



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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

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(16 April 2012 to 20 May 2012)

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Anderson, Sydney (Upper Bann)
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Beggs, Roy (East Antrim)
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Minister of the Environment	Mr Alex Attwood
Minister of Finance and Personnel.....	Mr Sammy Wilson
Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....	Mr Edwin Poots
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 16 April 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

New Assembly Members: Mr Sean Rogers and Mr Christopher Hazzard

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before we begin business, I welcome Members back. I advise Members that I have been informed by the Chief Electoral Officer that Mr Sean Rogers has been returned as a Member of the Assembly for the South Down constituency to fill the vacancy resulting from the resignation of Ms Margaret Ritchie. Mr Rogers signed the Roll of Membership and entered his designation in the presence of the Speaker and the Director of Clerking and Reporting on 2 April 2012. Mr Rogers will now take his seat.

Mr A Maginness: Literally. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I have also been informed by the Chief Electoral Officer that Mr Christopher Hazzard has been returned as a Member of the Assembly for the South Down constituency to fill the vacancy resulting from the resignation of Mr Willie Clarke. Mr Hazzard signed the Roll of Membership and entered his designation in the presence of the Speaker and the Clerk/Director General this morning. Mr Hazzard will now take his seat.

Private Members' Business

RMS Titanic Centennial Commemoration

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I advise the House that junior Minister Bell will respond to the debate on behalf of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, who is abroad on official business.

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 are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Douglas: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the 100th Anniversary of the maiden voyage of RMS Titanic; acknowledges the innovation and ingenuity of the design and construction of the world's most famous ship; welcomes the creation of Titanic Belfast and the commemoration by the Assembly; and calls for any further marking of the anniversary or memorial to be solemn and dignified as a tribute to the 1,517 people who lost their lives on 15 April 1912.

I welcome the opportunity to propose the motion on RMS Titanic, or, to give her her proper title, Royal Mail Ship Titanic. I hope that we will conduct this debate in a spirit of dignity as a tribute to the 1,500 or so people who lost their lives on 15 April 1912. Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I want to thank the Speaker's Office for this morning's Titanic service. It was very dignified, and there was a big turnout. Again, on behalf of the rest of the Members, thank you.

We have had a remarkable few weeks of activities and events surrounding the Titanic centennial commemorations. However, it is fitting that the Assembly has the opportunity today to pay its tribute and respects to the Titanic story — a story that will live on for many years as testament to a rich engineering and industrial heritage. Despite the obvious pride and passion that was evidenced at the Belfast launch of the Titanic on 2 April 1912, 13 days later, the ship lay at the bottom of the Atlantic, and over 1,500 people had perished. That pride was badly dented for many years to come. My late father, who was a red-leader in the yard, never talked about the Titanic. I remember my mother quoting this proverb from the Bible:

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

She felt that we had brought the wrath of God upon us by claiming that God himself could not sink the Titanic. Over the years, we, like many families, spoke little of the world's most famous ship, which was built here in Belfast. Looking back, I think that the disaster was, certainly in our family, the elephant in the room.

The media focus from across the world over the past few weeks has shown that we have put most of that collective guilt and negativity behind us. In some ways, it has helped us to restore that sense of pride and reclaim our natural maritime heritage. Last Saturday night, I was a guest at a Titanic ball in the welders' club on Dee Street. There was a real sense of pride as men and women, dressed up in clothes from the Titanic period, came together to tell stories about the people who were on the Titanic and spoke about the pride of their involvement as ex-shipyard workers.

The global recognition of Belfast's part in such a wonderful ship is to be warmly welcomed. Many cities claim links with Titanic, but only Belfast can claim to be the birthplace of the genuine Titanic story. This is now our time, our place. With the renewed interest in the Titanic, our great story is being told from a tourist angle, and Northern Ireland as a whole will benefit from the increased interest right across the world.

Titanic is remembered for the dramatic story of her sinking. Yet, in 1912, she was an icon for all that was great about the 20th century: breathtaking innovation; the most luxurious liner ever built; and the most awe-inspiring, largest-moving man-made object on earth. Let us not forget that when the White Star Line approved the designs of the Olympic class liners with Harland and Wolff, initially ordering two, we did not have a big enough dry dock in Belfast to house the massive ships. So what did we do? We built the Thompson dry dock — the biggest dry dock in the world at the time.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Member for giving way. How significant was the dry dock at that time?

Mr Douglas: I thank the Member for her question. Certainly, the Thompson dry dock and the pump house were at the leading edge of innovation, and we would not have had the Titanic without them. We have to remind ourselves that the pump house pumped out 23 million gallons of water in one hour and 10 minutes — what a feat. To think that there was no internet or computer-aided design (CAD) then. What a ship, and what a heritage. We built the Thompson dry dock, which was the biggest dry dock in the world at the time, as I said earlier. What vision, enterprise and leadership. We have every right to be proud people.

It was encouraging to hear the deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, speak with pride about his father's uncle, Hugh Rooney, who worked in the shipyard as a carpenter/joiner and helped to fit out the Titanic in 1911. However, Mr Deputy Speaker, although we rightly celebrate the innovation and ingenuity of such a magnificent, iconic ship — the ship of dreams, as it has been described — for me, the inspirational aspect of this story is that of the people, the Titanic people; the yard men who built the Titanic. These were some of the greatest workers in the world, men whose labour built some of the biggest and best ships in the world. Let us not forget that over 1,700 ships were built at Queen's Island, or the island of dreams, as it is fondly known locally.

In the present economic climate, we need people of vision, people who can dream dreams. As CS Lewis, one of east Belfast's most famous sons, reminds us:

"You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream."

Perhaps that is our thought for today.

Mr Allister: The Member, quite rightly, pays tribute to the craftsmen who built and kitted out the Titanic. Does he agree that one of the issues that has raised public disquiet is the fact that one of the most iconic pieces of fitting-out that they completed, namely the staircase, has been excluded from public visiting at the Titanic centre, and only seems to be available to those who use the extra facilities? Certainly, among constituents of mine, that is causing resentment. Will he join in calling for a review of that, so that the public might enjoy that aspect of the reproduction of the craftsmanship of those who built the Titanic?

Mr Douglas: I thank the Member for his intervention and agree with him wholeheartedly. I think that that has been an own goal in many ways. I spoke to the chairman of Titanic Foundation to say that surely we could build another staircase or have some sort of access. Minister Arlene Foster has said that she will call on the operators to look at this again. The last thing that we want to do is to drive people away from Northern Ireland. When tourists come, that is the one place where they want to stand and have their photograph taken. I hope that the operators will take note of that.

We have heard about the great designers of Titanic, the architects and the draughtsmen, but let us also remember the red-leaders, the riveters, the heater boys, the holder-uppers and the catch boys; catch boys such as Samuel Joseph Scott, a 15-year-old who was the first person to die during the building of the Titanic. As I have said before in the Chamber, last July I was honoured to unveil a headstone in the City Cemetery in Belfast to Samuel Scott during Féile an Phobail, the West Belfast Festival. That is a fitting memorial to a young life that was forgotten for 100 years.

That brings me to another fitting tribute that acknowledges the innovation and ingenuity of the design, construction and tragic story of the world's most famous ship. It may have taken us 100 years to build, but Titanic Belfast is the world's largest Titanic-themed, must-see visitor attraction. There have been 50,000 visitors to date, and I believe that there will be more if we can get that staircase sorted out. That is very impressive. It is Northern Ireland's largest tourism project, and it is achieving international stand-out and delivering economic and social benefits. I pay tribute to Minister Arlene Foster, the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Executive for catching this vision and delivering such a huge, iconic project, built on time and within budget. Is that not a good news story this morning?

We also have the SS Nomadic, which was brought back to Belfast by the Department for Social Development and berthed beside Titanic Belfast. This is the last remaining White Star Line vessel in the world, which will play an important role in the story of the Titanic.

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

Mr Douglas: Am I getting an extra couple of minutes? No? Oh, for goodness' sake. OK. Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Finally, I have already mentioned the financial support that the Assembly has given to Titanic Belfast and the SS Nomadic. Is it in order that the Assembly Commission investigate the potential for a small memorial? It is sad that, in the whole of Parliament Buildings, we do not have anything that marks the Titanic.

12.15 pm

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Is maith liom an seans seo a bheith agam labhairt i ndilchuimhne na ndaoine uilig a fuair bás ar an long Titanic ar 15 Aibreán 1912. I welcome the chance to speak on this matter and am very proud to do so. I have always had an interest in maritime affairs, although I am not from a seaport as such. I remind Members from Belfast that Derry had a shipyard 100 years before Belfast did, but that is another story.

We have seen a lot of tasteful, poignant and significant commemorations over this period, and, for the most part, they have been delivered fairly well. This is the first commemoration of a decade of commemorations, and, after it is over, we will have to do a critical analysis of how it went, how it was dealt with and how we could deal with it better somewhere down the line. It took 100 years for a proper memorial for the Titanic. I pay tribute in particular to my colleague the Mayor of Belfast for his very enlightened speech at the opening of the memorial garden yesterday. The garden commemorates, for the first time, all those who died on the Titanic, which is, perhaps, a reflection of the social mores that were in place at the time that the Titanic sunk.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ó hOisín: Absolutely.

Mr Humphrey: For accuracy, I should remind the Member and the House that there has been a memorial in the grounds of Belfast City Hall to those who lost their lives on the Titanic. The advance and progress in the new memorial garden that was opened yesterday is that the memorial names all those who tragically lost their lives. A memorial has been there for some time.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Ó hOisín: I thank the Member for his intervention. I am aware of that, of course. However, as of yesterday, the memorial actually names all those who died. It is rather incredulous that the crew members, in particular, were never previously named on the memorial. Another salient point is that a number of reports mentioned different figures for the number of people lost, and, 100 years on, that has to be addressed.

For many, the Titanic was a celebration of what was good about the engineering and progress of the period. For my community, it sometimes had a different resonance in that there was not a shared history in the shipyard, and there were social difficulties. I hope that other Members will address that and that we might be able to move forward here in a shared future and commemorate what has gone on in the past. The Member rightly pointed out the kind words of the deputy First Minister on the subject, and I also pointed out the words of my colleague the Mayor of Belfast.

The subject has perhaps come to our notice because of Mr Cameron — Mr James Cameron, not Mr David Cameron. His film 'Titanic' brought the subject back into public consciousness. Yesterday, I watched 'A Night to Remember' and realised that that film not only paid tribute to the courage and heroism of all those involved but referred to the blunders that led to this great disaster. That also needs recognition. The Titanic brings many mixed feelings for many people because of all the things that went wrong and because of all the inequalities that it flagged up. We must remember those things when we have our solemn and dignified recollection here. As we move on, I hope that this will be looked at so that we will be able to recognise the way that we should hold the commemorations and celebrations of the next 10 years. Sin é. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamacha uilig.

Mr Swann: As someone who worked in Belfast harbour for 14 years before entering this place, I thank the Members who brought the motion to the House today. It is very poignant.

The construction of the Titanic began on 31 March 1909, and, having left Belfast on 2 April, her maiden voyage commenced on 10 April from Southampton. Over 100,000 people watched the launch from Belfast, which shows the pride and excitement that existed at that time. The number of people who have taken part in commemoration events, especially over the past weekend, shows that that has been multiplied. It is fitting that we have opportunity to speak about the Titanic in the Northern Ireland Assembly today, which is nearly 100 years to the day since she was lost, to celebrate the launch and to remember those lives. I thank the Speaker and his office for organising such a solemn and moving cross-party event as the ceremony that was held earlier today. It was definitely a tribute to this House, and it shows how we can go forward together and celebrate organisations and decades of celebrations jointly.

I want to concentrate on the last part of the motion, which:

"calls for any further marking of the anniversary or memorial to be solemn and dignified as a tribute to the 1,517 people who lost their lives on 15 April 1912."

In questions throughout this Assembly sitting, my party leader and my party colleague Sam Gardiner also raised the issue of that solemnity and the dignified manner in which we remember this event in this place, and I thank them for that and for taking note of what was to come.

Of the 2,228 people on board — 1,343 passengers and 885 crew — 1,517 died. We must remember them today. We must also bear in mind the 17 men who died during the construction of the Olympic and the Titanic, including the father and son and, significantly, the shipwright, James Dobbin, who was injured during the launch of the Titanic when his legs were trapped under the ship as it launched. He died the following day in hospital.

Although there are many great orators in this House, I feel that it would be unfitting to use our words throughout this debate. I will take time to recount one individual's story and, if I have time, possibly that of a second. Archibald Gracie was just one of the 1,517 people who died. When the disaster happened, he spent most of the remaining time assisting women into lifeboats. Mrs Straus almost entered lifeboat 8, but she turned back and rejoined her husband. She had made up her mind: "We have lived together for

many years. Where you go, I go." Gracie tried to persuade her, but she refused. Mr and Mrs Straus went and sat together on a pair of deckchairs and listened to the band play.

Gracie continued to assist in the loading of women and children into lifeboat 4. At around 2.00 am, all the Titanic's rockets had been fired and all the lifeboats had been lowered, except for four collapsible canvas-sided lifeboats. Collapsible lifeboat D was lifted, righted and hooked to the tackles where lifeboat 2 had been. The crew then formed a ring around the lifeboat and allowed only women to pass through. The boat could hold 47, but after 15 women had been loaded, no more women could be found and men were then allowed to take the vacant seats. That was when Gracie found Mrs Brown, who was later to become known as the "Unsinkable Molly Brown", as she went on to establish a welfare fund for the survivors of the Titanic. Mrs Brown and Miss Evans were still on board, so he escorted them to the lifeboat.

When Gracie arrived with the female passengers, all the men — I repeat, all the men — immediately stepped out and made way for them. Thinking that there was room for only one more lady, Edith turned to Mrs Brown and told her, "You go first. You have children waiting at home." Mrs Brown was helped in, and the boat left the Titanic at 2.05 am under quartermaster Bright. Edith Evans would never find a space in any of the lifeboats, and she died in the sinking.

Elizabeth Shutes, aged 40, was the governess of 19-year-old Margaret Graham, who was travelling with her parents, and these are her words:

"No laughing throng, but on either side [of the staircases] stand quietly, bravely, the stewards, all equipped with the white, ghostly life-preservers. Always the thing one tries not to see even crossing a ferry. Now only pale faces, each form strapped about with those white bars. So gruesome a scene."

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Swann: Yes.

Mr Wells: I wish to hear the end of the Member's speech.

Mr Swann: Thank you very much, Jim, I appreciate that.

"We passed on. The awful good-byes. The quiet look of hope in the brave men's eyes as the wives were put into the lifeboats. Nothing escaped one at this fearful moment. We left from the sun deck, seventy-five feet above the water. Mr Case and Mr Roebing, brave American men, saw us to the lifeboat, made no effort to save themselves, but stepped back on deck. Later they went to an honoured grave."

They were two of the 1,517 men and women who passed away in the sinking of the lifeboat.

As I said, I cannot bring to a conclusion the accounts of the survivors or the details of the brave men and women who lost their lives helping others when the Titanic sank. I once again thank the Members who brought the motion to the House and all the Members who took part with the solemnity and dignity that the topic rightly deserves.

Dr McDonnell: I too would like to add a few comments to the discussion, because, given the sheer amount of media interest in the Titanic story, it can be quite difficult for

many of us to keep a proper sense of proportion. The first point we need to make and hold onto is that, although we may remember the launch of the world's greatest ship with pride, we are, first and foremost, commemorating a massive human tragedy. Although we should not judge historic events simply by the standards of our own time today, nevertheless, the tragedy was all the greater because many of those human lives seemed not to have been valued at the same level in escaping to the lifeboats. Tragedy was concentrated in the steerage cabins and further below the decks, where men shovelled coal into the engines.

Yet, despite the many stories and the many tragedies within that great tragedy, I believe that the Titanic story has much more to tell us. It was a tragedy for which nobody was to blame except nature. It marks the beginning, for all of us, of a decade of what may well be much more contentious commemoration. What we might take from the Titanic story is the simple fact that, at the level of the individual human being and the family, all loss is equally tragic. As we go forward over the next 10 years, we need to show the same respect for all of those who lost their life in the years after 1912 and for all the families who suffered loss, just the same as, today, we are thinking of and commemorating those 1,517 souls who found a cold grave in the north Atlantic.

Within that, we can also commemorate the time when we in this city were at the cutting edge of world-beating technology. Indeed, let us seek to emulate the ingenuity and endeavour of those who built that ship, which has been described as the equivalent of a space shuttle in its day. Much good can come from the tremendous tragedy that was the Titanic. The loss of that, with over 1,500 souls, was, by any standards, a historic landmark. I welcome the fact that Belfast, Northern Ireland, and, indeed, the world, have come to be able to embrace the Titanic story, because, for so many years — indeed, most of the last 100 years — we have grieved for the Titanic. We have felt a little guilty, a little unsure and a little uncertain as to whether it would be decent to celebrate the benefits in the context of the tragedy.

I think that we have matured enough to be able to rationalise that. Indeed, the events of the past few weeks have shown that we can.

12.30 pm

The Titanic is not just our history. It is not just Belfast, Northern Ireland or Ireland history — it is global history. Whatever the arguments about good news, bad news or indifferent news: the Titanic icon in 2012 has put Northern Ireland very firmly back on a global stage.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I concur 100% with what he said about how Northern Ireland has been put on the map. In fact, in giving evidence recently to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the First Minister stated that the Titanic brand is much bigger and more readily recognised globally than are Northern Ireland or Ireland. That must be fully exploited by the Executive here in Belfast.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Dr McDonnell: I accept that point fully. We are back on the global stage and we have to use that. We have got to take whatever strengths, assets, potential and ambition that we

can garner from that tragedy in 1912 to create a future for our children of tomorrow.

As my colleague rightly said, the Titanic is not a story just in Ireland or in Europe. It is a story in New York. It is a story in Atlantic Canada — in Halifax, Nova Scotia. While the living went to New York, the dead who were not buried at sea were buried in Halifax. In what was a poignant moment for me, I and my colleagues visited the cemetery in Halifax and saw the hundreds of graves there. There is a connection there. Indeed, I learned more about the Titanic in Halifax, where they have a museum and where they were able to come to terms with the tragedy without the sense of guilt that we had here.

We can make so much out of our Titanic history. I dare say that we can make it a flagship for our tourism, our economic recovery or both. Titanic is big news and we can use that fact as an anchor for a large-scale tourism project that will not just affect Belfast.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Will you bring your remarks to a close?

Dr McDonnell: It will push tourism out of Belfast, if we wish, to the Mourne, the Antrim glens, the Sperrins, Derry, Fermanagh and right across not just Northern Ireland but the northern half of the island. I see it as having vast potential.

Mr Lunn: We, of course, support the motion and I thank Mr Douglas and his colleagues for tabling it. These past few days and weeks have, at times, been a surreal experience, as Northern Ireland has done its best to celebrate the creation of the biggest ocean liner of its day — indeed, we are often reminded that it was the biggest moveable object on the planet — while solemnly remembering and commemorating the enormous loss of human life. For those conflicting reasons, we have had various events over the past days and weeks — mostly tasteful; all respectful, I hope — that culminated over the weekend in an MTV concert and the first performance of Philip Hammond's 'Requiem for the Lost Souls of the Titanic'.

There have been many absolutely fascinating programmes on TV and radio. Sometimes they were just old films, but there has been some really interesting factual stuff, and I think that we all know more about the Titanic now than we did before all that coverage. There has also been a lot of press and media comment about the celebratory aspect of the remembrance. For that reason, I welcome the final part of the motion, which calls for future anniversaries to be marked in a "solemn and dignified" way. That is how it should be, because the truth is that we are marking the anniversary because 1,517 people died and not because Harland and Wolff built a succession of great ocean liners, which it did, culminating in the ill-fated Titanic. Mr Deputy Speaker, you had only to look at the faces of the descendants and relatives of those people in the past few days, and during this morning's service in the Senate Chamber, to realise the emotional effects and legacy of Titanic, even after 100 years.

The rest of the motion — I congratulate Mr Douglas and his colleagues on bringing forward a very sensibly worded motion — relates to the unprecedented engineering feat of creating the vessel, given the much more basic engineering techniques that were available at the time. I noticed in a TV programme the other night that, in 1912, welding had just

been invented, but it was not in use, so, presumably, there was no welding on the Titanic. That would be the reason for the three million rivets that we have heard about. I do not know who counted them, but that is a lot of rivets. The ship was, effectively, built by hand, with the aid of some cranes and pumps and rudimentary equipment. Its memory stands testament to the days when Belfast led the world in heavy engineering and shipbuilding.

The motion also welcomes the creation of Titanic Belfast. I completely welcome that. Belfast, in tourism terms, is finally catching up with the rest of world's fascination with the Titanic story, and quite rightly so. The world interest in what happened is undiminished. It is right that Belfast, as the city that created the ship, should be at the centre of that interest. We are bringing thousands of tourists here, on cruise liners in particular. I have no doubt that, in future, the first port of call will not be Stormont or the Crown Bar; it will be the Titanic centre, which will be the first thing that they see as they dock. Everyone else with a Titanic connection is exploiting it, and we are entitled to do the same in a dignified and respectful manner. I look forward to the further redevelopment of the overall site. It is good that the centrepiece building has been completed in time. Images will go around the world showcasing Northern Ireland in a way that, in tourism terms, money just could not buy.

The final section of the motion welcomes the Assembly's commemoration. I join with others in congratulating the Speaker on the organisation and nature of this morning's commemoration. It really was a lovely event and it was very poignant. On Saturday, I think, Belfast's Lord Mayor unveiled the new memorial with the names on it outside the City Hall. That is marvellous, but even more marvellous was the fact that he said that it was built by our people. Hopefully, we have lost the view that it was built by people of one denomination and not another; it was built by the people of Northern Ireland, and that is the way in which we should celebrate it.

Mr McLaughlin: You have just made a very important point, Trevor. This is probably the most auspicious start that we could have had to this decade of centenary commemorations. We should reflect that the history of the employment practices at that time is one of the issues that the Assembly should address. We should not be afraid to look at it; we should draw the positive lessons that we intend to apply to building a shared future. There has been some downplaying of that.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Lunn: I thank Mr McLaughlin for his intervention. Of course, the employment practices of that time were completely different to what they are now. We have made so much progress in that area, so we should try to put behind us what was happening 100 years ago.

We have quite a few centenaries coming up. I really hope that we can deal with all of them in the way that we have managed to deal with the Titanic. They are all of a different nature, but there is no reason why we should not acknowledge our differences. We should think about a shared future and bring the same approach and attitude to all those centenaries. I support the motion.

Ms P Bradley: I support the motion and welcome the opportunity to speak to today's debate. I, like the proposer

of the motion, Mr Douglas, was born in east Belfast, and I have a family history that is steeped in east Belfast. My great-grandfather was a French polisher at the time. We believe that he worked on the Titanic as it was being built, so it is with great pride that I stand here today.

As other Members have highlighted, the Titanic was the greatest of innovations. Its sheer size, design and grandeur made it the greatest vessel ever built. It pushed the boundaries of shipbuilding to a new level. It used cutting-edge techniques and technologies that resulted in the creation of a vessel never before seen. It surpassed all others that came before. The Titanic was the ship of dreams.

It is of great importance to mark, remember and celebrate the men of Belfast who made this city the envy of the world. Thanks to their dedication, hard work and skill, Belfast became the centre of world-class shipbuilding. As the rest of the world played catch-up, our humble city produced the fastest, largest and greatest ocean liner to sail the seas. I am immensely proud to represent the city that designed, produced and manufactured what was, arguably, the most famous vessel of all time. That is why it is so important that we thank and remember the men who risked their life to produce what remains today one of this city's greatest achievements.

Mr Wells: For the sake of the record, and of someone looking back on this debate in 100 years' time, will the Member confirm that the vessel was perfect when it left Belfast?

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Member for his intervention. I heard it said on the radio this morning that we were not responsible for the iceberg. The Titanic was absolutely perfect when it left Belfast.

The creation of the Titanic Quarter and Titanic Belfast acts as a fitting tribute and an opportunity to showcase to the world the endeavours that lay behind the creation of such a monumental ship. Once again, I thank Belfast City Council and my colleague the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for all the hard work that enabled the creation of such sites. The Titanic Belfast building affords the city the opportunity to remember those who placed Belfast on the world stage and offers a great tourism opportunity as the world flocks to share in the celebration of this city's rich past and great achievements. The slogan "our time, our place" is more than fitting. One hundred years ago, the men of the shipyard took full advantage of the skills they had to offer. They worked tirelessly, and their endeavours ensured our place in maritime history as the city that gave birth to a ship to which the whole world paid homage.

Although the city is rightly proud of what it has produced and it is important that we celebrate its achievements, as has been said, it is also important for us all to remember those who lost their life on that fateful night of 15 April 1912. It can be all too easy for us to get caught up in the romantic discourse that has dominated much of the recent legacy of the Titanic and focus on the famous depictions that Hollywood has given us. The work of the Assembly and, indeed, today's debate allows us all to give true reflection and to pause to remember the women, children and men of all nationalities who died when the ship sank. The Assembly plays a vital role in ensuring that those who died are not forgotten, that those who gave their life to save others are not neglected and that, when the world comes to visit the

city, we give a fitting and dignified tribute to all who perished with the ship.

The Titanic and its legacy will continue to be a major part of this city's culture and heritage. It gave us our rightful place on the world stage and enriched us in the books of history. We should not pass up this opportunity to celebrate this great achievement while also remembering those who did not make it home. This opportunity to commemorate and celebrate should not be passed up. Once again, I give thanks and pay tribute to all who were involved in that great ship. In the words of Jack Dawson, the ship was a modern wonder of the world.

I support the motion.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and thank Mr Douglas and his colleagues for tabling it. In a sense, I may be creating history myself; I believe that I am the only Member in the Chamber who has worked in the shipyard. That might surprise a lot of people. I was based at the Beersbridge Road.

The Titanic was launched on 31 May 1911. While on its maiden voyage, it hit an iceberg and sank with the loss of 1,517 people. Little did the world know or realise at that time that from that tragedy would come the foundation of one of the biggest events of the millennium. Now, in 2012, on the 100th anniversary, we have opened Titanic Belfast. This was all done as the world's press looked on. Even 'The Times' magazine lists Belfast as the place to go. Tourism Ireland promotions reach over 100 million customers around the world. In England, Scotland and Wales, some 4,700 Titanic ads are running over a two-week period, and some 3,500 of those will be seen on the London Underground, one of the busiest underground systems in the world. You can imagine the number of people who will look at those ads.

12.45 pm

Television will reach 70% of all potential viewers in 2012. MTV shows, rock concerts, special stages of the Circuit of Ireland Rally, the Titanic light show, events at the Waterfront Hall, plays, exhibitions, and events at the Ulster Folk Museum are just some of the things planned to celebrate the centenary of the sinking of the Titanic.

The Titanic signature building will be the central feature of the Titanic Quarter. When completed, it will be practically twice the size of the City Hall and its shape will represent the five-pointed White Star Line logo. It is already being looked on as an iconic building, standing alongside the likes of Sydney Opera House and the Empire State Building. The project building cost nearly £100 million, employed over 600 workers and, it is estimated, will employ some 20,000 people over the next 15 years.

What do we have now? We have a worldwide tourism product, a Titanic Quarter and £24 million predicted to go into the economy in 2012, which is to be welcomed. However, if Tourism Ireland is to promote the Titanic experience, that must be done on an all-Ireland basis, which means that Cobh must be included in the package at all times.

We have created a £100 million tourism product, so we must expect criticism along with praise. I was a little bit disturbed and perturbed that the Audit Office came out with

criticism from the start. That should have been held back to see how everything goes. It was not warranted.

The onus is now on us to make sure that the projected 900,000 visitors expected to visit the centre are told that we have other sites in the Six Counties. Those sites must benefit from the experience. I think that other Members mentioned that. This cannot be a Belfast experience alone. It must widen itself out to the other tourism sites that we have here. That is paramount.

I agree with those who said that the marking of the anniversary must be solemn and dignified. Now that it is a centenary project and 100 years have passed, I hope that the site of the Titanic will become internationally protected. One thing that I really do not like is people making massive profit from all those artefacts that come on to the market. Now that the site is protected, I hope that there will be no more robbing of it and that things will be left the way they are.

When we talk about that fateful night on 15 April 1912 and the large loss of life, the main passengers are very little thought of, and those are the passengers who left Ireland and other countries on the ship that night —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Draw your remarks to a close.

Mr McMullan: — to start what they called a new life in another world. They were actually locked in and did not get off the ship. We must bear that in mind, too.

I support the motion and hope that everything is dignified as we go forward.

Mr Frew: I commend my party colleagues for bringing the motion to the House. It is a very special day, and it is great to see. I thank the Speaker's Office for the way in which it organised and conducted the commemoration this morning. It was very fitting that we in the Assembly did that. As some of my party colleagues and others in the House commented on the Titanic and the memorial over past weeks, you will not have failed to notice the emotion on their faces as they were talking.

It is not just about the here and now; it is about how they have grown up and the stories that they have been told. In certain degrees, there was a sense of shame on Belfast, and indeed the Province, about the sinking of this great liner and the lives and souls that were lost to the icy waters on that fateful night.

As someone who was educated on building sites, mostly in Belfast, I relate to titles like "heater-uppers" and "catch boys", because some terms like that could still be used on the building sites of Belfast and other places in the Province. To most people, those terms mean very little, but to others they mean a lot.

I have worked on building sites since 1991 and dipped in and out of the shipyard many times and had the opportunity to work in east Belfast a lot. In the early 1990s, the Connswater area, which was the site of the old ropeworks, was being redeveloped. At that time, like the shipyard and Queen's Island in particular, there were rows and rows of sheds and roofs of buildings. Some were in use, some were not. Some were in a terrible state. They were all dirty. If you ever had the opportunity to work in them, you certainly came out very dirty.

Even in that landscape, there was a sense of shame. The dry dock was there, but nobody talked about it. The slipways that built these massive ships were there, yet nobody really talked about them. The drawing office, where I had the opportunity to work a number of years ago when a small section of it was being renovated, was in a very bad state, yet nobody talked about it.

As I worked in later years in the Queen's Island area and saw the open-top tour buses coming in and out, I could not help but feel a sense of sorrow that people were coming from all around the world to see the birthplace of the Titanic and there was not really anything on the site for them. Those people could go all round the world, and there would be museums everywhere about the Titanic.

There was a sense of shame that people grew up with in Belfast throughout the years and there were stories that they would have been told about uncles, aunts, grandfathers and grandmothers and the loss. There was scripture quoted earlier with regards to pride before a fall. That sums up what Belfast felt for all those years. However, we did not need to do that; we did not need to be in that position.

I agree with the motion; the anniversary should be a solemn matter when we remember the 1,517 souls that were lost. However, every other day of the year, we simply should be celebrating our culture and history in that area of Belfast, which provided employment for so many. One thing we should always remember is that 17 people lost their lives building the Titanic and the Olympic and all the other ships. It was deemed to be acceptable for lives to be lost in the making of these great ships.

I would like to see us moving forward. We are providing employment. Look at Queen's Island now: we have a financial centre, which I worked on, as part of the Gateway project. We also have the Odyssey complex, which I worked on, an enterprise centre, a scientific centre, an education centre, a public records centre and people living in an area where no one would have dared to live 10 years ago.

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

Mr Frew: We should move forward, and this country and Province should move forward in hope and commemorate what we have achieved in Northern Ireland and in Belfast.

Mr McGimpsey: I rise to support the motion and talk about the Titanic because I had some connection with this as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure some 10 years ago and was involved in early work on the project. It is important to remember in a dignified way what happened to the Titanic.

I have listened to the remarks of others. I, too, am well familiar with the story because both my grandfathers worked in the shipyard at that time. My paternal grandfather, who was a blacksmith, died when my father was only eight months old, so I never heard his stories. However, my maternal grandfather lived long enough to tell some of his grandchildren about what the Titanic was like. As a carpenter in the finishing trade, he was able to recount to us its sheer breathtaking opulence, grandeur and, indeed, size.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to move closer to the microphone because amplification is being lost.

Mr McGimpsey: I beg your pardon.

As a man coming out of 176 Cambrai Street as the eldest of eight children, my grandfather was familiar with the harder side of life. Therefore, he was, of course, full of tales. I listened to Mr Frew but I have to say that I do not recall my grandfather exuding any essence of shame about what happened to the Titanic. There were, of course, stories in the yard about how and why she sank. There was sadness at losing such a magnificent monument to the effort of the workforce. There was also genuine sadness at the loss of Tommy Andrews, who was very highly regarded by the workforce.

I would like to focus, however, on another side of the story. Harland and Wolff was the largest shipyard in the world. Workman Clark & Co was another yard. It was referred to as a small yard but, in some years, it had a greater output than Harland and Wolff. Shipbuilding was not the only big business in Belfast. We had the Belfast Ropeworks Company, tobacco works, the largest linen manufacturer in the world and a series of specialist, world-famous, engineering firms, such as James Mackie and Sons, Sirocco and H J Scott. We also had the world's first aircraft factory. Before aircraft were built by Boeing or Hawker or anywhere else, they were built in Belfast. Belfast was the very first place in the world where aircraft were manufactured. Therefore, this is not simply a story about a ship or three great ships. It is about what was happening in Belfast at that time.

There was absolutely no reason why Belfast should have been the centre of all this. Some 50 or 60 years beforehand, it had been merely a river crossing — a bridge and a causeway over a delta. However, through the inventiveness, creativity and innovation of the people who lived here, and the way in which that was assembled and brought together, we created some of the biggest businesses and greatest enterprises in the world. If we did that once, surely there is a possibility and an opportunity to do it again.

We are finally trying to capitalise on the fact that we built the most famous ship since Noah's Ark and all that goes with it, and the tourism product is wonderful. However, there is so much more about this to inspire us to create businesses, enterprise and activity in our city and Province to again employ large numbers of people and stun the world with our innovation and creativity. We can provide the jobs needed by our people, particularly our youngsters, to give us the opportunity to build our society. That is the inspiration for all of us. What happened before can be done again. We can once again unlock the creativity of our people if we do not spend our lives in division but give our opportunities a chance. All the businesses that I talked about —

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

Mr McGimpsey: — started as local businesses. They were small businesses that grew. They were not brought in through investment from America or anywhere else. They were local businesses that grew, and that is the inspiration for the future.

1.00 pm

Mr A Maginness: I, too, pay tribute to the Speaker's Office for the conduct of this morning's memorial service. It was a moving and very dignified commemoration of the people who lost their life so tragically on the Titanic.

Most aspects of the Titanic commemoration have been dealt with adequately this morning, but there is a tension

between the commemoration of the Titanic tragedy and the celebration of the engineering genius of those who constructed such a wonderful ship. It is about trying to get that balance right and understanding it. We recall and rightly celebrate the engineering feat of the Titanic, but there is a very historic tragedy associated with it. I am not sure how we resolve that. However, throughout the debate and discussion about the Titanic both in the Assembly and outside, there has been political maturity. All political parties and all sides of our community have come together to focus on the narrative of the Titanic, dealing with the tragedy, the pathos and, indeed, the romance of the ship. That maturity is a great tribute to the Assembly and to the way in which our politics have developed.

We have taken the Titanic story and built an iconic building. That word is sometimes misused, but the building that now sits on the shores is truly iconic. It is a spectacular building, and people will come to see it and to go through the Titanic experience and see the state-of-the-art technology that has been used to recreate it. It is a work of genius, and it is important that we pay tribute to the people who constructed the building to commemorate the Titanic and to celebrate the genius of those who built the ship. In that sense, it has brought together a disparate community, which, in some respects, is divided, to develop the Titanic story, to attract visitors to our shores and to create an experience for people from right across the globe. That should be commended. Although it was long in its gestation, it has certainly borne fruit and will continue to bear fruit for all in this society not just financially but culturally, because it puts us on the international map for good, sound reasons. That is something for all of us to celebrate today.

We, of course, remember those who died so tragically, but it is good to look forward and to unite this community and the House, and that is what we have done.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the motion. I commend my party colleagues for bringing this important and timely matter to the Assembly this afternoon. It is important that we mark this significant centenary in a balanced way that remembers and respects the whole story of Titanic. It is important to always keep in our mind the 1,517 people who sadly lost their life on the Titanic's maiden voyage.

Today is certainly a significant day across the world. As many stop to remember this historic occasion, it is important that we keep a focus on the tragedy of Titanic. The tragedy of Titanic, which shocked the world, could probably have been avoided if the warnings of icebergs had been properly heeded. The ship contained passengers of all classes, nationalities, faiths and backgrounds, many of whom planned to travel to the USA to start a new life and to seek new opportunities. However, tragedy struck as 'Nearer my God to Thee', the last hymn, was played. Sadly, 1,517 people lost their life in the icy north Atlantic seas.

One of the legacies of the terrible tragedy is increased safety standards, including the global iceberg warning systems and on-board life survival equipment that are used now on marine craft throughout the world. The significance of Titanic as the world's largest liner, which was built by Harland and Wolff in Belfast and took three years to complete, was the sheer scale of the 50,000 workforce who worked on that great ship. It is difficult to imagine the number of

workers in “the yard”, as it was known locally. That has since disappeared and changed the employment base of east Belfast and, indeed, the greater Belfast area and beyond, with the loss of all of those engineering skills and support services. What, 10 years ago, was part of a derelict shipyard now houses such exciting projects as the Belfast Metropolitan College, Citibank, the Northern Ireland Science Park and innovation centre and a number of other thriving businesses, as well as the Harland and Wolff part of the yard, which has been reborn in the renewable energy sector with the manufacture of wind turbines at Queen’s Island.

Just as Titanic has become a household name right across the world, the Titanic story presents an excellent opportunity for Northern Ireland to benefit from it. I commend the Minister, Arlene Foster, for leading on the project. The recently opened Titanic signature building tells the full story of Titanic in a balanced way, and I believe that it does so in a respectful, accurate and inspiring manner. The world-renowned Titanic brand name has presented an opportunity to help put Belfast and Northern Ireland on the world map in a positive way. The whole project shows how a negative story can be transformed into something positive. Today, we are beginning to move forward, and Northern Ireland is beginning to present itself in the positive way that it deserves to be presented. The ongoing Our Time, Our Place campaign is an excellent programme of events and activities that has been designed to celebrate this important year for our country.

It is important that the House notes this significant centenary, acknowledges the innovation of Titanic, welcomes the Titanic Belfast project and looks forward to a brighter, more positive Northern Ireland in years to come, without forgetting the full tragedy of Titanic. I support the proposal.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Chris Lyttle. He has two minutes.

Mr Lyttle: I support the motion and thank Mr Sammy Douglas and his colleagues for bringing it forward today. It is my understanding that journalist Andrew Marr has described the commemoration of the Titanic centenary as distasteful and dull. Esteemed journalist as he is, I think Marr, on this occasion, is ill informed of the many dignified and creative ways that civic, community, church and political leaders have come together to balance the celebration of world-class innovation and endeavour with remembering and respecting the tragic human loss of life that occurred 100 years ago.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to community and civic leaders for the work that they have done. Such people as Chris Bennett and his team at the cross-community Dock church deserve our thanks for the dignified and creative way in which they are remembering Titanic and building community at a local level in Titanic Quarter. I also pay tribute to the congregation at the shipyard church — Westbourne Presbyterian Church on the Newtownards Road — for its ‘Titanic People’ exhibitions and its work with the East Belfast Partnership Board and local artist Ross Wilson to place the inspirational sculpture of the yardmen at Pitt Park on the Lower Newtownards Road, which has given the community an opportunity to reclaim and demonstrate a pride in the connection to that history and the world-class shipbuilding that was supported by men and women in east Belfast.

I had the privilege of attending the Titanic commemoration service at Belfast’s St Anne’s Cathedral yesterday. It was

a creative but solemn service of remembrance in honour of the more than 1,500 people who died in the icy waters of the north Atlantic. I also want to recognise the shared nature of the commemorative event at Belfast City Hall that launched the memorial, which, as has been said today, respects all those who died. At the Titanic commemoration service, Dean John Mann called on political leaders in Northern Ireland to look at Titanic in a way that:

“honours its past sacrifices, recognises its failures, celebrates its successes and works towards producing a healed and renewed people whose experience of difficult times will stand it in good stead in meeting very different challenges which ask the best of us all.”

That is a fitting challenge that we can rise to in the Assembly.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call junior Minister Bell to respond on behalf of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): There is a tremendous sense of unity of purpose in the House as we strike the balance between commemorating those who died and celebrating the brilliance of the maritime history that we have in the Titanic. As a working-class boy from east Belfast, born in the shadow of the shipyard, I remember the thousands who worked in it in the 1970s, and it is a privilege to take part in the debate. I thank Arlene Foster, the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and past and present members of the Executive who have done so much to bring this about. Nowhere in the world has a stronger claim to RMS Titanic than Belfast and Northern Ireland, which is her physical and spiritual home. No place on earth better understands the centenary of her maiden voyage. Gordon Dunne and many others referred to the tragic loss of life. We are what this is all about.

Alban Maginness said that it was important that we struck a balance with the commemorative event in the Waterfront Hall on Saturday night, and I think we have done so. It saw a host of well-known performers create a marvellous and dignified tribute to those who lost their life and to the ordinary shipbuilders of Belfast. The ship was built by everyone —

Mr McNarry: Will the Member give way?

Mr Bell: I will give way only once, because I have a lot to get through. Could you be brief, Mr McNarry?

Mr McNarry: I thank the Minister for giving way. Does he agree that, because of Thomas Andrews, Comber town in our constituency has a lasting legacy that we should be proud of and that Ards Borough Council is to be congratulated on the unveiling of a very fitting Titanic memorial on Saturday? In bringing all that together, Minister, I am sure that you will agree that celebrations and commemorations are nuances that Comber has portrayed throughout its lifetime since the tragedy. It stands us in good stead, and it is something that we should all be proud of.

Mr Bell: I fully endorse Mr McNarry’s remarks about Comber. Mr McGimpsey also referred to Comber’s affection for Thomas Andrews and for keeping that history alive. The legacy and the commemoration of Titanic is worthy of note. I congratulate the mayor, Mervyn Oswald, and Hammy Gregory,

the deputy mayor, and those in Ards Borough Council who unveiled the memorial in Comber recently.

We have a wonderful maritime heritage. I thank and praise Mr Sammy Douglas for his contribution to the recent Titanic commemorations in bringing forward this debate. I also thank him not only for his work on the Titanic Foundation Limited but for his work with the east Belfast community, which is linked to the regeneration of the Titanic Quarter. When we think of Titanic, it is important that we never forget the yardmen. We should never forget their key work. A number of key events have taken place already. Chris Lyttle referred to the event in Pitt Park, which was marked by Rev Mervyn Gibson and the Westbourne Presbyterian Church, and the shared celebrations led by the Rev Chris Bennett, which put in place the work of the yardmen. I think it was Paul Frew who mentioned the heaters and holder-uppers and the hard conditions, which Michael McGimpsey also shared with us, that many of those people had to endure to give us that brilliant ship.

1.15 pm

It is important to be solemn and dignified. This is a commemoration of the fate of the Titanic, as well as a celebration of our world-famous maritime heritage. We do not celebrate a disaster; rather, we hold in delicate and respectful remembrance the more than 1,500 passengers who did not survive — a terrible loss of life. At the same time, we recognise and salute the excellence of our maritime and industrial heritage, which Trevor Lunn brought out, and our great feat of engineering in building the Titanic. We should celebrate too today the place that we have reached as a society 100 years after the tragedy.

Yesterday's dedication of the Titanic memorial at Belfast City Hall is a significant step in recording all those who sadly perished. William Humphrey referred to the memorial at Belfast City Hall. He and Cathal Ó hOisín referred to the fact that the memorial reminds us that each name marks an individual story. Each person had their own circle of family and friends, and every name recorded tells a story. They are more than a number. It is a catalogue of tragedy that aids our understanding of the inspirational and heroic travails of passengers and others.

Many stories were told at the wonderful service this morning, shared by every party in the House. We heard 'Anthony Frost' by Mick Nolan, so beautifully read by Allison Murphy of the Belfast Titanic Society. Robin Swann referred to Mrs Brown and, if you will indulge me, to one of my personal heroes, John Harper. John Harper, a wonderful, outstanding Christian man and missionary, placed his daughter into lifeboat number 11. He was invited onto lifeboat number 11 because, as a widower, he had the right to be in a lifeboat. Such was his Christian faith, he wanted to go back to others and bring to them not only support but the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. When he hit the water as the ship went down, he bumped into many people in need and helped them. One man recalls that John Harper took off his life jacket and handed it to him, saying, "You have greater need of this than me." Such was his Christian faith. As he went down, he said, "I am going down, I am going down." However, such was his Christian faith, his last words were these: "No. I am going up." The survivor whom John Harper gave his life jacket to was rescued — one of only six, I believe, to be rescued. That stands testament to the

Christian conviction of not only John Harper but many of the heroes who lost their life serving others.

We have witnessed a range of world-class events. The Titanic Belfast visitor attraction is one of five tourism projects spearheaded by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. It was specifically planned and timed to open for the Titanic's centenary. We should wholeheartedly welcome the creation and opening of Titanic Belfast, which Alban Maginness correctly referred to as iconic. We say proudly that we have the world's largest Titanic-themed visitor attraction. It is a fantastic symbol — one which, as Paula Bradley said, enriches us and puts us in the books of history — of the world-famous shipbuilding and maritime heritage of the Titanic, which Trevor Lunn correctly referred to as the largest moving man-made object of its time. We remember all the incredible vessels built by our skilled tradesmen in the Titanic shipyard.

We have referred to all the people in our society who helped build the Titanic, from Martin McGuinness's great-uncle through many of the experiences people have had to my colleague who served in the modern-day shipyard. They represent the rich maritime history of Belfast and the new Belfast and the new Northern Ireland, which is confidently moving on and which we as a society are embracing.

In innovation and design, opening on time, mirroring the skill and ingenuity of the shipyard men, and built within the timescale of the original construction of the world's most famous ship, our Titanic visitor attraction is something that we can be very proud of. The opening of the attraction has been captured by the international press. As Alasdair McDonnell reminded us, we are on the global stage. We are generating positive stories and replacing old preconceptions of Northern Ireland's troubled past. We are proclaiming a new, resurgent Belfast and a Northern Ireland that is open for business and where, as Michael McGimpsey correctly said, we can continue to unlock our creativity.

The opening of Titanic Belfast is one of eight substantial events in our 2012 Our Time, Our Place campaign. Let us look forward to the other major events, such as the Land of Giants, the Irish Open, the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race in Londonderry and the opening of the Giant's Causeway visitor attraction.

One of the key commitments in our Programme for Government was to provide financial and other support to ensure the success of Our Time, Our Place in 2012, including marking the centenary of Titanic's maiden voyage. Investment in the 2012 programme through DETI and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has been significant. We expect that the campaign will attract an additional 100,000 visitors to the region. It will provide hundreds of new jobs. It will contribute £24 million to the local economy. The aim is to see tourism transformed into a £1 billion industry by 2020, attracting 4.5 million visitors annually and creating 10,000 additional jobs in hospitality, transport, expert services and food processing across Northern Ireland. I am convinced that Northern Ireland 2012 will be our time, our place and that the local companies that we want to grow, with their innovation, creativity and enterprise, can be a catalyst for driving forward Northern Ireland's tourism economy.

We are upping Northern Ireland's tourism game. The tourism industry is central to our economic strategy for the next

four years, as detailed in the Programme for Government and the draft tourism strategy. There is recognition of the potential of tourism, which so many Members mentioned, and the need to invest in events, facilities and amenities, such as Titanic Belfast, the Giant's Causeway and the Walled City of Londonderry. Those will enable more people from abroad to experience and enjoy our unique and natural physical assets, as well as the warmth and welcome of our people. We want to excite international visitors and, indeed, people throughout Northern Ireland, the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland and to encourage them to become engaged in what represents the most comprehensive campaign ever undertaken to promote tourism here.

The Northern Ireland 2012 initiative is about not only tourism and tourism targets but changing perceptions of our place in our own minds and in those of our families and friends living abroad, as well as in the heads and hearts of all the potential visitors to our shores. Today, the eyes of the world are on Belfast for all the right reasons because of the Titanic. The appetite for information and experiences related to her is voracious. Her story resonates with people throughout our globe. Every opportunity is being taken to increase visitor numbers and spend in 2012.

By celebrating the Titanic, we do not forget the people who lost their life in the tragedy. It is right and fitting that, under the Northern Ireland 2012 initiative, the sinking and loss of life have been commemorated with consistent sensitivity to date. A series of exceptionally sensitive events has taken place to commemorate the ship's fateful end and to remember the passengers who did not survive. We want to ensure that all further marking of the anniversary will be sensitive and dignified, as a continuing tribute to each and every person who lost their life aboard the Titanic.

As Alban Maginness said of Northern Ireland, it is a new time and a new place. We have the iconic building. We have the political maturity to unite on what was a terrible tragedy and loss of life and to mark the ingenuity and brilliance of all the shipyard men from all their communities — different communities, different religions, different backgrounds — who came together and built us a world-renowned ship. They gave us a ship that we can all be proud of. In marking deeply the significant loss of life, let us keep the balance absolutely right between commemoration and marking the brilliance that went into the Titanic.

I thank Sammy Douglas and Paula Bradley for tabling the motion. I also thank all the Members who took part in making today's debate a success. Given its unanimity, the debate will show the world what we, as a society, have become. Belfast is a new place. We are open for business. Potentially, we can reach the targets that I have set out. It is time for every one of us to put our shoulders to the wheel to ensure that the hard work, ingenuity, brilliance and skills that went into building the Titanic can again be used to build local business, build tourism and create a shared Northern Ireland that each and every one of us can be proud of and can celebrate globally.

Mr Easton: The Titanic is one of the most famous things to have left Northern Ireland. Her construction in Belfast was a showpiece of the high standard of work ethic that exists in this part of the world. It is right that we should take this time to recognise the work that many men put into the construction of that ship.

It should not be forgotten that Titanic was not the only ship built by our great shipbuilders at Harland and Wolff. She had sister ships that showed beyond doubt that craftsmanship in Northern Ireland is unrivalled. For too long, we have been afraid to show pride in our connection with Titanic, preferring perhaps to stay in the background for whatever reason. However, I welcome the commemorations that we are embracing, which remember our strong shipbuilding traditions. It is right and just that Northern Ireland's role in the Titanic is commemorated and that we give those interested in the story the opportunity to come and visit key sites that have connections to the ship. However, it is right that any further commemorations should continue in a dignified and solemn manner, in keeping with the rest of the programme.

One hundred years ago, 1,517 people perished in the icy sea, many of whom were from Northern Ireland. In fact, because of the lack of records for those who embarked or left the ship at various ports, the figure could be higher. Many men would have absorbed the news as they read newspapers: the ship that they had worked hard on was now at the bottom of the ocean.

Although the film industry portrays Titanic as the love story that time forgot, we must remember that relatives of those who died are alive today, as are relatives of those who survived but had terrible memories of what happened in that short period of just 160 minutes between Titanic hitting the iceberg and her submersion. Unlike today, when a host of counsellors would rush to help survivors to deal with the emotional impact, many of those saved had to deal with the impact themselves. The same is true for the men who worked on the Titanic, as shipbuilding in those days was not the hotbed of health and safety regulations that it is today. Skilled workers earned just £2 a week, and unskilled workers earned £1 a week. Many young boys also worked on the construction of the ship. The monetary cost of building the Titanic in 1912 was just \$7.5 million, but the human cost was higher even before she set sail. During the building of the Titanic and her sister ship, RMS Olympic, 17 men died, including a father and son, as one Member mentioned. Riveters who worked in the shipyard often ended up with hearing loss as a result of the noise of their work.

The Titanic history is not a brand like Coca-Cola; nor is it an abstract idea. From 1909 to 1912, it was the mainstay of hundreds of families living in Belfast. Real people living in our cities helped to build the ship, and their contribution and sacrifice must be recognised in a way that highlights the seriousness of what happened 100 years ago yesterday. We must acknowledge that nothing that our men did contributed to the sinking of the Titanic. Northern Ireland's workmanship was of a high standard, and we must remember that when speaking of the Titanic. We should also use the Titanic commemorations to celebrate our shipbuilding history. It may be our most famous ship, but we were once major world players when it came to shipbuilding.

We are a proud people here in Northern Ireland. We have many achievements to be proud of, and the Titanic is only one of them. We must be careful not to turn the Titanic into a cheap gimmick. We must always keep at the forefront of our mind the fact that real people built the ship and real people perished on it. Let us be proud of and dignified in our achievements. Let us remember not only the Titanic but all the ships that we as a people helped to launch. Let

us remember all the men who lost their life in the shipyard over its entire history. Let us remember what that meant for the families who were left behind, and let us remember the people who needlessly died on the Titanic on that fateful night in 1912 in a way that befits the impact that it had on those left behind.

I will now address some comments made by Members. Sammy Douglas, who proposed the motion, said that the debate was a tribute to all those who lost their life. He mentioned all the events that have been happening to commemorate the Titanic over the past several weeks.

He mentioned his sense of pride in the building of the Titanic and in the skill of the workforce from Northern Ireland. He said that the Titanic was an icon of her time and that she was the biggest ship at the time. He also said that the Thompson dock was the biggest dock to be built in the world at the time.

1.30 pm

Mr Swann said that it is fitting that we are debating the commemoration of the Titanic today. He mentioned the 17 men who died during the construction of the Titanic and her sister ship, and he gave an account of the bravery of some of the men and women who were on the Titanic. Alasdair McDonnell mentioned the other commemorations that are to take place. He also mentioned that the shipyard was at the cutting edge of technology at the time and that the Titanic now has a global history.

Trevor Lunn praised the motion and the fact that the anniversary was commemorated in a solemn and dignified way. Paula Bradley mentioned her grandfather, who, I think, polished the Titanic or had something to do with polishing it. She mentioned that our forefathers had produced the fastest and biggest ship of their time and that we should be proud of their work.

Mr McMullan mentioned that he worked in the shipyard. He also said that the Titanic Quarter will be a worldwide tourist destination, and we all agree with that. Paul Frew mentioned the emotions shown by Members in the debate. He talked about the culture of nobody wanting to talk about the Titanic and about how that has now changed.

Mr McGimpsey mentioned his family connections with the shipyard. He also mentioned Thomas Andrews, the designer of the Titanic. He touched on all the manufacturing businesses that were in Belfast at the time and said that we should all be proud of them. Alban Maginness mentioned that there was political consensus on how we have commemorated the Titanic and said that that was welcome.

Gordon Dunne said that it was important to remember all the people who lost their life. He also said that the Titanic story is an excellent way to promote Belfast in a positive light on the world map. Chris Lytle mentioned how the different churches commemorated the Titanic and how he had enjoyed that.

Junior Minister Bell remembered the thousands who have worked in the shipyard over the years and not just the Titanic years. He praised the Titanic Quarter and all those who were involved in designing it and getting it up and running. He said that we should never forget the shipyard and the men who worked there. He mentioned all the

benefits that will come from the Titanic Quarter: over 4.5 million people are to visit over the years; an estimated £24 million is to be brought into the economy; and, I think, about 10,000 jobs are to benefit from tourism.

In conclusion, it is important to remember the motion. We are looking for the Assembly Commission to mark the tragedy in some way and to show our appreciation of the men who worked on the Titanic. I support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the 100th anniversary of the maiden voyage of RMS Titanic; acknowledges the innovation and ingenuity of the design and construction of the world's most famous ship; welcomes the creation of Titanic Belfast and the commemoration by the Assembly; and calls for any further marking of the anniversary or memorial to be solemn and dignified as a tribute to the 1,517 people who lost their lives on 15 April 1912.

Disappeared Victims

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes 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 will have five minutes. Before we begin, I remind Members that they have a general duty and responsibility as regards what is said and how they behave to ensure that nothing that is said prejudices any future proceedings that may be taken in relation to these matters.

Mr D Bradley: I beg to move

That this Assembly acknowledges the progress that has been made in locating the remains of disappeared victims; recognises the work of the families, the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains, WAVE Trauma Centre and others in achieving that progress; notes that some families are still waiting; and calls on anyone with information which might help in the location of the remains to share that information with the commission, through whatever means they choose, without further delay.

Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I want to begin by addressing the amendment. Although I can see the thinking behind it, I think that we need to be careful not to in any way compromise the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains, considering the fact that it is subject to legislation that prohibits information shared by it being passed on to any other agency. We also need to respect the commission's independence and not put it in a position in which that independence may be in any way tainted. We already know what more can be done and by whom it can be done. We in the House, in the right spirit, can highlight those issues in the debate. That said, it is not my intention to divide the House on this important issue.

Seventeen people disappeared during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. To date, the remains of 10 victims have been recovered. Joseph Lynskey was from Belfast; his remains have yet to be located. Seamus Wright was also from Belfast; his remains have not been located. Gareth O'Connor was from Armagh; his remains were recovered in 2005. Kevin McKee was from Belfast; extensive searches have been carried out in the Coghalstown area for his remains as well as those of Seamus Wright, but the remains of neither have yet been recovered.

Jean McConville was a widowed mother of 10 from west Belfast; her remains were found at Shelling Hill in County Louth. Peter Wilson disappeared from his home in west Belfast in August 1973; his remains were found at Waterfoot beach in County Antrim in November 2010. Eamon Molloy was abducted from his home in the Ardoyne area of Belfast in 1975; his body was discovered in a coffin left in a cemetery near Dundalk. Columba McVeigh from Donaghmore, County Tyrone, was 17 years of age when he was abducted and killed in October 1975; his remains have yet to be recovered.

Robert Nairac was an officer with the Grenadier Guards; his remains have not been recovered. Brendan Megraw was a 23-year-old married man from west Belfast; his remains

have not been found, despite intensive searches at Oristown in County Meath. John McClory and Brian McKinney were from west Belfast; following information received by the commission in 1999 and a search at Inniskeen, County Monaghan, a double grave containing the remains of John McClory and Brian McKinney was discovered.

Gerry Evans was a 24-year-old painter from Crossmaglen who disappeared in March 1979; his remains were recovered from a site in County Louth. Danny McIlhone from west Belfast went missing in 1981; his remains were recovered near Blessington lakes in County Wicklow in 2008. Charlie Armstrong was a married father of five from Crossmaglen; in July 2010, the commission recovered his remains in County Antrim. Eugene Simons disappeared on New Year's Day in 1981; his body was found three years later in a bog at Knockbridge, County Louth. Seamus Ruddy from Newry was a 33-year-old teacher of English in Paris, France when he disappeared in 1985; despite searches on the outskirts of Paris having been carried out, his remains have not been recovered.

There are strong indications that the remains of Brendan Megraw may be buried in Oristown bog in County Meath. More accurate information may help to locate his remains. Kevin McKee and Seamus Wright may be buried near Wilkinstown, four miles from Oristown. Likewise, more accurate information could help to locate their remains. Quite often, groups of up to 15 people were involved in the disappearances, and although some members of those groups may have come forward with information, others may not have. It is important that the call goes out from here today that those who may not yet have engaged with the commission should do so and provide more information. Every piece of information is important, and the smallest piece of information may be of help. The commission has specialist skills and knowledge to help to locate remains, but they can be used to the fullest extent possible only when coupled with good information.

Seamus Ruddy's disappearance is different, in that his remains are believed to be just outside the city of Paris. It would help if the two Governments, along with the French Government, were to intensify an information campaign locally in France to jog the memories of local people who may have heard or seen something. It was people from Northern Ireland and the Republic who were responsible for and involved in all the disappearances. They are the people who have the vital information, and they are the people who can bring the suffering of the families to an end.

I place on record our thanks to all those who have come forward to date to the commission with information leading to the recovery of remains. "Information" is the key word. It is the key to progress. I take this opportunity to renew the call for information about the victims whose remains have not yet been recovered. Now is the time for those who have said nothing or who have not said enough to come forward, speak and give information. That is why I ask all Members to join me in appealing to anyone who has any piece of information whatsoever that may be of help to the independent commission to bring it forward by whatever channel they feel comfortable with, either directly to the commission, to a member of the clergy, through the media or to a public representative.

It is worth reiterating that the legislation that governs the commission ensures that any information received by it is privileged and can be used only for the purpose of recovering the bodies of the disappeared. It cannot be passed on to any other agency or authority. The commission has a confidential telephone number: 00800 555 85500. It also has a confidential postal box, which is PO Box 10827, Dublin 2, Ireland. As a former paramilitary has said, there is no longer any justification or reason — if there ever was any — for withholding information on the location of remains. I ask all those who can help, or who think that they can, to do so, and I ask all public representatives to use their information to help the commission to get the information that it needs.

When we have debated the plight of the disappeared and their families, we have done so in a non-party political spirit, and I ask Members to respect that approach once again. The families ask not for revenge or prosecution and not for the where, why or how or even for the truth to which they are rightly entitled. They simply ask for information to help locate the remains of their loved ones so that they can afford them a Christian burial and so that they and the community in which they grew up can say goodbye and have a place — a grave — where they can be remembered publicly and where they may rest in peace and have the fact that they lived on this earth marked publicly.

All here today have lost loved ones in various circumstances. Some of our loved ones passed away at the end of a long life, some were taken from us in tragic circumstances, some were the victims of serious diseases and some survived only for a short period after birth. The sadness remains with us, and we struggle with our grief. Time heals the hurt and helps us to come to terms with it all, although it may never completely leave us. What helps us to deal with the initial trauma of a death are the rites that have grown around bereavement in our culture, such as the wake —

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

Mr D Bradley: — where neighbours and friends call to the home. All of those rites give us comfort at that time. Those comforts are denied to the families of the disappeared. Let us today, through our call for information, help to bring comfort to those families and end the long period of suffering that they have had to endure.

1.45 pm

Mr Nesbitt: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after “waiting;” and insert

“and calls on the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims’ Remains to make clear what more can be done, and by whom, to bring the comfort of recovery to the remaining families.”

I thank and acknowledge Mr Bradley and the SDLP for bringing this matter to the House; indeed, for bringing it back to the House. I acknowledge the work of Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims’ Remains, and what groups, led by WAVE Trauma Centre, continue to do to ensure that the remaining families do not feel totally forgotten at this time. Remembering my time as a victims’ commissioner, I pay personal tribute to Anne Morgan, whose brother Seamus Ruddy remains one of

the disappeared and is believed to be buried in France. Anne remains tireless in highlighting the issue, and I thank her personally for reminding me of the human impact of what was done in whatever name it was done.

As I said, we have been here before, in November 2008 and October 2010, and that is why we tabled our amendment. We understand that it is a difficult next step, given the legal constraints on the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims’ Remains, but we believe that it is necessary if we are to move on and change the dynamic. We acknowledge that the commission is bound by confidentiality and is independent, but, 13 years on, we must find a way of moving forward.

As Mr Bradley said, I am sure that all of us have lost loved ones from time to time. It is part of my Christmas ritual to visit some graves at Roselawn Cemetery on a Christmas morning. I visit my father’s grave, my maternal grandmother’s, my aunt Edna’s and those of several other family friends and relatives, and I am always encouraged and heartened by how busy the cemetery is. I am sure that all cemeteries in Northern Ireland are as busy on Christmas morning as individuals and families go through that ritual, which has its roots in faith, family and humanity. It reaches as far back as we can remember. Indeed, so far today, we have remembered the 1,500-plus who lost their lives 100 years ago on the Titanic. However, the ritual takes us back much further than that. We think of the ancient Greeks and the importance that they placed on burial. The ancient Greeks gave us the democracy that we practice in a particular form in the House today. It was a Greek belief that those who did not receive proper funeral rights were doomed to wander by the River Styx — the entrance to the underworld — for eternity with their souls never at rest. The Greeks believed that denying burial to a corpse not only insulted the body but damned the soul for all time.

I will take you back to Roselawn and to 13 March 1987, when I reported on a funeral. I remember it well because the man being buried was by the name of Nesbitt. He was no relation of mine but was a Reserve constable by the name of Peter Nesbitt, who, three days previously, had been blown up by a terrorist bomb when attending an alleged robbery at Ardoyne in Belfast. Three days later, the IRA attempted to blow up the funeral procession when it exploded a bomb at the Roselawn gatehouse. Four people were injured. When mentioning this, I am conscious of Michael Stone and of what he did at Milltown Cemetery. I am also conscious of what happened to corporals Derek Wood and David Howes at the funeral of one of Stone’s victims, when more inhumanity was visited upon man during our Troubles. In that context, I turn to the shameful situation of the disappeared.

As a victims’ commissioner, I attended the funeral mass for Danny McElhone in 2008. He was disappeared for longer than he was alive. He was 21 years of age when he was killed, but he was not buried for a further 27 years. I will never forget the picture of Danny that was used at the requiem mass. It was a picture of a young man entering his 20s, not the picture of a man being buried nearly 50 years after he was born. The family, of course, had no choice, because, for those 27 years, they had no picture, as he was dead but not buried. What a very stark visual reminder of how unnatural, inhuman and perverted it is to “disappear” somebody. I remind you that we lost Danny McElhone because somebody decided that he needed to be questioned about a gun. The IRA thought that he might have

stolen one of its weapons, so it took him away and killed him. At that requiem mass, the priest said:

"What is clear in these circumstances is that time doesn't heal. Truth heals, justice heals, righting a wrong heals. We are still in a society that is continuing to come to terms with its past. What happened to Danny is not in the past for the McIlhone family, it has been very much in the present."

The same could be said for so many directly impacted by our Troubles.

I have no doubt that the debate might include another call for a concerted effort to deal with the past. Let us put on record the stark statistic that, of the 17 disappeared, seven bodies remain out there. Seven families still await the opportunity to bury their loved one. Seven groups of friends and acquaintances await the chance to pay their final respects. Seven stains remain on the fabric of our society.

Nearly half of all disappeared cases remain open and unresolved. If we take the number of dead from our Troubles as being around 3,500, that would mean over 1,750 families having no realistic prospect of the truth, of justice, or of righting the wrong that I heard defined at Danny McIlhone's funeral mass. The Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN) at the University of Ulster says that the IRA was responsible for 1,824 deaths. A calculation based on seven of the 17 still being disappeared would mean over 900 families being left with no realistic hope or prospect of closure.

It is not just a question of acting in a civilised, humane and Christian manner. It is also a question of credibility — the credibility of any process of dealing with the past that involves those who took part divulging accurate information about what happened. A building near the new Titanic project is called W5, the science park. The five Ws are who, what, when, where and why. How can we have confidence in dealing with the past when we cannot even satisfy four of the objective Ws? We know the who, we know the what and we know the when, but we do not know the where. If we did, we would locate the missing bodies. As for the fifth W, the why, it remains subjective. As we look to deal with the past, we must have confidence not just in the truth but in it being delivered in a credible manner. It is not credible when we cannot even deliver the first four objective Ws.

The Consultative Group on the Past, headed by Eames and Bradley, put much store in reconciliation, but do we have a common understanding of what reconciliation means? To me, it is an internal process, whereby an individual who has lost a loved one comes to accept what happened. It is different from closure. I do not believe that there is any such thing as closure this side of the grave. There is a burden to be carried by the families of the disappeared. Some days that burden will be lighter, some days heavier. The challenge for us is to try to lighten that load by trying to help those families locate their loved ones and offer them a Christian burial. Those who withhold that information contrast darkly with the dignity that we discussed earlier as we remembered the Titanic.

I will close by quoting from a speech by Sinn Féin's national chairperson, Declan Kearney. The speech has received much publicity of late, and it begins:

"Many years ago, unionists told republicans that our words could not be heard over the sound of guns and

bombs ... with the benefit of hindsight provided by our peace process, their assertions have been proved right."

There is another right and another truth to be heard today, and that is the call of the families of the disappeared. I support the amendment.

Mr S Anderson: Back in October 2010, we discussed an SDLP motion broadly similar to the one before us today. However, I welcome the chance to debate the issue of the disappeared again today. It gives us an opportunity to highlight an issue that simply needs to be resolved to bring comfort and closure to the relatives who still await news of their loved ones. The previous motion also called on those with knowledge of the location of victims' remains to bring that information, in confidence, to the Independent Commission without further delay. Action not words is the key. I support the motion and the amendment. Indeed, the amendment adds to the motion, as it calls on the Independent Commission to spell out what can and needs to be done to properly conclude this long-running and painful issue. It is vital that those with any information come forward. Surely, anyone with a shred of compassion who knows anything of the missing victims would and should want to provide that information, which will bring long-overdue closure to the suffering and grieving families.

Shortly after the debate in the Chamber in October 2010, the remains of Peter Wilson were found at Waterfoot beach in County Antrim. Since then, the always painfully slow progress seems to have come to a complete halt. Although 12 bodies have been found, and some closure given to the grieving families, the remaining families are still waiting and living a nightmare. All they want is to be able to give their loved ones a proper burial. Some members of these families have passed away without finding out what happened to their loved ones.

The disappeared were all very different people with different backgrounds, outlooks and lifestyles. The mother of a young family, Mrs Jean McConville's only crime was to show compassion and offer help to a dying soldier. Charlie Armstrong was an innocent man simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Aged 17 when he died, Columba McVeigh has yet to be found. His mother worked tirelessly for the recovery of his remains until her death in 2007. She went to her grave not knowing. Captain Robert Nairac has also never been found. He was a soldier doing his job in the battle against terrorism. I could go on, for each victim's story is unique.

No matter who they were, there is absolutely no justification for the illegal abduction and brutal murder of any of those people. The terrorists who carried out these vile deeds need to be brought to account, even at this late stage. I suspect that some Members of the House may have a fair idea about some of these cases. If they do not personally know, I am fairly certain that they know people who could provide that vital information. It seems to me that some Members on the Benches opposite are only too keen to call for selective inquiries into the past, but not so keen to have the spotlight shone on their past and that of their friends. Indeed, I often wonder to what extent Sinn Féin has really moved forward. Apart from hare-brained suggestions that we might fly the flag of a foreign nation over Parliament Buildings, Sinn Féin seems to want to continue to glory in the terrorist campaign of the Provisional IRA. Plans to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Loughgall are an

affront to decency and a studied insult to the victims of republican terrorism, including the disappeared.

Information that will identify the location of the remains of the victims is vital, but so too is information that may cast light on the decisions that led to each person being abducted and murdered. In that context, I hope that the PSNI succeeds in its efforts to obtain access to the Boston College tapes. It would be interesting to find out what role some people in Sinn Féin had in the murder of Mrs Jean McConville. Gerry Adams says that he has nothing to fear from the tapes, but then he also says that he was never in the IRA. The time has come for open, honest and forthright confessions from some key people who, I believe, hold essential information. Justice demands it, common decency demands it and the grieving families demand it. Only in that way can the situation be satisfactorily resolved.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I support the motion. I welcome the fact that, in proposing the motion, Dominic Bradley addressed his concerns about the amendment but indicated that he would not divide the House. That is also our position: we will be content to support the motion and the amendment.

The issue of the independence of the commission is well enough protected by statute and its members are experienced enough to judge how far they can go. However, I think that the amendment is intended to go the extra mile, if necessary, to encourage people with information to give it.

2.00 pm

I support the motion because I support the right of the families to have redress after so many years of injustice piled on injustice. The policy was wrong then and it is wrong now. The testimony of the commission should give some assurance to the families and to the Member opposite who spoke before me. The commission acknowledges the co-operation that it has received and the quality of the information that was made available to it. Clearly, however, more information is needed. The motion is particularly relevant and important because the commission has indicated that it has sufficient information to commission only one more planned dig. It has indicated that, after that, it is difficult to know what more it can do to address the issue. That should concern us all.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for giving way. I am not out to score party political points, but I was interested in your use of the word "policy". You said that the "policy" was wrong. If that refers to the sequence of deaths, can you confirm that it was a policy rather than a random series of events?

Mr McLaughlin: Anyone who studies the history of conflict in this country will know that it was a practice or policy that emerged much earlier. In fact, it emerged very early in the previous century. It visited this generation: the generation that is represented in the House is that which lived through the most recent example of that conflict. Thankfully, it has ended in a peace process and agreement on how we can address issues in a non-violent, democratic and political fashion. It was a practice or policy that was carried forward. The IRA stated publicly that it came to recognise the injustice of that policy, which it inherited and then ended. What I regret, and what I think we all should regret, is that, as well as ending the practice or policy, it should also at that

time have taken steps to try to identify where the remains were buried. You talked about people being denied a burial. In fact, the bodies were disappeared by being buried in secret locations. That simply compounds the terrible trauma that the families have endured. For that reason, I say that it was an injustice then, and it is an injustice now. I repeat and reiterate —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr McLaughlin: Yes, indeed.

Mr Allister: Would the Member then like to withdraw the statement that he made in January 2005 that the killing of Jean McConville was not a criminal act, or is it still the position of Sinn Féin that the vile murder of Jean McConville was in some way justified? If it is the Member's stance that it was not a criminal act, so much of what he says today has no credibility.

Mr McLaughlin: I thank the Member for that intervention. I will address that issue in the context of a process of truth recovery and genuine reconciliation. That would mean that I could expect people from all sections around this room to acknowledge the role of the British security services in procuring murder and collusion with murder gangs. If we address all those issues — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr McLaughlin: If we address all those issues — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. At the beginning of the debate, I asked Members to be careful about what was said so that it would not in any way jeopardise any future proceedings. I ask Members to remember that. The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McLaughlin: I repeat: we need to have a truth recovery process in which all will come to the table with all the available information. A partisan approach means that we will ask only some questions and will end up with only some of the answers. Let us go for a genuinely inclusive process.

We should support the motion because the commission has made it clear that it is almost at the end of the road unless those who have even the slightest piece of information come forward. The commission has the experts, the resources, the structures and the DNA and forensic experts all available. Let them judge the quality of the information. However, if anyone — a landowner or a local person — who noticed something or anyone who is connected in any shape or form with the burial of these remains has information, they should pass that information on now as a matter of urgency. The commission urgently needs additional information to move forward.

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

Mr McLaughlin: Thank you.

Mr Lunn: The Alliance Party welcomes the motion and commends the SDLP Members for bringing it forward today. I will talk about the Ulster Unionist Party's amendment in due course.

At a time when the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains has indicated that, unless fresh

information is forthcoming — as Mr McLaughlin rightly said — it will have to wind up its activities, it is timely to remind those who may have the knowledge to allow progress that they still have a moral obligation to pass on that knowledge.

Our Troubles, or, more correctly, the vicious terrorist campaign that we have endured from 1970 onward, produced many atrocious acts. Indeed, it seemed, at times, that it had become a contest to see how obscene an act of murder could be. So we had bombs targeted at innocent civilians, proxy bombs and gruesome murders on a grand scale, including the tit-for-tat slaughter of innocent workmen and the killing of people, including women, for no obvious reason whatsoever. We also had the retaliation, more murders, the Shankill Butchers and the disgraceful activities of so-called defence organisations before good sense began to prevail. We are now in a relatively peaceful society, but we have still the legacy of our past to deal with, hence today's motion.

Through all the sadness, for the most part, the bereaved were at least able to give their loved ones a Christian burial, a proper funeral service, a wake, a headstone or a memorial to visit and to help people remember. The disappeared victims are, of course, in a different category and, frankly, it is hard for me to comprehend the suffering involved when a son, husband or mother is simply taken away and killed, without explanation, by a self-appointed judge and jury, and the body hidden for all those years. It is also impossible for me to understand the mindset of an organisation that adds more agony by not only committing a murder but refusing to return remains or at least indicate where they might be. Why would it do that, Mr Deputy Speaker? What is the point? Why will those who know — given that they now have absolute immunity and the fact that, legally, the information that they could provide cannot be used in court — not reveal what they know and, perhaps, why they felt justified in doing what they did in the first place? No one is expecting convictions at this stage, but how can those left behind find closure without a body, in the knowledge that there are people out there who could help but still refuse, for reasons known only to themselves?

In the history of the past 40 years, the taking of those people and the continued despair of the bereaved stand out as perhaps the worst open wound. It is, as Mr Nesbitt said, a stain on our society. It is unfinished business of the worst kind. I hope that, even at this late stage, those who know — there are plenty of them — will, even now, come forward, in the words of the motion, to:

“the commission, through whatever means they choose, without further delay.”

I turn to the Ulster Unionist Party's amendment. It seems to miss the point. The motion calls for people who know to come forward. It is pretty simple. The amendment would perhaps have been better had it been an addition to the motion rather than one that takes out the final paragraph of the SDLP's motion. There is no harm in asking the commission to tell us again what it needs and what can and should be done. It is not as though it has not told us many times before. We know what needs to be done, and what needs to be done is expressed in the motion.

For all that, it is pretty obvious that the House will not divide on the issue, so the Alliance Party will not divide the House. However, I hope that the words of the original motion will still

stand on the record as a demand from this House, and a rightful demand.

Lastly, Mr Bradley read out the list of all the disappeared. There is one name that does not qualify for that list; that of Lisa Dorrian. Her disappearance is a more recent disgraceful act. I appeal to people who might know about that. Information will be a lot fresher in their minds. They should give some clue or indication as to what has happened to Lisa Dorrian.

Lord Morrow: A number of Members have said that this is the third time that we have had a debate in relation to those commonly known as the disappeared. Yes, we have to acknowledge that some movement has been realised on this vexed issue, but it continues to be part of what we would call the unfinished business of the past that this country and, indeed, we as a people have to deal with.

It has to be said, and it cannot be said much differently, that, in relation to this dreadful past that we are debating today, the spotlight is very much on one party, namely Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin has got to realise that things are moving on. It claims to be moving on, and I acknowledge that, in many regards, it has. However, this is the one issue that it seems to want to drag its feet on. It is going to have to step up to the plate and be counted if it is to be taken at face value here, because there is no doubt that Sinn Féin has a legacy here that has to be dealt with. I suspect that it feels that it has no part to play in it.

Jean McConville was mentioned. Jean McConville's body was, of course, found. However, that was done not by the actions of Sinn Fein but more by accident than design. I thought that Mitchel McLaughlin was going to go the second mile today, but he just backed away from it when it was expected that he was going to say something of great value, which those of us who feel strongly about this issue could have taken some heart from.

Most of us know the sad, sad story of the murder of Jean McConville, who was the mother of a large family and was abducted. I thought that Mr McLaughlin would have dealt with this when it was put to him by Mr Allister. In January 2005, the Sinn Féin party chairman, Mitchel McLaughlin, claimed that the killing of Jean McConville was not a criminal act given the context of the Troubles and the belief that she had been a British spy, which was, of course, totally untrue and unfounded and was just a fabrication to deflect attention at that time.

He then went on to make the statement that, in fact, the policy was wrong then and it is wrong again. When he was challenged by Mike Nesbitt on that, and I picked up strongly when he was challenged to see in just what direction he was going to go, it was regrettable that he did not go the direct route and say, “Look, I am also speaking about what I said then about Jean McConville, and I am now saying something totally and completely different.” I will give way to Mr McLaughlin if he wants to put the record straight here, once and for all, in relation to the death of Jean McConville and what he said at that time.

Mr McLaughlin: I do want to set the record straight, because you misrepresented me in your remarks. I said precisely then what I said today in this House about the issue of the disappeared. In that television debate that you are referring to, I appealed for those with information

about the whereabouts of Jean McConville to make that available to the family. Indeed, I addressed the wider group of families seeking that information. So, my position has been consistent.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Lord Morrow: Thank you. I heard what Mr McLaughlin said, and he seems to be now saying something different. I think he still has to deal with the issue, but we will give him his time. He seems to need more space on this one. However, I appeal to him directly, and I can do no more than that, to please deal with the issue and put any ambivalence or ambiguity to rest on this one.

2.15 pm

A number of years ago, I was contacted by the family of one of the disappeared, namely the McVeigh family. That case has already been referred to. Columba McVeigh was a lad of 17 when he was abducted by the IRA in 1975. The late Mrs McVeigh came to discuss the issue with me, which I was happy to do. Right away, I could see etched across that elderly woman's face trauma, distress and agony. She was pleading for the return of the body of her son before she passed away. Unfortunately, Mrs McVeigh has passed away, and she was never to realise that longing in her heart to be reunited with the body of her son so that she could take him back and give him a Christian burial in the town he came from, Donaghmore.

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

Lord Morrow: I appeal again to Sinn Féin, if it wants to listen, to take on board the agony that many families — I think it is seven — are still going through, to address the issue and step up to the plate.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht seo, nó ceapaim gur díospóireacht an-tábhachtach í. I welcome this debate, which is very important. One of the main reasons why I feel it is very timely is that, as Mitchel McLaughlin said, the commission has said that it will be doing its last dig unless further information becomes available. I reiterate the calls from all the different parties, because we owe it to families to refrain from party politicking on this issue. We want anybody who has information to bring it forward, no matter how trivial it may seem. There are mechanisms available, and I join with everybody else in urging people to bring forward that information.

As many people have said, we are a society coming out of conflict. Our society has suffered dreadfully, in all sections. I do not believe in a hierarchy of victims; all people need truth. Other victims' families will not mind me singling out the disappeared, because, as Mitchel McLaughlin and other Members stated, they have suffered in a particular way: they do not have their loved ones to bury, and that has been the case over such a protracted period.

I welcome the fact that the commission has stated publicly that it has received the full support of the IRA. That is very important for the families. I join everybody else — there is no ambiguity about this, although some Members chose to engage in party politicking a little bit — in calling on people to bring forward whatever information they have, because the families of the disappeared deserve to bury their loved

ones and to be able to go to a grave. I join the House in trying to make sure that that happens.

Mr Campbell: I join others in commending those who brought the motion before the Chamber today. Mr Bradley outlined a series of names, and I was glad that the Alliance Member added the name of Lisa Dorrian, because her family suffers in exactly the same way as other families of the disappeared.

When talking about this issue, we can get sidetracked from the fact that 3,500 have died as a result of terror in Northern Ireland. All the families of those people have had the same anguish and shared the same pain as a result of their losses. However, this is a small group of people that had the additional pain and anguish of not being able to bury their son, daughter, brother, sister, father or mother. As was outlined by the proposer of the motion, 17 or 18 people disappeared in total, and seven or eight remain unlocated. Those eight families still seek some form of information or knowledge. That needs to come from those who have it to the commission or whatever person in society they feel confident and comfortable going to. That information must be brought to bear so that a decent burial can conclude the matter and allow the families, in so far as it is possible, to move beyond the tragedy that they suffered.

The Jean McConville tragedy has been raised on a number of occasions. I join others in expressing regret that the Member for South Antrim Mitchel McLaughlin did not take the opportunity to withdraw his absolutely outrageous and scandalous comment that the perception was that Jean McConville was a British spy. Let us be clear: if all unsubstantiated allegations of being a British spy resulted in a death sentence, there would be more co-options to the Sinn Féin Benches than the replacement that we heard about today.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member acknowledge and recall the fact that, in her report on the murder of Jean McConville, the former Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan took the most unusual step of stating that Jean McConville was not an informer?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for that. Yes, I recall that. That view and position expressed by the former Police Ombudsman is shared right across the community. Unfortunately, it does not appear to be shared by the Member for South Antrim Mr McLaughlin.

Hopefully, we will pass this motion today. We will all be able to have our say and make our points, hopefully in a very forthright fashion that endeavours to bring some sort of closure to the debate. However, we need more than closure to the debate. We need closure for the families who want the bodies of their loved ones so that they can bring closure to their lives and move beyond what happened.

Mr Hussey: Ireland is supposedly a Christian country, and one of the most obvious rights of a Christian society is the right to a Christian burial. Clearly, this simple act allows a family to remember their loved one and lay their soul to rest. Nobody has the right to withhold that sacrament from a family. Nobody has the right to put a family through that hell for any political or vindictive reason. Yet, here in the land of saints and scholars, families have been abandoned

and ignored by republican terrorists who not only murdered their loved ones but retained the bodies and buried them in secret, unmarked, unconsecrated ground.

As far back as 1864, article 16 of the Geneva convention mandated that parties to the conflict should record the identity of the dead and wounded and transmit the information to the opposing party. I do not for one minute accept that the murder of anyone during the Troubles was under the terms of a legitimate war. The acts were of terrorism, but basic human rights should pertain. Even as far back as 1864, it was accepted that, where possible, opposing forces should identify those killed.

Anyone with any knowledge of the history of Ireland will know that a very large pot of whitewash has been used to cover up republican crimes by attempting to justify them in some form or another. However, no amount of whitewash will hide the stain. The IRA and other republican groups simply took people out. They spirited them away and murdered them and did not even have the common decency to return the bodies for a Christian burial.

Is it not bad enough for a family to suffer the loss of a loved one without the added horror of not being able to bury their dead? There are many recorded instances of war dead being buried during vicious campaigns and, at the end of the battle, bodies being returned and buried. Who do these people think they are that they would hold a family to ransom for years and years without allowing them to bury the mortal remains of their victims? Who gave them the right to be judge, jury, executioner and bodysnatcher? Believe me: that is what they are and were. The late Captain Robert Nairac was murdered by the IRA on 15 May 1977, probably somewhere in south Armagh. Three men have served a sentence for his murder, but his body has never been returned, possibly because it was so badly mutilated that his murderers did not want the world to know what they did to him.

Mrs Jean McConville was murdered, and I pay tribute to her family for their steadfast refusal to give up, their determination to ensure that their mother was laid to rest and their determination to follow that through to the end. By their actions, they had her mortal remains returned for a Christian burial.

I am working for constituents whose brother, a serving soldier, was murdered in west Belfast. Two people who were on the periphery of that event disappeared and have still not been returned. The family of the murdered soldier want answers to their questions about how their brother died. It is clear that the two people who disappeared knew something, but the bigger picture is that a republican warlord wanted to ensure his own safety and removed them not only from their homes but from the face of the earth.

I sincerely hope and pray that the families who have lost loved ones will have the opportunity one day to bury their dead and have a place of sanctuary where they can bring their nightmare to an end. However, I honestly believe that we will not see the return of all the disappeared. Those who know the whereabouts of the remains are staying stubbornly quiet. Those who directed operations, wherever they currently sit, are staying stubbornly silent. Yet, every day, while their silence is allowed to go unchallenged, we hear cries that the RUC must answer for this, the British Army

must answer for that, and we must know what happened here, there and everywhere.

Saying sorry for the loss of the disappeared is relatively easy, but explaining why those people were spirited away and why their bodies were taken is not so easy because it is not justifiable. There are 18 known cases of individuals who, it is suspected — I repeat the word “suspected” — were murdered and secretly buried. Why will the cowards who carried out those barbaric acts not even admit that they did so? Are they ashamed of what they did? They should be. If their conviction was so strong that they felt that they had the right to take the life of someone who may have been a comrade in arms, they should have the moral strength to stand up and at least admit what they did.

Some of the disappeared were simply removed because they knew too much about their colleagues, and fear of the truth emerging could have been the reason why they were taken out. We are supposed to be in a new dispensation. Even Jeffrey Donaldson says that the IRA army council has gone away. If that is the case, I urge anyone who knows anything at all about these lost souls to clear their conscience and allow the mortal remains to be returned to families so that this bloody chapter of the history of the Province can be brought to a close.

The Ulster Unionist Party amendment was tabled in an attempt to move forward the process of locating the remains of the disappeared victims so that the families may have some comfort.

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

Mr Hussey: If the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains can indicate what needs to be done and by whom, it could help to facilitate that. I support the amendment.

Mr Principal 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 Patsy McGlone.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Oral Answers to Questions

Environment

Taxis: Licensing

1. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the consultation on taxi operator licensing fees. (AQO 1693/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I thank the Member for his question. The series of questions on this issue today and at other times is timely, because, arguably, there is no area of road management in which there will be more new regulation and licensing than for taxi operators.

The consultation to which Mr Maskey referred is complete, but the response was very fragmented. Given the diverse interests of the taxi industry and the small, medium-sized and very large operators, diverse and fragmented views were expressed by the industry in all its parts, as you will have anticipated. The consequence of that is that, as of October this year, a new regime for taxi operator licences will be in place. In putting it into place, I tried to inform the process with principles that gave more protection to smaller operators and put a relatively higher financial burden on larger operators. At all times, I tried to make the process as simple and cost-effective as possible to ensure that operators, especially small and medium-sized operators, were able to continue their business in these times of economic need.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat a Cheann Comhairle agus a Aire. I thank the Minister for his response. I take on board his comment about there being diverse views out there, which I know through recent meetings with some of the taxi operators. He mentioned October. Is that the date for the implementation of the Act, or is it another process? If so, does he foresee any circumstances that could cause further delay?

Mr Attwood: First, I acknowledge the fact, as does Mr Maskey, that the taxi business is fragmented. We reckon that there are some 10,000 taxi drivers in the North who can operate individually. There are also supersized firms, some of which have an affiliation of 500, 600 or even 700 taxis.

I confirm that the intention is that a taxi operator licensing system will be in place by 31 October. Unless something comes from left field, that part of the legislation will be in force and operational as of the end of October. Its purpose, given the scale of the taxi industry, is to regulate, protect consumers and, not least, ensure that tourists to our cities, towns and rural areas, when they get into a taxi cab, are certain about the character of the business that is being conducted. In an effort to recognise the fact that costs will be incurred by small, medium-sized and large taxi operators, I decided that the fee for those who register as taxi operators in the two months up to the end of October would be reduced

from £140 to £40 to encourage registration and to minimise the costs, especially to small operators.

Ms Lo: I welcome the Minister's announcement that this will happen in October. It is long overdue. As well as lowering costs, will his proposed changes regarding a licence's duration changing from five years to one year and three years place further burdens on staff time in the Driver and Vehicle Agency? Will the system be self-financing? Will there be full cost recovery? Will there be a deficit for the DVA?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Chair of the Committee for her welcome for what I am doing. The proposal that I outlined today will not be self-financing, because I think that that would place an unfair burden on too many taxi drivers, especially the small operators. Consequently, in the first instance, there will continue to be a subsidy from central government to try to reduce the costs to the taxi industry of the regime that is being put in place.

Part of the regime that I am putting in place — this is different from what was proposed — is that taxi operators will be able to apply for an operating licence for one year, three years or five years. The purpose of that is, again, to reduce the costs. If a taxi operator applies in any one year for a taxi operating licence, it will cost £140 after this year, and it will cost £140 each and every year. However, if a small, medium or large taxi operator applies for a taxi operating licence for five years, there will only be a £140 upfront cost for that application. In that way, I am trying to protect the small and medium-sized operators. The owners of big taxi businesses can, I think, take care of themselves. The principle behind the costs and the process that I am outlining is to reduce the burden on and the upfront cost to the individual taxi driver.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome the help that the Minister is giving to small taxi companies. However, many people see the legislation as specifically creating a monopoly for one or two of the larger companies. What other actions is the Minister looking at to help the small or part-time companies, particularly after the legislation comes in, which is when many of the problems will start?

Mr Attwood: I appreciate the Member's welcome for what I am doing. I am very mindful of his point that we have passed legislation, we have consulted on the operational aspects of that legislation and we will not end up with supersized taxi firms — of which there are a number, including in the city of Belfast — as a consequence of the legislation having created a monopoly situation. The reason why I have not gone with the fees regime that was originally consulted on was that very point. The aim was to rebalance away from what I thought was legislation and implementation that inevitably favoured the large, if not the very large, to try to better favour the medium and the small so that everybody could be helped, particularly, the small single operator or the smaller taxi firm.

We will issue guidance to ensure that people know what is happening, and we will conduct roadshows to inform the very large taxi industry of the full outworking of the legislation. In particular, we will advertise and promote the initial phase of reduced costs to try to enable all those who want to continue to operate to do so at a lower cost base than might originally have been intended. In all those ways,

as well as through carefully monitoring what we do, I hope that we have got the best balance possible at this stage.

Planning Policy Statement 16

2. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the amendments to draft PPS 16 in regard to rural tourism.

(AQO 1694/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. Given the year that is in it — 2012 — and given the weekend that we have just had, with the recognition of the Titanic, this is a timely question about where we are going with draft PPS 5. As Members know, the consultation on draft PPS 5 ended some time ago. However, I was not satisfied that the draft policy was sufficiently helpful to rural tourism in its original form to enable rural tourism to grow. Consequently, we have had further conversations with stakeholders, including the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, to ensure that the policy is not too restrictive and is sufficiently supportive of rural tourist operations.

I will give you two examples. When the final policy comes out, subject to Executive approval, there will be further opportunity, in exceptional circumstances, for significant tourism opportunities to grow than might have originally been the case under the draft policy. We will be more flexible when it comes to the location of tourism opportunities outside rural settlements. In my view, the consequence will be a more flexible policy when it comes to bed-and-breakfast, hotel and self-catering opportunities. The draft policy, as amended, will be a pathway to a more flexible, less restrictive approach to rural tourism than was the case under the original draft.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin, agus tá ceist agam dó. Further to his reply, will the Minister tell me what key planning issues rural tourism providers have raised with his Department in relation to this planning policy statement? What are the key hurdles? Is he engaging directly with rural tourism providers, such as Todds Leap near Ballygawley and An Creagán Visitor Centre in mid Tyrone?

Mr Speaker: Members should make one enquiry to the Minister in their question.

Mr Attwood: I am sure that the local tourism industry will welcome that advertisement and rightly so. I am not protesting about that by any means. We all have an obligation to do all that we can to promote local tourism and rural opportunities, as the Member has just done.

I was inclined to broaden the scope and opportunities of the policy. Therefore, beyond the 69 consultation responses, we consulted the Environment Committee, the NITB, the Royal Town Planning Institute, NILGA and the holiday park industry in an effort to ensure that, when the draft goes before the Executive, it will have the ambition that, I believe, it should.

Let me make it clear that, given what is happening in 2012 and 2013 and given that the built and natural heritage is, as I keep saying, at the core of tourism opportunity in the North and, therefore, at the core of economic opportunity and future jobs in the North, it is important that we are not restrictive when it comes to rural tourism opportunities.

That is why, in the assessment of the draft and following the consultation, moving increasing opportunities beyond settlement limits seems to be the right principle to adopt. That will, as I indicated, increase opportunities for bed-and-breakfast, hotel and self-catering providers. That seems to me the right approach to take.

The overarching strategy, as reflected in the Runkerry decision, is that, where there are significant benefits for a rural tourism proposal, that can, at the end of the day, be critical in making the right call for individual applications.

Mr Campbell: In talking about how he is going to progress matters with the draft PPS, the Minister used two subjective terms. One was “significant” and the other was “flexibility”. Can he ensure at the outset that, when we reach the conclusion of his discussions, those two subjective terms and the explanation and onus behind them will be relayed to each of the district planning offices?

Mr Attwood: I welcome the endorsement for the approach that I am taking. The purpose in making, for example, the Runkerry decision was to send a very strong message, especially in areas where we have signature projects. As I keep saying, the Causeway signature project is arguably our single biggest tourism economic opportunity. That decision was made to send out a message consistent with planning policy. Although it may end up that those terms are viewed as subjective, they are, nonetheless, informed by various other criteria included in various planning policies, not just PPS 21 and this draft policy. The message has been sent out from my Department. That message is working through the planning system and going through training around, for example, renewables, which we will touch on later. Where there are opportunities and where there is significant benefit to the tourism industry or the economy generally, the principle should be to favour that development. I hope that that position will prevail.

2.45 pm

Mr Byrne: Will the Minister outline what other functions his Department may have in supporting tourism development, particularly in rural parts and, indeed, some rural towns?

Mr Attwood: Without anticipating a later question, I will say that I have a simple view of the function of DOE. The function is, on one hand, to be the leading environment Ministry but, on the other, to be a leading economy Ministry. The twin-track purpose and function of the Department is to lead and be the leader in respect of environmental protection and, at the same time, to be a leading economy Department. That is the perspective that I try to bring. Therefore, to answer the question, when it comes to article 31 applications in respect of tourism or wider economic projects, it is the Department's role to demonstrate that it can assist the environment and the economy going forward. In my view, through the efficient deployment of the Department's planning policies, whether in respect of PPS 21, draft PPS 5, when it comes out, or the development of area plans — I hope to have an announcement in the near future on the long-awaited BMAP proposal for the city of Belfast — we can remodel opportunities for tourists and the economy, consistent with sustainable environmental standards.

Armagh Jail

3. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions his Department has had with Armagh City and District Council in relation to the regeneration of Armagh jail. (AQO 1695/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. I confirm that, beyond the role of other Departments in respect of Armagh jail, there have been ongoing discussions between the DOE and the council. There have been ongoing pre-application discussions (PAD) with the council in respect of any application for the development of the jail as a hotel with heritage potential, as well as the possibility of newbuild retail and residential apartments as part of the overall plan. I say this cautiously, but it is anticipated that, in the next number of months, an application in that regard will be received by the local planning office.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he ensure that the planning office recognises the importance of the development to Armagh city and that any application will have a speedy resolution, within the relevant guidelines?

Mr Attwood: Yes, I would like to give those reassurances, subject to the caveat that the planning system can process planning applications if it gets all relevant information from the applicant. In this case, given that an applicant might be Armagh council, I would presume that all necessary information will be provided. It is also necessary that all other relevant Departments and consultees live up to the standards of the memorandum of understanding in respect of the time frame for responses. So, subject to the caveats that all information is given up front and all responses come back from consultees in good time, you would like to think that this application would be processed in and around the six-month period. I have to lay down some caveats, but that would be the ambition. If those hurdles are jumped, the outcome should be forthcoming. That is why I encourage any council or any other developer of a significant application to engage with the local planning office in respect of the pre-application discussion. A fully fledged pre-application discussion is the key to ensuring that, when an application is received, it is processed in a timely fashion.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra a thug sé. Can the Minister assure us that the pre-application discussions to which he referred have indeed been entered into by all parties to the regeneration of Armagh jail?

Mr Attwood: That is their purpose. I will not comment on this particular PAD, but I am concerned that some consultees do not show their full hand during pre-application discussions on the potential application with the planning system. They talk in the context of the PAD but do not give certainty on what their view might be on a future planning application. I urge the consultees to show their hand in the context of any PAD, including the one on the jail complex in Armagh, bearing in mind the importance of that building in heritage and historical terms and the importance of its regeneration. That will ensure that, when an application is received, the process can be expedited and the six-month time frame can be lived up to.

Wind Turbines

4. **Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of the Environment how many applications for wind turbines have been submitted in the last year. (AQO 1696/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. In 2010-11, 639 planning applications for wind turbines were received: 620 for single wind turbines and 19 for wind farms. The figures for the last quarter have yet to be fully updated, but, in the nine months between April and December last year, there were 500 applications for single wind turbines and 29 for wind farms.

Those figures do not take into account other renewable energy-related applications for anaerobic digesters and other such opportunities. However, despite the English Government's indication in the papers yesterday, the scale of those figures in the preceding year and up to December of last year demonstrate, in my view, that renewable energy remains the biggest economic opportunity for this island and for the North.

Mr Molloy: Can the Minister tell the House how many of those multiple applications are based in the Sperrins region? Can he break it down that way?

Mr Attwood: I will be able to break it down like that but not right at this moment. I will come back to the Member.

Behind that question lies the point that the Sperrins has been the test bed for renewable wind applications in Northern Ireland. If you look at a map of wind farm and wind turbine applications, you will see that the greatest concentration of applications and approvals is in the Sperrins area. As opportunities for wind farms spread to the east and as opportunities for offshore begin to develop at the end of this calendar year, we need to learn from that experience in order to ensure that every reasonable opportunity is grasped in a way that local communities can live with, that does not compromise the natural beauty and that will see this opportunity rolled out to the people of the North.

Our Governments are beginning to grasp the fact that, when it comes to wind, wave and tide — and geothermal, as we will learn in the near future — there are opportunities for this island to become self-sufficient in electricity supplies and to become a net exporter of electricity over the next 10 or 20 years. Our Governments need to grasp that idea more fully going forward.

Mr Elliott: Does the Minister accept that there has been a lack of preparation by the Department for the significant number of renewable energy applications, including wind turbines and anaerobic digesters?

Mr Attwood: I concur with the broad sentiment of the question. That is why, last autumn, I instructed the head of planning and our senior management team to conduct training at all divisional levels in the North to ensure that the spike in individual wind turbine applications was managed in an expedient fashion and that we had the capacity and knowledge in each development office to ensure that applications were dealt with in an expedient way. Given the surge in individual applications, I accept the point that there was a need to make up for some lost ground in the management of those applications and to have the skills and capacity in local offices to do that.

Similarly, as there are now over 70 applications for anaerobic digesters in the planning system, we have gathered together in the past number of weeks the major agents making applications on behalf of individual farmers and others to ensure that our planning system is better fit for the challenge of managing AD applications as they roll forward. The same will be true for offshore wind farm applications on the far side of the licensing round. The licensing round will conclude in the autumn, and we need to have the capacity to manage any forthcoming applications, not least because offshore wind is of better quality than onshore wind. However, I have to say to Members that, unless our national grid is sufficiently broad to connect renewable opportunities to the grid, we may have a situation in which planning applications are submitted and approved but opportunities to build do not arise because there is no connection to the national grid. Members will have read in the papers this morning that there may be some further developments this week in that regard.

Mr Agnew: Is the Minister aware of the research by the Fermanagh Trust into the community benefit from wind farms? Does he see a role for Planning Service and, more broadly, his Department in ensuring that communities get benefit from wind farm developments in their area?

Mr Attwood: I am aware of the Fermanagh Trust's publication. Indeed, I have arranged to meet the trust to interrogate further its conclusions. Furthermore, I have met officials in the Department to assess how to optimise community benefit and opportunities from renewable applications. However, we may have a different context and environment from that which exists in, for example, Scotland, where there is a very advanced model of community benefit and where, as part of the planning process, opportunities, moneys or resources are allocated to local communities as a consequence or in parallel with a renewable application. The character of the rural community in Scotland is not the same as that in Northern Ireland. The rural community there tends to be concentrated in hamlets and villages, whereas the rural community here is much more dispersed, as Members know. Consequently, it may be the case at the moment that individual landowners, householders and farmers are entering into local arrangements for adjacent planning applications for renewables. I want to see greater cohesion around the principle of community benefit, and the Department and I are looking at that. However, we may end up with a different conclusion from that which prevails in Scotland.

Social Development

Rural Dwellings: Armagh

1. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his strategy to deal with unfitness of dwellings in rural areas, especially in the Armagh area.
(AQO 1706/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Information on fitness levels of housing across Northern Ireland is taken from the house condition survey, and the latest information available is from the 2011 survey. Significant progress certainly has been made in tackling rural unfitness in recent years.

In 1991, the figure stood at 17.2%, or 29,000 properties. Rural unfitness now stands at just 4.1%, or 9,500 properties.

3.00 pm

The provision of new homes in rural areas is also a good way to increase not just the quality but the quantity of rural homes. In 2010-11 we started 302 new homes across the countryside, which was the largest number for over 10 years. We are clearly making good progress, although I accept that we still have more to do. In Armagh and Bann more specifically the results are even more encouraging, with the latest unfitness levels assessed at 2.3%, or 1,800 properties, again representing a significant reduction from an unfitness level of 11.6% for Armagh alone back in 1991.

Most unfit homes are in private ownership, with the worst unfitness occurring in more isolated rural areas. In some circumstances, grants are available to help to tackle poor housing in the private sector, with renovation and replacement grants specifically targeted at tackling unfitness. However, the approval of discretionary grant aid is dependent on the level of funding available to the Housing Executive.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's answer. He said that progress has been made, but will he review the strategy to address the issue of private housing that he mentioned? How much finance is available to address the issues that exist and the concerns of rural people?

Mr McCausland: There are two points there. First, in considering an approach, the Member will be aware that we are working on a housing strategy that will be multidimensional and multifaceted. It will cover all the different areas in housing, and the issue of rurality will, undoubtedly, feature in some way or another. As regards funding, the Member will also be aware of the amount of money that is in our budget. It can be spent on urban, rural, suburban or any other type of housing. There is no specific single amount set aside for rural housing; it is for the provision of social housing.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat a Cheann Comhairle agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra. What is the Minister's overall assessment of the demand for social housing in rural areas in Northern Ireland?

Mr McCausland: The Member will be aware that a social housing development plan is brought forward each year, which is based on figures for demand in the different areas. On the basis of that demand, amounts for housing are allocated for the different areas. That is indeed, therefore, a reflection of the need that exists in the different areas. It varies very much from place to place. I encourage the Member to study the figures carefully when we publish them in the near future. If he has further questions at that point, I will be happy to take them.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. What is he doing to raise standards in the private rented sector?

Mr McCausland: The private rented sector strategy, Building Sound Foundations, which was launched in March 2010, sets out a number of measures aimed at ensuring the provision of good-quality, well-managed accommodation

in the private rented sector, supported by an appropriate regulatory framework. Measures already introduced include landlord awareness seminars, practical advice and guidance, and increased security of tenure with the extension of the notice-to-quit period.

Later this year, regulations will be laid before the Assembly for the introduction of landlord registration and tenancy deposit schemes. The introduction of mandatory landlord registration will provide councils with information that will allow them to work with private landlords to ensure compliance with the law, to raise standards and, where necessary, take enforcement action. The introduction of tenancy deposit schemes will safeguard tenancy deposits paid by tenants and will also allow any disputes between landlords and tenants to be dealt with speedily and independently.

As well as these measures and the planned improvements, it should be noted that, under the Private Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, the landlord of a property built before 1 January 1945, where a private tenancy commenced after 1 April 2007, must have a fitness inspection conducted by a district council unless the property is exempt. In the absence of a certificate of fitness, the property is subject to rent control.

Mr Copeland: Will the Minister detail the method by which any property is adjudicated as being unfit and describe how, if at all, that process may have changed since the introduction of devolution?

Mr McCausland: There are a number of standards for housing in Northern Ireland. Social housing operates to the decent homes plus standard. The Member will be aware that, if complaints are made, local authorities assess the houses to determine whether they are fit for habitation, and they do so regularly. There are certain basic standards, and whether those should be enhanced at some point is a matter that could be considered. As regards the way forward, all such things will be kept in mind in the strategy. One key point is that we need to ensure that we have a robust and very good private rented sector so that we are not entirely dependent on social housing. People should not see housing in the private rented sector as in some way second rate. It should be an area in which people are entitled to a decent standard, and we have that very much in mind.

Business Improvement Districts

2. **Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the introduction of legislation to facilitate business improvement districts (BIDs). (AQO 1707/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A draft Business Improvement Districts Bill has been received from the Office of the Legislative Counsel, and my officials are considering the finer detail of its provisions to ensure that it fully meets requirements. It is my intention, subject to Executive agreement, to introduce the Bill to the Assembly before the summer recess. Subject to the speed of the Bill's passage through the Assembly, I hope that it will receive Royal Assent by the end of the year. That will be followed next year by the necessary subordinate legislation and guidance from the Department, with the aim of having the statutory framework in place by the summer of 2013.

Mr S Anderson: I thank the Minister for his answer. Must businesses in towns such as Banbridge, Lurgan and Portadown in my constituency and, indeed, other towns wait for legislation before developing their plans?

Mr McCausland: No, a lot of work can be done in advance. A lot of work is needed to develop a BID proposal, and that is not dependent on the legislation being in place. There is evidence from other jurisdictions that it takes between 18 months and two years to develop BID proposals. It involves, for example, canvassing businesses in the proposed BID area, working up a proposal for the services required and putting together a business case. I understand that some areas, for example, Ballymena and Belfast, have already started work on developing their BID proposals. I encourage other areas that are contemplating a BID proposal to start work on that as soon as possible.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I know that, in the past, the Minister has answered questions in the House on business improvement districts. Has he had any discussions with the private sector on how, if the resources existed, it would tap into them? What is the private sector's opinion on business improvement districts?

Mr McCausland: I have had a number of meetings with businesspeople in different areas of the Province. Belfast and Ballymena are quite advanced in that regard, and, in both cases, traders are very supportive. Keen for business improvement districts to happen as quickly as possible, they are making preparations. So far, any response that we have received has been very positive.

Mr Beggs: Business improvement districts involve raising rates to secure additional revenue for improving services. Will the Minister advise how struggling areas in my constituency, such as Carrickfergus town centre or Larne town centre, will benefit from such a scheme if they already struggle with the current level of rates?

Mr McCausland: The first thing to do is to point out the benefits of business improvement districts. A business improvement district offers a sustainable source of finance to fund an agreed package of additional services or projects required by the local business community. In simple terms, it is a pooling of resources to deliver an improvement plan that is business-led. That is fundamental to the success of any BID scheme, and it simply will not work if government is seen to be imposing it.

It is entirely under the control and direction of the local businesses, and it is for them to decide what additional things they want done, and their nature, extent and character. I am sure that, in making that decision, they will take account of the resources that are available from the traders in that area.

Mr Byrne: Is it the Minister's intention or hope that the business improvement scheme could enable towns such as Strabane to regenerate themselves? Will any extra resources be earmarked by his Department for that in the future?

Mr McCausland: I am sure that the businesses and traders in Strabane could benefit from a business improvement district every bit as much as traders in Belfast, Ballymena, Banbridge or anywhere else in the Province. BIDs are generally recognised as very positive.

The Member asked about funding for the business improvement district process. No, we do not anticipate that happening. Additional funding will not come from central government, but we will continue to do what we have been doing. I am sure that the Member is well aware of the investment in town centre master plans and public realm schemes, a number of which were carried forward under my predecessors. We are continuing the good work that was done in that regard. It is one of the areas about which I can definitely say that.

Housing: Foyle

3. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the adequacy of shared and smaller-type housing in the Foyle area to deal with the consequences of welfare reform. (AQO 1708/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am hampered in answering the question because the Housing Executive does not hold the information in the format requested, not only for Foyle but for all of Northern Ireland. It has informed me that, in the surrounding city council area, it has 398 houses in multiple occupation. It does not hold information on single-room apartments.

The Housing Executive has identified 779 existing housing benefit cases in its three district offices covering the city council area that would be affected by the extension of the shared room rate to 25- to 34-year-olds. The precise effect of welfare reform on tenants more widely is not known, and my Department, along with the Housing Executive, is taking steps to identify what services and support need to be put in place to assist those who are impacted on by the changes. Those steps will include assessing the adequacy of shared and smaller homes, and the housing strategy will address that question further.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat a Cheann Comhairle agus go raibh maith agat don Aire as an fhreagra a thug sé. I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he agree that little or no preparation has been done in the Foyle constituency on the provision of shared housing? What exactly will his Department do to prevent increased homelessness in the area?

Mr McCausland: In my initial answer, I said that 398 properties are in multiple occupation. What else can be done? We have spoken to the Housing Executive and the housing associations about the type of accommodation that they include in their social housing development plan so that the plan takes account of welfare reform rather than have them simply bring forward a plan based on the situation as it was before. I am awaiting the final outcome of that plan in the very near future.

A number of measures can be undertaken to help people in the interim period, one of which is the discretionary fund, and we are working in that regard. There is already some level of provision, but I have to emphasise the fact that detailed information on a number of issues is not available at present. When we were in London recently talking to officials in the Department for Work and Pensions, I found that, when asking about the exact implications of welfare reform on housing not here but in Great Britain, there was a higher level of uncertainty.

3.15 pm

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for his responses. When he was responding to the initial question, he referred to the shared-room rate. Perhaps the Minister could allude again — I know that he has done so in the past — to the origins of the welfare reform proposals that spawned, among other things, the shared-room rate; that is, the parity issues. He could perhaps outline what some others could do to oppose that by going into the House that they were elected to in order to stop it.

Mr McCausland: The Member makes two interesting points. The first is that, of course, all of that issue around housing benefit reform and the shared-accommodation rate for those aged 35 and under was introduced as part of the 2010 spending review changes and came into effect in January this year. It is clearly intended, and it was expected, that the change would help to contain housing benefit costs, which have risen exponentially over the past five years. The number of cases has risen by some 20%, with expenditure on housing benefit having increased by 40%. That is the background to all of that. It is a matter of parity, and, therefore, it is something that we are required to follow. Secondly, if people wish to oppose it, as the Member has pointed out, the best place to have done so was when it was going through the House of Commons at Westminster.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his earlier answers. In one of the answers given to the original questioner, the Minister said that there is, to date, a lack of detailed information on the impact of welfare reform, particularly on housing. Is the Minister able to let the House know when that information might become available?

Mr McCausland: As I pointed out already, we met Iain Duncan Smith and others in the Department for Work and Pensions just a few weeks ago. They are obviously in advance of us, because they already have their legislation through and completed. We are at the preparatory stage at the moment, because we could not start until the legislation had gone through Westminster. There was some uncertainty there as to the exact implications. I was simply highlighting the fact that it is, therefore, not unexpected that there are some uncertainties as yet here in Northern Ireland.

We know that there will be an impact, but it would be impossible to predict the precise detail of it at this stage. However, we are now working on further information that has become available. The difficulty is that the focus up to now has been largely on working out implications in Great Britain. Now there is more focus on doing that work in Northern Ireland, and our officials are working on modelling schemes to try to get to the bottom of it. Even thus far, the impact that you might predict and the actual outcome at the end may not be exactly the same. At the early stage, we thought that there would be a lot more applications for the discretionary payments than there actually were. There were a lot fewer than we anticipated.

Housing Strategy

4. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he plans to develop a housing strategy. (AQO 1709/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The issues that I face in housing are stark, and I am particularly concerned about three things. First, the empty homes blighting many of our communities; secondly, the challenges of welfare reform in relation to housing; and, thirdly, the drive and focus of social housing direction and spending. I, therefore, intend to publish a housing strategy for wider consultation later this spring. Key players within the housing sector have already contributed to the draft strategy that my officials are preparing.

The strategy will contain five themes, including how we ensure access to decent, affordable, sustainable homes across all tenures; how we meet housing needs and support the most vulnerable people in our communities; and how we drive regeneration and sustain communities through housing. We are also looking at how we develop housing services and initiatives to support people in these challenging times, taking account of the impacts of, for example, welfare reform; and, finally, how we get the housing structures right.

It will be an ambitious strategy, recognising that homes are at the heart of people's lives and that good housing contributes significantly to creating a safe, healthy and prosperous society. In a time of constrained public finances, difficult decisions will have to be made, but we will have opportunities to make better use of what we have and to find better ways to do things differently.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Minister for his reply. I am very glad to hear him confirm his intention to publish a housing strategy for Northern Ireland, and particularly the emphasis on affordable housing. I am sure that the Minister is aware of several initiatives that were launched recently in Great Britain on affordable housing. Will he confirm whether his Department has any plans to roll out similar measures in Northern Ireland?

Mr McCausland: I understand that the housing Minister at Westminster, Grant Shapps, recently brought forward two initiatives: a new-buy guarantee scheme, and the Get Britain Building fund.

The new-buy guarantee scheme will potentially require smaller deposits from first-time buyers and may help them take that first step onto the housing ladder. We already have a similar affordable housing scheme here, which we fund through co-ownership. Last week, during a visit to a successful co-ownership applicant in Ballyclare, I was pleased to learn that four banks are now prepared to offer 100% mortgages under the co-ownership scheme. That is very welcome news. I hope that it will encourage more people to take that first step onto the housing ladder at a time when house prices are so affordable compared to a few years ago.

I understand that the Get Britain Building initiative provides funding on a repayable loan basis to potentially help developers to build out what had been stalled developments. I am very interested in that sort of initiative, and I have started talks with the Finance Minister to see whether some form of Northern Ireland pilot can be established. I will be happy to update the Member on those discussions once they are concluded.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister assure the House that the housing strategy that he intends to bring forward will include and

link with all aspects of housing, from housing associations, through social housing, to the private rented sector? Will it also take on board the fact that there are current reviews into the structure of the Housing Executive and housing associations? In other words, will the housing strategy be comprehensive and interlinked?

Mr McCausland: I assure the Member that it will indeed be comprehensive and coherent. All of the different elements need to fit together and complement each other, and the strategy will fit in closely with the work on the Housing Executive that is being taken forward by the Department. All of those aspects will be complementary.

Mr Nesbitt: In his original answer to Mr Hamilton, the Minister talked of his concern about empty housing. Does he intend to bring in powers to take possession of empty homes, similar to powers that I understand exist elsewhere in the United Kingdom?

Mr McCausland: If the Member looks down the list of questions for today, he will see that there is one specifically on the issue of empty homes. At the moment, we are operating two pilot schemes to see what, in the Northern Ireland context, is the best way of addressing that issue. There are areas in which we clearly see a concentration of empty homes. We need to know the nature of that. What is the breakdown of ownership of those homes? Why are they lying empty and what can be done to get them back into use as quickly as possible? Once we have completed the pilot schemes — the results should be known within weeks — we will be in a position to take this to the next stage.

Mr Lyttle: Will any housing strategy seek to establish the nature and extent of housing segregation in Northern Ireland and establish an action plan to facilitate the overriding preference to live in mixed neighbourhoods?

Mr McCausland: The figures regarding segregation are well known and the facts about it well rehearsed. There is a very high level of segregation, particularly in social housing. There is a very high level of segregation even in private housing. So it is not simply a matter of looking at how you deal with that in social housing; it is a matter that spreads right across the board. That reflects the fact that not only housing but many other things are segregated in Northern Ireland. All of these things are elements that make up a person's life. Where you live will be influenced by whether there is a school available for your children to go to and whether social and recreational facilities are available and accessible to you. Those are things that will encourage you to move into an area. It is much more complex than it may at first appear. Certainly, we are open to the issues, and I am sure that any proposals that people have will come forward during the consultation.

Empty Homes Pilot Exercise

Mr Douglas: I will ask question 5, Mr Speaker, although the Minister may have answered it to some degree.

5. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the empty homes pilot exercise which will target homes in east Belfast. (AQO 1710/11-15)

7. **Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline how the two areas in north and east Belfast were chosen to take part in the empty homes pilot exercise. (AQO 1712/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I assure the Member that the Member for Strangford has not stolen his thunder. With the Speaker's permission, I will answer questions 5 and 7 together, as both relate to the empty homes pilot exercise in north and east Belfast. The empty homes pilot exercise, which I have asked the Housing Executive to carry out, is under way in the Fortwilliam and Upper Newtownards Road areas of Belfast. It will investigate the possibilities for and test the merits and effectiveness of various interventions to bring empty homes back into use.

The two areas were selected because of their location, demographic, level of housing demand, the number of empty homes and the variance in condition of the empty properties. That will allow the full range of interventions to be assessed. In both areas, there is potential to make a measurable positive impact on empty properties, particularly in the private sector. There is also the potential to harness local community involvement and support, including through partnership with other statutory and community groups. The various interventions include publicity, advice and signposting; practical help, such as grants and loans; and the threat and use of enforcement action. Work will be carried out by the Housing Executive. Relevant interventions will be identified by the end of this month, and necessary actions will be planned.

The results from the pilots will inform a new empty homes action plan for Northern Ireland. I am determined to maximise all opportunities to meet social, and other, housing need and to reduce blight. That will be an integral part of the forthcoming housing strategy.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his very comprehensive answer. Will he inform the House of what happened to the first empty homes strategy?

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for the question. It is worth reminding ourselves that an empty homes action plan has been ongoing since 2007. Although there has been limited progress on the management of Housing Executive and housing association empty homes, the same cannot be said for private sector empty properties. Progress in that sector has been very disappointing, not least because the Housing Executive has limited knowledge of or control over those who own the homes. The Housing Executive has done a lot of work since 2007 to identify and survey empty houses and to make contact with owners. However, the results of such action have so far been disappointing.

Since coming into office, I have been determined to maximise all opportunities to meet housing need, reduce blight and tackle antisocial behaviour. I tasked officials to work with their colleagues in the Housing Executive to learn from approaches that are used in other jurisdictions and to test those in two pilot areas. As I said, I expect the results of phase 1, which will inform a revised action plan, by the end of this month.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. I know that housing provision, with which he is grappling, is a very sensitive issue. Does he acknowledge that there is some concern

about the selection of those two locations, given the long-established patterns of social stress and need elsewhere in Belfast?

Mr McCausland: The choice of the areas was determined largely by having, in a small concentrated area, the sort of mixture of issues for which we needed to get a very informative pilot scheme. As I said, those areas were chosen because of their location, the demographic, the level of housing demand, the number of empty homes they have and the variance in conditions of the empty properties. In the Fortwilliam pilot area, which is bounded by Fortwilliam Parade, Somerton Road and Skegoneill Avenue, there are 22 empty houses in a very small space. Three of those houses have transferred to Trinity Housing, ownership details are known for seven, the details are still unknown for a further seven properties, and the remaining five are up for sale or rent. So, it is about getting that mixture of properties that can be transferred to housing associations quickly; properties that we know the ownership of and that, therefore, you can work on; those of which you do not know the ownership, meaning that there is work to be done on how you find that out as quickly as possible; and finding out what the turnover in sale or rental is in that area. The figures for the Upper Newtownards Road pilot are not dissimilar. So, the decision was based on the nature of the vacancies rather than on the overall housing need in an area.

3.30 pm

Private Members' Business

Disappeared Victims

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly acknowledges the progress that has been made in locating the remains of disappeared victims; recognises the work of the families, the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains, WAVE Trauma Centre and others in achieving that progress; notes that some families are still waiting; and calls on anyone with information which might help in the location of the remains to share that information with the commission, through whatever means they choose, without further delay. — [Mr D Bradley]

Which amendment was:

Leave out all after "waiting;" and insert

"and calls on the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains to make clear what more can be done, and by whom, to bring the comfort of recovery to the remaining families." — [Mr Nesbitt]

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

With regard to this issue, many of us rise to speak with a lot of sadness in our hearts as we discuss members of families whose remains cannot be obtained for a proper Christian burial. Those of us who have followed coffins of loved ones and seen their burials have seen the heartfelt sympathy and outpourings that take place as people do what is normal in the course of life. Indeed, in what we refer to as the majority of our religion, Christian patterns, the same as in other cultures, the burial and sanctity of human remains. It is in that context that I speak in this debate.

The Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains was established in April 1999. Its objective was to locate the remains of those abducted, murdered and secretly buried by paramilitary groups during the previous 30 years. It is worthwhile stating, though some indeed may have the temerity to suggest otherwise, that the abductions and murders were the primary human rights violations in those cases. Denying the families the ability to give their loved ones a Christian burial added insult to the original injury.

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

Others have shared time with families and listened to their emotions. I can reflect on Mrs McVeigh of Donaghmore and members of her family, who I have been with on a number of occasions. Her young son, Columba, was taken from her and abducted. Other members of the House will have shared the same emotions with her and been with her as that poor woman pined her way to her grave, thinking of her young son taken from her by the Provisional IRA.

Thirteen years later, nine bodies have been recovered. Those nine families have at least been able to bury the remains of their loved ones, but there are now 16 names on the commission's list of victims. When the commission was created, there were fewer names on the list, but

the Provisional IRA has since remembered some more people whom it abducted, murdered and secretly buried. The attentions of the press aided the recovery of those particular memories. The Provisionals have now admitted responsibility for 13 of the 16 victims, but they are also prime candidates for responsibility in the unattributed cases.

The commission was created to allow information to be given confidentially which, it was hoped, would lead to the recovery of those victims' remains. It has been partially successful. With the help of the efforts of the families of victims and organisations such as the WAVE Trauma Centre, the locations of nine bodies have been identified and those remains recovered. However, the confidentiality which the commission guarantees also protects those who come forward to help locate the remains of victims. The information, and any evidence which is obtained as a result, can be inadmissible in criminal proceedings. Forensic investigation of that evidence is restricted, and the information can be used only to facilitate the location of the remains to which that information relates. Given those protections, granted by both the Irish and British Governments, it is perhaps surprising that more information has not been brought forward and that more victims' remains have not been located by now, giving release to their families and the dignity of a Christian burial to those remains.

However, the commission remains committed to its objective. The families of the victims whose remains are still to be located cannot grieve properly until that is achieved.

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

Mr McGlone: Anyone who has information that could lead to the location of those remains and does not bring it forward is responsible for those families' continued pain and suffering.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr McGlone: Mar Éireannach, tacaím leis an mholadh.

Mrs D Kelly: I will begin by echoing the plea made by Sir Kenneth Bloomfield in February of this year, when the commission made a presentation to the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, when he said:

"I would voice a fervent appeal, on behalf of those whose loved ones have disappeared without trace, that those who can offer information about their fate and where bodies may lie should now do so. I realise that many of those in possession of such information may fear the risk of inculpating themselves, but I am sure cast-iron arrangements could be made, if necessary through trusted intermediaries, to report such information anonymously and in confidence. Many of the relatives have faced up long ago to the probability that a loved one has been killed, but it is one of the most fundamental of human instincts to seek certain knowledge of the fate of a husband or wife, son or daughter, brother or sister. Common humanity cries out for this modest act of mercy."

Those words were, I think, spoken with sincerity and were reflected by the contributions of Members this afternoon. It is remarkable, given that there were so many commemorations over the weekend and today for the victims of a disaster some 100 years ago and memorials recently opened, that those people have yet to have the most basic of memorials

granted to them; that is, a gravestone or headstone that will mark the spot where their loved one is buried.

I want to pick up on Mr Glone's plea about information and those comments of Mr Bloomfield, because the commission went on to talk about those who were responsible or who may have information. Some concern is voiced in some quarters about the work of Boston College, its interviews and the requirement that is now being made upon Boston College for those tapes to be given to the PSNI. The commission made a commitment at that meeting, which states:

"As our commissioners have stated, our activity is not currently time-limited. Once we have finished the active phase, the structure will remain in place ... The hot topic at the moment is the future security of Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains, ICLVR, records. I have no doubt that this has been brought about by the recent activity in connection with the Boston College archives. We want to make it crystal clear that the commission's records will always be retained by the commission and will never be passed on to any other body or organisation. They are safe and secure for the future."

As Mr McGlone said, and, indeed, my colleague Mr Bradley said in his opening remarks —

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Member for giving way. Earlier in the debate, the Member will have heard contributions from Sinn Féin Members, when Ms Ruane said that there should be no hierarchy of victims. We all very much agree with that, given the contribution of Members in the debate earlier about Titanic. However, she and Mr McLaughlin also said that anyone with any information should pass it to the authorities. Indeed, Mr McLaughlin said that anyone who owned land and had any information should pass it to the authorities.

Is it not regrettable that that encouragement did not come from Sinn Féin all those years ago? Indeed, tragically, members of the general public who did have that information could not have passed it on because we know the inevitable consequences.

Mrs D Kelly: I was going to remark, Mr Humphrey, that, unfortunately, not only did families lose their loved one but their character was subsequently assassinated in the immediate aftermath. That still lingers. There was also a wider fear in the community for anyone seen to be associated with the families of some of the victims — a fear of retaliation. That remark and comment of yours is well made.

Unfortunately, I think Ms Ruane said earlier that there should be no political point-scoring and no ambiguity. I am not having any ambiguity on this matter. The crime of the disappeared stands above all the brutality of 35 years of the conflict whereby people have been denied their most basic rights. It is regarded in international law as a war crime. It is regrettable that in our peace process, in order to move society forward, we have had to not quite turn a blind eye but make some allowances whereby some people who are responsible will not be brought to justice. One of the things that the families are quite clear on is that that is not their intent. Mr Bradley was quite clear in his contribution that today's debate is about urging those people, particularly those who might have a conscience and might wish to make some level of peace with their maker before they face their own death, to assist the commission and the families in

locating the remains of any of the remaining seven people who have disappeared.

There are those who talk about human rights, and it is quite noticeable that some of those people are from organisations that were the greatest abusers of human rights in the North over the past 40 years. I would have been very interested to hear a conversation that some might have had with Councillor Madame Liu Yandong, because she might have had a few questions to ask some of the people who were making remarks to her.

Nonetheless, today's debate is about trying to find closure for the families who have yet to have their loved ones' remains returned to them.

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

Mrs D Kelly: Therefore, I hope that all of those who have information are assured that they will not face a court and that they will assist the commission.

Mr Allister: There is nothing about terrorism and the implementation of terrorism that is anything but cruel. Yet, within all of that, the taking of someone, the cold-blooded murder of them and then, instead of leaving them by the side of the road, as was done in so many cases, secretly burying them, going through a process of denying involvement and giving no assistance to the search over decades for their bodies has to be one of the most cruel acts associated with the implementation of terrorism.

It is of those cruel acts that we speak today. Each one of them infamous, but perhaps the one with the greatest infamy was the murder of Jean McConville, which epitomises much of all of that. In this debate, we had an opportunity for some Members to put right wrongs of the past and do the decent thing in respect of past utterances.

We had Mr McLaughlin's attention drawn to the fact that in 2005 he shamefully said — shamefully said — that the murder of Jean McConville was not a criminal act. If it was not a criminal act, then it was, in Mr McLaughlin's view, a lawful act. It was one or the other. Patently, today, in his view, because of the refuge he has taken in obfuscating and avoiding the issue, it is still a lawful act. That speaks much, and in far greater volumes than I could ever speak, about the heart of those who sit on the Benches of Sinn Féin. To this day, they patently believe that the callous, cruel and vicious murder of Jean McConville was a justified and lawful act. Why would they think that? Because of who perpetrated it. Because in their twisted and perverse minds, the acts of the IRA were lawful acts, justified acts, acts of war or whatever perverse way in which they seek to describe them. That is the shame of this debate: there are Members in this House who, to this very day, hold to that perverse Provo mantra that what the IRA did was right and justified, because, in their eyes, it was the lawful authority. There was nothing right, there was nothing justified and there was nothing justifiable about the vile, vicious and cruel murder of Jean McConville. Maybe, of course, it is because that murder touches right at the heart of Sinn Féin, if we are to believe what appears to be in the Boston library, namely the utterances from the grave of Mr Hughes and Dolours — the lady whose name I have forgotten.

Mrs D Kelly: Kelly.

Mr Allister: Dolores Kelly — Dolours Price; sorry. She tells it as it is, it seems, and says that she drove Jean McConville to the place where she was murdered as a member of a unit presided over by the current president of Sinn Féin.

3.45 pm

Lord Morrow: Does the Member accept that it is worth noting that, when Jean McConville was murdered, 12 IRA people, both males and females, were dispatched and one single bullet was put through the back of her head?

Mr Allister: Yes indeed, and dispatched by whom? One of the questions that hangs over the House is this: who controlled the unit that decided that Jean McConville would die? Is that part of the reason why Mr McLaughlin cannot bring himself to say that it was a wrong act, an unlawful act, a criminal act, a terrorist act, a vile and cruel act, and why, to this day, he hugs the IRA mantra that it was not a criminal act but a lawful act? That tells me all that I need to know of the party that sits on those Benches, and it is why, in my mind, they are still unfit for government.

Mr Elliott: I thank Members for their contributions today. In particular, I pay tribute to Mr Bradley and his SDLP colleagues for bringing forward the motion. I am pleased that they will accept our amendment, which we believe is helpful. As Mr Nesbitt outlined, it was tabled to move this on to another stage. I also applaud and pay tribute to the families of the disappeared. I sometimes struggle with the term “the disappeared”. I often wonder whether there is not a better term that we could use. I am sure that others in the Chamber have thought about that too, but clearly we have not come up with anything. Those families have endured something in this lifetime that I do not think any of the rest of us have had to endure.

As I have said on many occasions, one of the most difficult jobs that I have had to do is to go to the home of a family of someone who has been murdered by terrorists and see the difficulty that they face in the following years. However, as Mr Bradley outlined, many of those people have not even had the opportunity to hold their wake and remember their loved ones. As my party colleague Mr Nesbitt pointed out, they have not even had the opportunity to go and stand at the graveside of their family member at Christmas, or at any other time.

Some words that have been said here today need to be reiterated: human decency, respect and compassion. I must say that that is far from the minds of the people who carried out these dastardly acts and those who still openly and bluntly refuse to give the information that may allow the remains of the people who were so brutally taken and murdered to be returned to their families. However, that would go against the grain of justification. Mr Allister outlined some of Mr McLaughlin's comments in years gone by. Down the years, many have attempted to justify not only the taking and murdering of these people, but the entire murderous campaign that was carried out over three or four decades. I do not believe that there can be any justification. It is far from the human decency, respect and compassion that my colleagues, particularly Ross Hussey, outlined. Where, in a country that is supposed to hold dear the Christian values that we all, or many of us, are supposed to have, are those Christian values today? Where are the Christian values of those in the IRA who took people from

their loved ones and murdered them? Is it not time to come forward and give information? Is it not time for the independent commission to speak, because I believe that it knows the identities of some who can help?

That is why we tabled the amendment. I know that Mr Lunn may not be happy with it, but we have discussed and raised those issues before. It is time to move to another level. If we are truly moving into a new phase of Northern Ireland and into a new political realm, it is time for the likes of Mr McLaughlin, who has obviously been put out front here today, to do the shoving for Sinn Féin, and, indeed, maybe the IRA. Is it not time for those people to come forward, tell the truth and give these people's remains back to their families?

Mr A Maginness: I thank everybody who contributed to the debate, and, in particular, I thank Mr Bradley for bringing the motion to the House. Although we have some reservations about the Ulster Unionists' amendment, we are prepared to accept it and will not divide the House on it. By dividing the House, one would take away from the substance of the motion.

The motion is a timely reminder to those who have information about the disappeared to divulge it to the commission, or to do so through an intermediary to the commission, because the pain that people suffered continues. It does not simply end, and, of course, the recovery of remains for other families of the disappeared adds to that pain because it creates a greater expectation that remains can be found, and that has to be borne in mind.

Therefore, the earnest plea from all Members of the House is for people to search their recollections and consciences and to provide information, no matter how little it might be, to give closure to those families who have suffered so much.

I cannot understand why the IRA did this. Why did they take away bodies? There is enough indignity and suffering in ordinary people finding their loved one shot and left as some sort of refuse on the side of a road. The taking away, concealing and burying of that body is an act of savagery and a gross violation of anybody's rights.

We heard condemnation from the Sinn Féin Benches. They said that it was terrible, but we heard no explanation of why it happened in the first place. We heard no condemnation of the murders, only of the fact that the remains were disappeared — and that was some violation of people's rights. However, there was no condemnation whatsoever of the act of murder.

Mr Humphrey: Those of us who have lost loved ones through natural causes know of the absolute loss that that brings to a family as they try to deal with it. However, consider the position of a family who have experienced the absolute loss of someone being murdered in a most heinous crime and not being able to deal with that, and then not being able to deal with it for decades afterwards and not knowing where, or if, that person is buried. That is an absolutely awful travesty. We hear others talking about the hierarchy of victimhood, but these people are placed at the top of victimhood in Northern Ireland, because they have not had the opportunity to gain closure and to provide a Christian burial for their loved one. That has to be an absolute indictment of those involved.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I agree with him.

Mr McLaughlin said that this was the policy or practice of the IRA and that that policy or practice was wrong. He left it at that; he did not give any further explanation. It was a policy. He said that it was a bad policy, but that they had abandoned it and, therefore, had, in some respects, set things right. That cannot be right.

In his intervention during Mr McLaughlin's contribution, Mr Jim Allister pointed out, again, the 2005 justification in relation to Jean McConville. That act cannot be justified. It was a criminal act by anybody's standards. It has been confirmed by Nuala O'Loan that Jean McConville was not an informant, a British spy or whatever you want to call it, but even if she was, how would that justify somebody putting a gun to the back of her head? She was the mother of young children. As a consequence of that act, that family was destroyed — individually and collectively. Shame on those who did it. The fact that up to a dozen people were involved in that act of brutality brings great shame on that community and organisation.

For a Member of the House to continue to insist that it was not a criminal act is reprehensible. I think that the Member should reflect very carefully indeed on what he has restated in the House today, and his party should reflect very carefully on that. If he does not change his position, one hopes that the party, at least, will change its position. We are in an entirely new dispensation, and it is not right for those old habits and those old and bad values to continue. They are anti-human. They are anti everything we believe is civilised and just, and they should be abandoned. I call on Sinn Féin and Mr McLaughlin to reflect very carefully indeed.

It has been suggested in some way that the commission will wind up its activities in the near future. First, I do not believe that that will happen. It may slow down or retrench its activities, but I do not believe that its activities will end. It has a statutory mandate, here in Northern Ireland and in the Republic, to continue its work. The Assembly should make it very plain to the commission that that work should continue until the last possible bit of information is obtained in order to retrieve those who have been disappeared in such a callous fashion. As Mr Lunn said, this is a legacy of the past, and we all have to deal with it. By tabling the motion today, we reaffirm the fact that that legacy of the past must be completed.

4.00 pm

I believe that it was Mr Lunn who mentioned the case of Lisa Dorrian. It is important that we remind the public about Lisa Dorrian and express our sympathy and support for that family, who have also been cruelly treated.

There has been some unanimity in the House about the continuance of the commission's work. I believe that there is consensus about the noble objective of obtaining the remains of those who are still disappeared. I hope that such consensus continues and that the resources and the will continue until there is a successful conclusion to the recovery of the disappeared.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly acknowledges the progress that has been made in locating the remains of disappeared victims; recognises the work of the families, the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains, WAVE Trauma Centre and others in achieving that progress; notes that some families are still waiting; and calls on the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains to make clear what more can be done, and by whom, to bring the comfort of recovery to the remaining families.

Adjourned at 4.02 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 17 April 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Private Members' Business

Lough Neagh

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

Mr Molloy: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to convene a working group to explore and pursue actively the potential for a cross-departmental approach to bring Lough Neagh back into public ownership.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. This morning's motion is very important as far as my constituency is concerned, because Lough Neagh surrounds it so much. I thank the Business Committee for allowing the opportunity for the debate to proceed, and I thank the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for attending to reply.

Although the motion calls for the two Departments with direct responsibility for Lough Neagh to explore the possibility of bringing it back into public ownership, at the end of the day, if the motion is successful, it will no doubt bring together the various Departments that have responsibilities or interests in the Lough Neagh basin so that they can get involved and be part of any working group that would come into operation. There is an important cross-departmental role, as well as a role for the Executive, in exploring this in the future.

The motion calls for the lough to be brought into public ownership to realise the full potential of Lough Neagh for citizens and for the benefit of the economy. Lough Neagh is the most dominant feature on the map of Ireland. On every map, you clearly see that blue spot, so it is a very important location. It is also an important basin that supplies 40% of the water that we drink in this part of the world.

The lough plays a significant role in the local economy, particularly through commercial eel fishing, sand extraction and the leisure facilities around it, but it could have greater tourist potential in the future. If properly utilised and developed, it could create substantial investment and much-needed employment opportunities. At present, 300 fishermen travel to Lough Melvin in Fermanagh for its fishing competition once a year. Think how that could be expanded and how fishing and various competitions and events could

happen across the North. Lough Neagh could become the key development there and start to expand fishing and other aspects of tourism.

When David Burnside was MP for the area, he raised in Westminster the question of exploiting the full potential of Lough Neagh for tourism, sports, culture and various things. I would like us to take the same line and develop ideas to explore that potential. I do not think that anybody should have any concerns about this. We are talking about a working group that will explore all the issues that come up. That group will have to make a decision and come up with a business programme to see whether this idea is viable.

We are in the probably unique situation of there being no contest, because the 10th Earl of Shaftesbury wanted to sell and approached the Government about buying the lough. He was prepared to sell the rights and the lough to the Government but was turned down, despite the water company's recommendation that the Government should buy to protect the future water situation here in the North. We have the potential here, because things have changed. The tenth and eleventh earls died, and the twelfth now owns Lough Neagh. Whether he is still approachable and the situation negotiable, I am not certain, and that would have to be explored.

The development of any activity is at present curtailed because of the procedures that have to be gone through at Lough Neagh and with the Shaftesbury estate. Bringing the lough back into public ownership would open up the potential to do whatever would be required across it. The bed, soil and surrounding shore of Lough Neagh are privately owned by the Shaftesbury estate, including the shooting and mineral rights and the extraction of sand and gravel, as well as the rights to charge for the use of Lough Neagh.

It is a pity that Jim Shannon is not here today. In our last debate on this, Jim Shannon promoted the idea that the lough could be a great venue for shooting and bringing in tourists from across the world. I am sure that Jim would want me to explain again the potential of Lough Neagh for him and others across the world.

The situation is that you cannot drive a post down into Lough Neagh without paying a fee. If a council wants to develop a jetty or anything else on or around Lough Neagh, it has to pay fees to the Shaftesbury estate. If, for instance, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development or any other person or developer wanted to extract sand from the lough, again, they would have to pay for that.

On a number of occasions, rivers flowing into Lough Neagh have been backing up. This happens because a ramp has been created by the waters of the lough blowing in from one side. The water from the river creates a ramp at the end, which curtails the water flow, despite the fact that the Rivers Agency may already have cleaned out the river. It still creates a barrier as it approaches the lough. Fishermen have found that they cannot get out of a lot of the quays because the build-up of silt and sand has created a barrier. Any sand that is extracted at the moment has to be considered as waste product. However, if Lough Neagh were under public ownership, the sand could be sold and that money reinvested in the lough. So, there is potential to develop that resource and, consequently, the economy. It would not be a drain on any Department's resources; rather Departments could benefit. So, the opportunity exists to develop a cross-departmental response to ensure that Lough Neagh's tourism potential and economy, as well as the fishing and all the other elements, are developed.

Pollution is another serious problem. Lough Neagh is a big water bowl, and it collects sewage from a lot of sources. It is important that we improve the water in Lough Neagh and clear the pollution. Some say that algae on the lough create flies, which can be a major problem around the lough shore. That could also be dealt with through cleaning. The Department of the Environment has a role to play in cleaning the lough to ensure that we have good, safe water that is free from pollution. European funding could be accessed for that. Now that the Barroso task force is back in operation, I would like Departments to look at whether there is any potential for European funding. Instead of that funding going back to Europe, under the present processes for the Peace programmes and rural development funding, there may be potential to get European funding to develop the whole thing, and possibly even for the other Departments.

From a DRD point of view, the big problem is that, although we have water access at the moment, nobody is paying for it to be extracted and nobody is charging to extract it. However, who knows what could happen in the future? The lough has been offered to the Government here and to direct rule Ministers in the past, and it could be offered to anyone. It could be offered to an international or foreign water company, which would then be able to levy fees on NI Water to extract the water. So, there is a potential risk to our water supply. It is, therefore, important that we plan for the future and secure the supply by taking control of the water bowl, which is a source of water for everyone right across the North. It is important that we protect DRD's role in providing water supplies to all facilities in the future so that we do not face a levy that would curtail that supply.

The fact that we have no overall responsibility for Lough Neagh prevents us from putting in place a strategic approach for its future development. We need management, control and ownership of the lough so that we can create that approach and Departments can come together to put in place a working arrangement and business plan. There is an urgent need for a management structure. There is no navigation authority on Lough Neagh, so, if you went on to Lough Neagh with a boat one morning, you could either finish up on a sand bank or get across; there is the potential for either to happen. So, it is important that there is a navigation authority to direct boats. However, we do not have that at present, and nobody has responsibility for navigation, because the lough is under private ownership.

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

Mr Molloy: The possibility of training and various other things could come from the development of Lough Neagh. I will leave it to others to conclude.

Mr Hamilton: Although I have a role as Deputy Chair of the Environment Committee, I was worried for a time about how somebody from the shores of Strangford lough could credibly speak on a debate about the shores of Lough Neagh. However, Mr Molloy then helpfully introduced the name of my friend and colleague Mr Shannon and mentioned his passion for shooting. In my experience, there are few parts of Northern Ireland where Jim does not see the potential for shooting.

I agree with much of what Mr Molloy said. I do not think that anybody in the House would disagree with him, particularly what he said about the need for better management of Lough Neagh. From my reading on the issue and, indeed, from talking to colleagues who represent constituencies adjoining Lough Neagh, I have observed that there is a serious problem on many fronts with the management of the lough. As Mr Molloy outlined, there is clearly a key public sector interest in various aspects of the better management of Lough Neagh, whether that is from a leisure perspective and the potential to exploit tourism around the lough, some of which is already happening at Oxford Island and through leisure pursuits, or whether it is about the rivers to which he referred and their pollution, or, indeed, the extraction of water from Lough Neagh for consumption in our towns and villages across Northern Ireland. Given that there is a clear public sector interest, the debate is useful. I have read reports that point to pollution and problems with water quality, biodiversity and recreational use, and it would be difficult to dispute the fact that there is not an interest for us in looking at the better management of Lough Neagh. My party and I are happy to pursue that. The lough is huge, is of huge significance and comes with huge problems. There have been reports of problems with bird populations, pollution and the theft of fish stocks in the lough. I agree with Mr Molloy that action is needed.

10.45 am

I always support more cross-departmental work when there is a shared interest for all the citizens of Northern Ireland. I can bring some experience from Strangford lough. The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development will be familiar with the concerns about the management of Strangford lough, which have led to potentially serious problems with the European Union. If a problem is seen to arise, there is a need to deal with it, not simply for public sector interests but because Europe will examine those problems and tell us that if we do not sort them out, as they are contrary to some directive or other, we will have to pay fines. The lesson from Strangford lough is that cross-departmental work should start as early as possible.

No one will have a terrible difficulty with Mr Molloy's sentiments. The difficulty for some of us on this side of the Chamber is one that he would expect from someone with an interest in the Department of Finance and Personnel. The final few words of the motion refer to purchasing Lough Neagh and taking it into public ownership. I understand Mr Molloy's arguments, which are worth exploring in a working group. No one will have difficulty with looking at a working group on better management of the lough, which would

include discussions on those issues. Such a group would have to discuss those issues in that context. However, if we pursue the line that the Member wishes us to go down, which is to purchase Lough Neagh, that comes at a cost, and none of us knows what that cost will be. It is not prime development land, so it will not have the same value as land in the centre of Belfast. However, it has a price and added value because of a number of factors. The Member mentioned mineral rights and shooting rights: mineral rights and the extraction of aggregates from the lough will have a value that has to be factored into any price rather than simply the cost per square kilometre.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hamilton: Yes, I will.

Mrs D Kelly: The Member's point is relevant, but, given that neither the Shaftesbury estate nor its predecessors since 1641 paid anything for the lough, perhaps it might be magnanimous enough to give it back to the Irish?

Mr Speaker: The Member will have a minute added on to his time.

Mr Hamilton: For many reasons, I do not think that we should go back to 1641, as the Member will know from the history of her constituency. She is right: we can always rely on people to be generous in that regard, but my experience of landowners, particularly when government shows an interest, is that the value of the land goes up. If I wanted the Member's car and was desperate to buy it, she would try to get more out of me than it was actually worth.

Mr Molloy: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hamilton: I will give way very briefly, because I want to conclude.

Mr Molloy: We should recognise the fact that the Shaftesbury estate has been very generous in the past and that a number of properties that it owned were given over to public ownership.

Mr Hamilton: I accept that point. However, when someone wants to buy something from you and you put the value on it that the Member put on it in his contribution, the price will inevitably go up. I throw that out as a serious note of caution. In order to achieve the aims that the Member expressed, with which I and others agree, do we have to own it ourselves? Times are difficult, and I can imagine that, if we purchased that land now, someone may look back in 50 or 100 years' time, when we are going through economic difficulties again, and ask why we purchased it and whether it could be sold again to get a few pounds back.

The purchase of public land goes against the general direction of the Assembly and the Executive, whereby we have been trying to divest ourselves of public assets so that we can invest, in particular, in infrastructure projects without using some of that money to buy new public assets.

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

Mr Hamilton: So it is a serious note of concern that I issue, but we do not disagree with the sentiments that the Member put forward or, indeed, the idea of getting a working group to look at the better management of the lough.

Mr Kinahan: Normally, I would welcome any motion on better management of Lough Neagh, but the Ulster Unionist Party does not feel that it can support this motion. However, I will listen to what other Members say today to see which way we will vote. I am concerned that hidden behind the motion is the taking away of property rights and stealth towards a united Ireland and that it is driven by Marxist and communist philosophies. They are just hints at the back of it, but, put together, they are very much driving this. Already, Mrs Kelly has hinted that there could be something hidden behind it. I do not feel that the motion is purely about better management of the lough, although we would all like to see that. It is not just about the potential for tourism, because all of that already exists. I am saddened that our amendment was not taken up. It would have allowed for a more lengthy debate in which we could have gone into more detail on why we would like to see Lough Neagh better run, but I do not think that the motion leads the debate in that way.

When you first look at the motion, it looks harmless, until you get to the last seven words:

"bring Lough Neagh back into public ownership."

We are left not really knowing what is meant by Lough Neagh, and the motion plants the myth that it was once in public ownership. If Lough Neagh is about water, I can say that we already manage that pretty well in government through Northern Ireland Water. It does not necessarily need protection for the future, although we have to decide what direction we are going in with all our water concerns. It is a huge area, and I feel that this is more about taking than about public ownership. It is about the lough bed and mineral rights, but how deep do you go? Indeed, when it comes to the lough, how wide do we go? If you take the ownership, the bed and the minerals back, where do you stop? Is taking the quarries next?

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: I would like to carry on with my points for the moment.

Will the rivers, streams and sheughs that belong to farmers be next? On the question of how wide we go and the shoreline, which, of course, changes as the water goes up and down, is it one foot, one metre or one mile? If we take the lough back, does that extend to taking back farmers' fields, hedges and tracks? Does it mean taking things back from the property of businesses? Of course, capital is often the basis of all good businesses. Where does this stop? Behind this is the fact that the lough is a big chunk of Northern Ireland. It is one chunk that we can see being taken away and slowly going into that myth of a united Ireland.

My colleagues will touch on the facts of taking it back. In the Stone Age or the time of the Vikings, it did not belong to the public. In the time of the clans, it did not belong to the public. In fact, Agricola, when looking at whether he should invade Ireland, was told that they were so divided that he should not go there. He never did, so the Romans never came to Ireland. If you read Jonathan Bardon, you will see that he talks about Ireland always being divided by its natural boundaries. Hidden behind the motion is the wish to take away one of the biggest chunks of Northern Ireland.

The issue of the cost of taking back Lough Neagh has been raised. We do not know the cost, and we certainly cannot

afford it at the moment. There is no harm in looking at different ways of going forward, but the motion is about taking, not bringing it back.

Mr Molloy: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: No, not at the moment, thank you.

We would all love to see better management of the lough, and we have heard of all its various uses. We do not have any good examples of us as government running such properties well. Strangford lough, for example, is a disaster. Fines are looming. We asked for a management group, and no management group is yet set up, so we cannot even do it with one smaller lough. The five Departments are all failing to work together on how we manage our rivers.

Mr McCarthy: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: No, not at the moment.

Most of the environmental action of this body is only done because of Europe. Our actions on waste and on wildlife protection are all done half-heartedly until Europe comes in and tells us what to do. So, to take it back or to bring it back into public ownership is not the right way, and that is why I oppose the motion.

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

Mr Kinahan: This is really about taking it back. It is the red, communist side of life trying to take things away from people who have big property.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Kinahan: It is also about a united Ireland. We oppose the motion at the moment.

Mrs McKevitt: I am pleased to have an opportunity to share my views on the motion. In principle, I welcome the proposal to establish a working group to consider the return of Lough Neagh to public ownership. Lough Neagh is an important natural resource, and, therefore, its management and future must be carefully considered.

The return of Lough Neagh to public ownership seems like a logical and sensible idea, but it will take the involvement of all interested parties and Departments to establish whether that will be the case. If it is to be achieved, the Minister of the Environment should be central to such a group, given that the areas of the lough are of such environmental importance and are protected as an area of special scientific interest and with a Ramsar designation. The role of the Department for Regional Development should also be considered, given that Lough Neagh supplies 40% of the region's drinking water. All parties with an interest in the activities on the lough or the protection of it and its environs should have a seat on the working group. Much needs to be considered and consulted on before a recommendation can be drafted prior to full consideration by the Assembly, and the report to the House should contain detailed information on the mechanics of returning Lough Neagh to public ownership, if that becomes the recommendation of the working group.

I support the proposal to establish a working group to put all the right people around the table and to bring this beautiful asset to its full potential.

Mr McCarthy: The Alliance Party fully supports every effort to encourage tourism, recreation, jobs etc, and it seems to me that the motion, which asks DCAL and DARD to set up a working group to explore the potential for Lough Neagh if it were brought back into public ownership, makes a reasonable request.

I am extremely grateful once again to our Research and Information Service for everything that it has put together in our pack. Reading the history of the ownership of Lough Neagh and about what and who can have right of access is very interesting, to say the least. The term "absentee landlord" can be applied, and, if it had not been for the hard work of local people and, indeed, the whole area, it might well have been well out of reach of the general public.

There seems to me to be a similarity between Lough Neagh and Strangford lough. I tried to intervene during Mr Kinahan's speech — he is gone now — when he stated clearly that Strangford lough did not have a management committee. I do not know where he has been for the past 20 or 30 years: Strangford lough does have a management committee and many other committees that look after the lough. That was what I wanted to bring to your attention, sir. In both cases, an advisory body and management strategy committee were put in place, and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency was involved. At least Strangford lough, for the most part, is, as far as I know, in public ownership, unless somebody can say otherwise.

As Members will be aware, Strangford lough can create employment. We have a fishing industry in the lough, albeit a small one, and I fully support it, provided that it is looked after and not destroyed. We also have a tourist attraction right around the lough, and I must plug the villages of Greyabbey and Kircubbin. If you are ever out and about, come and enjoy the car park beside where I live. You will have a tremendous time. *[Interruption.]* I am trying to explain the similarity of what we are talking about. We have sailing, yachting, canoeing, skiing etc in the lough.

Our packs contain reports on an Assembly debate on 9 February 2010, and Mr Molloy mentioned it quite a bit when moving today's motion. Indeed, there was an Adjournment debate on 21 October, and the Assembly gave its full support to that at that time.

Also in the pack are interesting reports from various newspapers from as far back as 1999. It seems to me that Lough Neagh, which is the largest inland waterway in these islands, has had a troubled past, for one reason or another. Perhaps now is the time to take a joined-up approach to seek ways to have that facility reach its full potential for the benefit of local residents and, indeed, all of Northern Ireland. On behalf of the Alliance Party, I support the motion.

11.00 am

Mr Frew: I share the same sentiments as my colleague Simon Hamilton. First, the debate has not been progressed by the history lesson that we are being taught. The year 1641 was mentioned, and I am sure that we would love to get into a debate about what took place in 1641. Comments were made that we should give it back to the Irish. We then had Members asking whether it was just a piece of the jigsaw towards a united Ireland. Is this going to unite Ireland by stealth? Communism has been raised. Red flags have

been raised. This has got out of all proportion. We really need to get back on track.

As a party, we think that the wording of the motion is unfortunate. We have nothing against looking at a cross-departmental approach to anything in this Province, and I think that we should all be working together, as should the Executive, on these issues, so I have no problem in supporting the convening of a working group to explore the potential to make the lough and everything about it better managed. However, the motion states:

“to convene a working group to explore and pursue actively the potential for a cross-departmental approach to bring Lough Neagh back into public ownership.”

I would like the working group to explore the potential and see whether it would be worth actively pursuing bringing Lough Neagh back into public ownership. That is the unfortunate bit about the wording.

That said, we as a party have no problems in supporting the motion and the spirit in which it has been debated by the Members across the Chamber. The Member is absolutely right when he talks about the potential of what Lough Neagh could and should be. We have the mineral rights, the sand extraction, the fishing opportunities, the shooting rights and a much greater potential for tourism than exists at present. We also have areas of large concern and potential for concern, including security of supply for our water and high water levels, which can impact greatly on agriculture, and which we control, as a Government, with the sluice gates at Toome. We have a certain control over and responsibility for the lough at present.

We have major problems with water quality and with illegal and reckless fishing on the lough. I am told by our fishermen and anglers that Lough Neagh could be so much better and could attract many people from all over the world to come to fish there and in the rivers of our Province. It is good to get away from the historical issues; let us not talk about them again, please. We should concentrate on the future of Lough Neagh and what it could mean for this Province.

Mr Clarke: I know that you do not want to look at what they talked about concerning the past, but let us just explore it slightly further. If Lough Neagh was brought back into public ownership, what is public ownership in Northern Ireland at the moment? I would have thought that that is actually part of the United Kingdom.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for his contribution. I agree.

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added to his time.

Mr Frew: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

We have nothing to fear from public ownership. Of course, we have to be careful. There is a lot of responsibility that comes with things like that, but I certainly do not mind whether it is called a working group, whether it is two Departments, one Department, three Departments or four Departments. Any decision will have to be made at the Executive table. That is when any decision on the issue will be taken. To call it a “working group” may not be the right way in which to put it. A management group might have been better to see what we can manage on the lough, because we could have public ownership of something without owning

it. Ownership depends on the degree of management and control that you have over any lough, issue or item. We have a certain amount of responsibility for water levels and the sluice gates at Toome. Therefore, it is very important that we get this right.

I have no problem supporting the motion. As I said, however, I regret its wording. I respect the way in which Francie Molloy debated the issue. Unlike other Members, he did not go into the history. It is right that we should explore with the 12th Earl of Shaftesbury whether there is the potential to do something. However, we have to do that right. We have to make sure that we make the right decisions and those that are in the public interest. We could manage this better than we have. The potential of Lough Neagh is great for tourism, fishing and, in Jim Shannon’s case, shooting, and for everything else around that. The lough is a massive area of Northern Ireland, and the Assembly —

Mr Speaker: The Member’s time is up.

Mr Frew: — and Executive should have more control over what can and cannot be done on its waters.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, like Mr McCarthy, thank the Assembly’s research team for providing the information packs for the debate.

Lough Neagh is widely acclaimed for its historic and scenic significance. The lough and its 97-mile shoreline is one of Ireland’s best-kept secrets and could be this island’s next signature project. The current attractions of the lough and its shoreline include walking and cycling, the Kinnego marina and Oxford Island nature reserve, which, as has been mentioned, has won several tourism and conservation awards. It attracts more than 100,000 wintering wildfowl from all over the world and, as the third largest lake in Europe, contains 800 billion gallons of fresh water that supplies a number of counties across the island.

Lough Neagh and its shore has room for massive tourism development. The annual lough shore cycle trail attracts more than 1,500 people from Ireland and beyond. The lough has Europe’s largest commercial wild eel fishery, which produces hundreds of tons of brown and silver eels every year, bringing over £60 million back into the economy here. The lough has its unique fish descendants from the ice age, including pollan, dollaghan and other species. Fishing is the livelihood of many families around the shoreline. Fishing has been passed down through many generations and is in their blood. Many fishermen around the shore work long, hard hours.

The beautifully scenic landscape of the lough and its hinterland has existed since prehistoric times and contains an abundant scattering of ancient religious sites, medieval ruins and historic houses. On the lough shore, the Ardboe cross is over 1,000 years old. One of the finest high crosses that you will find anywhere in Ireland, it is steeped in history.

Lough Neagh needs to be developed as one of the greatest tourism potentials on the island. It needs to be more appealing to the tourist. It needs to develop a way of encouraging people to visit the area in caravans or tents, as is popular, or provide much-needed overnight accommodation around the lough.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I hear what she says about the lough’s potential. Does she

agree that the last thing that any lough, and particularly Lough Neagh, would want is to have ugly apartments built along its edge? That would create an enormous eyesore, pollution and everything else.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Boyle: I agree. I was not thinking of apartments, Mr McCarthy. If a management strategy were in place, that would obviously be looked at. I think more of small housing and cottages for that area.

Lough Neagh's tourist potential in water and recreational activities can provide a great family day out. There is the Tannaghmore Gardens Farm and the Clementsmount Fun Farm, which I have visited. The NITB has fully recognised that the area has huge potential for growth and tourism for our local economy. It has been said — I echo this — that the people are the most important asset of the Lough Neagh wetlands, as they have created for us the beautiful surrounding landscapes over the past centuries. They bring life and vitality to the area where they live, work and relax in the wetlands of the lough. The local people, communities and stakeholders have a vital role to play in safeguarding the future development of the lough while ensuring the future environmental integrity of the area.

I hope that today's debate will highlight the start of an important process on the way forward for Lough Neagh. I hope that all of the objectives that each Member has spoken of will be implemented. It is not just DARD and DCAL that have responsibility; also involved are the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), the Department of the Environment and, of course, the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). Those Departments and other stakeholders need to be part of the wider extensive consultation on the way forward and the potential of bringing Lough Neagh back into public ownership for future tourism investment.

Mr Wells: I suppose that I am the only Member who can claim to have worked on Lough Neagh. I worked as the officer of what was called the Association of Lough Neagh Users (ALNUS), and I also worked on the environmental impact assessment of the lignite deposits at Crumlin. I suspect that I have walked every inch of the lough shore in my time; I know it very well.

The reality is that, in any other part of Europe, Lough Neagh would be a jewel in the crown of the community. It would be a tourist asset and a phenomenal nature reserve. It would also produce huge economic gains to society. However, the people of Northern Ireland have, for centuries, turned their backs on Lough Neagh. The roads do not run along the shore of Lough Neagh; they run at right angles away from the shore. Access is particularly difficult in many areas.

The management of Lough Neagh is, quite frankly, a shambles at the moment. It is under enormous pressure. Its fish stocks have declined dramatically. The water quality leaves an awful lot to be desired. Even without Mr Jim Shannon's attention, the numbers of wildfowl species such as pochard, tufted duck, goldeneye and scaup have declined dramatically over the past 10 years. Something has gone very wrong ecologically with Lough Neagh. The planning controls around Lough Neagh have been an utter fiasco. Why anyone would want to visit some parts of the lough shore,

given the way in which it has been ruined by unsympathetic development, beats me. We have huge problems.

During my time working for ALNUS, we tried to implement an effective management strategy for Lough Neagh. However, we came across one fundamental problem: the guy who owned it did not want to co-operate with anybody. We wrote many times to Shaftesbury Estates, and the formidable Mrs Murdoch, who was then the chief executive officer of Shaftesbury Estates of Lough Neagh, would write back and say, "Thank you for your letter, but I remind you that the lough is owned by Shaftesbury Estates, and we are not going to co-operate with you." It controls the sand and gravel extraction, the wildfowling and fishing rights; it has control of the bed of the lough. It is very hard to manage a national asset if the person who owns almost all the rights that are associated with it is not going to play ball.

I welcome the motion. It is not pledging the Assembly to compulsorily acquire the assets of Lough Neagh; the motion is saying that we should set up a group to look at the issue. It could be that Shaftesbury Estates will say that it is quite happy to sell the asset to the Northern Ireland Executive, so there may be no aspect of compulsory purchase.

That compulsory purchase was opposed by other contributors, including Mr Kinahan. As an aside to Mr Kinahan, last Saturday 'The Newsletter' reported that he was a rising star in the Ulster Unionist Party, so it must be true. I wish him well in that, but, if he is a rising star, he will have to start to take interjections. However, that is me just getting my oar in, as I do take interjections.

11.15 am

Mr Molloy: What the Member said about the benefits was correct, and a number of councils have found this a particular problem when dealing with it. However, the fact that the 10th Earl of Shaftesbury said that he was willing to sell means that there is no conflict, and that is something to explore in the future.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Wells: Thank you. I do not know what the situation is with the present Earl, but if a price could be agreed and the Northern Ireland Executive could achieve a good rate of return for that asset, everyone would benefit. Crucially, if we were to acquire ownership of the lough voluntarily, it would enable adequate management of the lough. The lough is not being effectively managed, and that is not to the benefit of anyone, including the fishermen, the wildfowling and those who extract sand and gravel. It is being exploited in an unsustainable way, because no one has any control over what is going on. I accept the philosophical problems that Mr Hamilton and Mr Kinahan have about the public ownership of the lough, but if it can be done in a voluntary way, I am happy enough to do so.

I know that Mr Molloy spends every working hour trying to run Northern Ireland into a united Ireland. However, to be fair to him, I do not think that bringing Lough Neagh into public ownership would take a united Ireland one step further. We would be bringing an integral part of the United Kingdom into public ownership and the ownership of the Northern Ireland Executive, which is one of the four devolved Administrations of the United Kingdom. It would certainly not be a rocky

road, or even a rocky lough, to a united Ireland. Therefore, it is not correct to say that.

If we allow the present situation to continue, the ecological quality and tourist potential of Lough Neagh and the economic benefits that accrue to this society from having it will continue to decline. We will be left with a large body of water in the middle of Northern Ireland that is of no benefit to anyone. Surely we need to do something about that and try to restore Lough Neagh to its former glory, so that everyone can benefit.

Mrs Dobson: I also welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. As has been mentioned by my party colleague, Mr Kinahan, my party opposes the motion. I feel that, had our amendment been selected, it would have added to the debate.

Nevertheless and speaking on the issue at hand, transferring the lough, and, supposedly, the rights that go with it into public ownership is not a realistic call, for a number of reasons. Of course, a debate about the ownership of Lough Neagh is nothing new, and I apologise to my colleague Mr Frew in advance, as he is about to get another history lesson. When Charles II first granted the lough to Lord Donegall in the 17th century, it was not fully clear whether he owned it in the first place. However, that debate was put to rest in 1911 when the House of Lords made a final ruling. As we know, ownership of the lough later passed to the Chichester family and has subsequently fallen into the possession of the Shaftesbury family. Therefore, we are discussing privately owned property. It would be different if we were calling on a public body to transfer a function or asset to another public body, but we are not. I find —

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. Would she be surprised to learn that the council of which she was a member and her colleague Mr Gardiner were signatories to a previous call by all the councils around Lough Neagh to try to get the lough back into public ownership?

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added to her time.

Mrs Dobson: Thank you. I thank the Member for her intervention, but there are other issues at stake.

I find it rather tactless of Sinn Féin to have tabled this motion, which essentially calls for the nationalisation of Lough Neagh and its resources. I would be interested to hear whether that party even had the regard to speak to the current owners before tabling the motion. If it has not, that shows that this proposal was as ill-thought-out as its pursuit of bringing the Crown Estate into public ownership a number of months ago.

My constituency of Upper Bann has a deep connection with Lough Neagh. The lough is incredibly important to the local economy, environment and the communities that live cohesively alongside it. It remains Northern Ireland's main source of drinking water and sustains hundreds of jobs locally, primarily through the fishing of its world-renowned wild eels. Given the sheer size of the lough and that it drains approximately 38% of Northern Ireland, it is inevitable that nutrient enrichment, more accurately called eutrophication, is a problem for the water. Indeed, lowland agriculture is responsible for 75% of nitrate inputs to Lough Neagh. However, it is important to note that, given the large number of farms that border the lough and the relatively

few associated incidents of pollution, farmers can also be considered quite effective custodians of the lough.

I am aware that Dermot Nesbitt, a former Ulster Unionist Minister of the Environment, launched the Lough Neagh management strategy in 2002. That was the culmination of several years' hard work from the Lough Neagh Advisory Committee. Both bodies brought new ideas to the table. However, it is unfortunate that, a decade later, this House is still calling on all interested bodies, including statutory bodies and individuals, to get together to discover a model that, once and for all, works.

Mr Wells: I thank the Member for giving way. The reality is that that management has not worked. During the previous decade, there has been a fundamental decline in the ecological quality of Lough Neagh's fishing stock and wildlife. The planning around Lough Neagh has been an utter shambles. Therefore, how can the Member continue to support something that has so utterly failed?

Mrs Dobson: Thank you for your intervention, but I plan to continue. *[Laughter.]*

The debate that we are having will, most likely, leave more outstanding questions than answers. The question of the ownership of Lough Neagh goes much further than the ground on which the lough sits. There are many subsequent rights, such as those to which Mr Kinahan alluded, including rights on shooting, minerals and sand, that need to be accounted for. The current ownership model may not be ideal. That was especially clear when the late Lord Shaftesbury passed away in 2005 and there was subsequently considerable unease that a private company might seek to purchase the family's rights. Fortunately, that was not the case, and the lough remains in the estate. However, it would be foolish to think that that may never become an issue.

I also accept that the current model of the management of the lough is clearly not working. I would prefer to see the Department of the Environment, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure throwing their weight behind a permanent management body that would be responsible for the day-to-day operation of the lough. That body could be target driven but independently led.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. As someone who was reared across the road from Lough Neagh and who lives beside the fishermen, boatbuilders and basket makers, I am well acquainted with the economic spin-off that Lough Neagh has had to offer and with its rich cultural heritage and the ownership and feelings that the community have for the lough. It is where all my family learned to swim. Unfortunately, these days you do not see many families enjoying the summer at Lough Neagh. Mr Wells is right to point out how the ecological environment around the lough has deteriorated in the past couple of decades.

For that reason alone, one could argue that the lough should come back into public ownership. In fact, there would be quite an absence and dereliction of public duty were the Assembly and Executive not to seek the return of the main source of our drinking water to public ownership. As Mr Molloy pointed out, the Shaftesbury family in some instances, although not all, had been generous to the communities and people of the North with the drinking

water, but what if another, private owner were to come, step in and buy it? It might start charging for that extraction, and where would we be then? So, there is a moral obligation.

It is interesting to note that, very disappointingly, the Ulster Unionist Party seems to be stuck in that landed-gentry mode of the past. Really, I am sure that there were no vested interests seeking that land that was acquired during the years of the plantation went back into public ownership. To reassure Members, as I understand it, the Republic of Ireland has never forcibly taken back into public ownership land belonging to the absentee landlords. I am sure that that will remain the case, and it is not the intention behind the motion.

A numbers of Members spoke about the activities on the lough and how much more could be achieved if it were in public ownership. Tourism is one of those activities. People often ask me why more is not done in the lough and why there is no navigation. Well, who is going to spend the money?

Mr Wells, in mentioning Miss Murdoch, reminded me of the fear that letters from that lady used to cause among local representatives.

Mr Wells: Her very name causes me to tremble as well. However, the fundamental problem with the Shaftesbury Estates is that Miss Murdoch, who is no longer with us, and her management team were there to extract the largest amount of income for the Shaftesbury Estates from Lough Neagh. That is clearly at odds with proper management. You simply cannot match those two competing demands.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Wells is correct. There is no good management of the lough. There is no sustainability with regard to how the lough is going to be managed and cared for for future generations, particularly as a source of natural water. He is quite right to point out the loss of the wildlife, in particular the birds, and he will be well-acquainted with Portmore lough, where the RSPB has a bird sanctuary not so far from where I live, and the good work that goes on there in the protection of wildlife and natural habitats. That is something that could be —

Mr Kinahan: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: I will give way, of course.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you for giving way. Does the Member not agree that the system that we had in place beforehand, in which all the councils gave money into a central pot and allowed the Lough Neagh management company and the advisory committee to carry on, was a very good system? It is because the money was then taken away from them and some councils did not sign up that we are left with the problem we have today.

Mrs D Kelly: I do not agree with the full thrust of your argument. Yes, the Lough Neagh partnership was a good model, but it did not go far enough and the parameters of its works were reduced because of the ownership being with Shaftesbury. Mr Wells pointed out that perhaps he is the only Member who has worked in anything to do with Lough Neagh. I was a voluntary director of the Gawley's Gate Quay company, which drew down SEUPB moneys from Europe to develop that quay for use by local people. That could happen

only with the permission of Shaftesbury, but other projects were not so fortunate. In fact, we very nearly lost the opportunity to draw down that funding because we waited so long for permission from Shaftesbury.

We, as an Assembly and an Executive, could have a vision for Lough Neagh as the jewel in the North's crown if it were in public ownership. Indeed, we could hold Ministers much more to account with regard to the delivery and protection of water quality and the environment around Lough Neagh than is currently the case — they can easily point to responsibilities that are outwith their own gamut of responsibility because they fall to Shaftesbury. It would be a dereliction of our duty if we did not pursue a working group to seek to consider the return of Lough Neagh into public ownership. It makes sense, and I, for one, am an enthusiastic supporter of the motion.

Mr Gardiner: In 2008, I called for the establishment of a Lough Neagh authority, which I saw as a stakeholders' body giving focus and direction to the entire Lough Neagh basin and the area of the Upper Bann and Lower Bann rivers. There is so much unrealised and untapped potential in the area that a body that focused on every aspect of life there, from tourism to river maintenance and protection, could only be a good thing for the entire area.

In 2008, I also called for further tourist development of Coney Island, off Maghery, in Lough Neagh. Coney is one of the inhabited islands on Lough Neagh, and its history is a remarkable asset to the Craigavon area. It recently emerged that King Edward VII stayed on the island for a month with Lillie Langtry in a lodge built by the seventh Lord Charlemont in 1895. That lodge is still there and lived in by the current warden on the island.

That is only one episode of an amazingly colourful history with links to St Patrick, the Bronze Age, the Norman tower and the Gaelic chieftain Shane O'Neill.

It was the O'Neills' treasure house, and prisoners were held there during the 1798 rebellion.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way, and I hope he will appreciate and join my support for the current inhabitant of Coney Island, who is a man from Aghagallon and a neighbour of mine, Peter McClelland. I congratulate him on his good work.

11.30 am

Mr Gardiner: Yes, I do, and I am not for sacking him.

Some 3,500 tourists visited that remarkable place last year. Clearly, it has a tourist potential that far exceeds that level. It can be reached by boat from Maghery and Kinnego marina, and is clearly an undeveloped gem for Craigavon tourism. However, any development should be done sensitively to protect local wildlife and plant species, because there are also distinct possibilities for the island to be eco-tourism friendly.

Enhancement projects in the recent past have included a new boat for Lough Neagh Rescue, a new passenger boat to Coney Island for the Christian heritage trail and an advertising campaign to attract visitors to Lough Neagh. There are six sailing boats for the purpose of training children at Ballyronan marina. Kinnego Harbour Centre,

Oxford Island, Ballyronan marina and the Battery harbour are all great successes and potential major tourist draws.

A Lough Neagh group representing all stakeholders should be created to co-ordinate the development of the entire lough shore in much the same way as the Highlands and Islands Development Board made such a difference to the Scottish Highlands. However, I do not agree with the proposal to take private property into public ownership or with nationalising anything. That is an agenda in the motion that I cannot subscribe to.

Mr Molloy: Will the Member accept the point that I have made a few times that the tenth earl offered it to the Executive, and that offer was refused? Northern Ireland Water and the water companies recommended that it should be bought to protect the future of the water bowl and keep it in public ownership.

Mr Gardiner: Yes, but he died, didn't he? *[Laughter.]*

Lough Neagh is a vast and underused resource. It would be better if it could be treated as a whole, rather than having a piecemeal approach. A Lough Neagh authority would provide central direction and organise intelligence to oversee the well-being and potential of the lough.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Earlier, I did not know whether I would be entitled to provide a reading from 'Das Kapital' or give a rendition of 'Only Our Rivers Run Free'. If I had done either, Mr Speaker, it would have very quickly become inoperative in here, given that I am not a very good reader of either, or a very good singer.

Going back to issues that were raised, I assure Mr Kinahan that his property will be safe with me. I had a brief flirtation with reading about Marxism and communism when I was about 18, but I am firmly a social democrat now so, Danny, you are OK with me. Getting back to the motion, it is about establishing a working group. There is absolutely nothing to prevent that from actively looking at public ownership of the lough. I hope that it would do that, because the only other option would be for it to inactively look at it, which would not be too good a route to go down.

I will provide a wee bit of background. Where I come from is down on the shores of Lough Neagh. The River Moyola ran at the back of my family home. The bar mouth, where that river runs in, is about 400 yards from the back door of our family home. That is where I was brought up, so it is instinctively and naturally part of my heritage, background, upbringing and culture to see the lough, to see what happens around it and to witness the fishing, the sand extraction, the shooting and all the cultural activities that have happened around it. That is very much part of what I am, where I come from and the traditions of my family and generations of it who have lived there.

I listened very carefully as the lough's history and heritage, as well as tourism and environmental issues, were mentioned. Mr Gardiner referred to some places that I have represented and know exceedingly well. In Toome, a project put in new walkways down to the lough so that people could walk there, examine and explore the heritage, and see the ducks that Mr Wells referred to, the eel fishery and all that has developed down through the years. People can come to Toome and to Ballyronan marina, which I know very well, to feed ducks and see the living aspects of the ecology and

environment that is there for us all. It is a natural jewel that is underexploited.

As we move on up the shore, we come to the Battery harbour and the Old Cross, which are huge historical aspects of where we come from. Indeed, when I was there very recently, I read the inscriptions on the Old Cross. All of that is there for us, and it is all part of who we are and where we come from. As a resource, it is totally underutilised and underexploited.

Economic opportunities around the shore include sand extraction, fishing, shooting, and so on. I have heard Shaftesbury Estates mentioned a number of times. Ms Murdoch's name was associated with shooting rights, fishing rights, sand extraction and all such aspects of life around the shore. However, that association was invariably negative: for example, a letter that came back stating, "No, you cannot" or, "No, but you may be able to do so with a bit of extra negotiation around the money."

Mr McCarthy: Thank you very much for giving way. Not being from that area, may I ask the Member this: where exactly along the lough does Lord Shaftesbury or that other lady live?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr McGlone: Thank you very much for that. The lady is now deceased, but I think that the address was somewhere in London.

Such negativity was a retardant factor on the development of the lough. Mrs Kelly gave a specific example of how a grant for the development of a quay in her area could have been lost.

This is really about exploring a debate that has already started. I pay tribute to the late, great Paddy Duffy, a former party colleague, councillor and dedicated community activist. With the fishermen from the lough shore, he took the fight for eel rights to London and disputed them. The Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative developed from that and has worked very well. More recently, eel sources on the lough have been somewhat depleted. However, with proper management, those can, hopefully, be resurrected and that part of the economy developed further.

Returning to the matter of public ownership, I emphasise that this is for everyone. What we are talking about here is facilitating and establishing a working group. There should be input and membership from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, the Department for Regional Development, the Department of the Environment and local government. However, the most important people, who must also be represented on the working group, are the stakeholders, the public. There is the potential for all members of the public to enjoy this jewel and asset when it is fully developed. They, too, have been excluded from ownership of the lough.

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

Mr McGlone: Yes.

As a young lad, I went to the shore with an old farmer who owned the land. I could never understand why he would say, "People can shoot on my ground here but not there, just a yard away."

Mr Speaker: Time is up.

Mr McGlone: We must address that issue and, hopefully, come to a resolution.

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I will start by declaring an interest in that, like Dolores Kelly, I also swam in the lough and picnicked on its shores many times as a child. I thank the proposer of the motion. It has been an interesting and lively debate, and I have enjoyed it very much. I thank Members for their positive contributions and for constructively pointing out some of the issues that we need to address. The stance that the UUP has taken is disappointing, but I am sure that that will be picked up in the winding-up speech.

I thank the Members who tabled the motion. Many Members picked up on the need for a cross-departmental approach. The motion calls for action to be taken by DCAL and DARD, which are the two obvious Departments. It is clear, however, that a number of other Departments also need to be around the table and be part of the discussions as we move forward.

Some Members tried to go into a detailed history of the lough. We all know that it has been owned continuously by the Shaftesburys since 1600. That is as far as I will go in the history debate. Many Members mentioned the issue of cost. To bring the lough into public ownership will be a question of transfer either by compulsory purchase or an agreed sale. Those two methods will have to be explored. Some Members picked up on the Shaftesburys' generosity in the past. Perhaps we will be lucky enough to see that again.

The question of cost was raised, and I do not know the answer. I do not think that anybody in the Chamber could answer that question at this stage. The motion calls for a cross-departmental approach to the establishment of a working group and allowing that group to look at all aspects of cost and what could be the market value of the lough in this day and age.

I will cover a few facts about Lough Neagh. It is one of the biggest freshwater loughs in western Europe, measuring 300 square kilometres and containing 800 billion gallons of water. It is home to the largest wild eel fishery in Europe. As many Members pointed out, the Shaftesbury Estates are the lough's owners. The owners grant lease agreements to commercial operators on the lough, of which there are many including the Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative Society and sand extraction companies, and they also grant sporting rights to wildfowling clubs.

The water of Lough Neagh is not owned by anyone, as water flows freely and cannot be owned by anyone. However, as I believe the proposer of the motion pointed out, a report from NI Water in December 2011 noted that it abstracts up to 50% of the raw water that enters the water supply from Lough Neagh. Members pointed out that that issue has been raised on a number of occasions in the past. In 2003, the Water Council identified the potential for the public to be charged in future for water that is abstracted from Lough Neagh and recommended that the lough be purchased on the public's behalf. It appears that the two Departments that were most closely associated with that at the time were the DOE and DARD. Obviously, they were not inclined to pursue that route at that time.

Many Members referred to an issue that is increasingly obvious to me, which is the extraordinary number of public, private and voluntary interests on the lough. They all have their specific remits, obligations, interests and aspirations. Therefore, it will be an extremely complex picture when it comes to dealing with the way forward.

Although the lough is not in public ownership, different aspects of its management are under the control of a number of Departments and public agencies, which, through their legislative remits, are provided with sufficient powers to safeguard Lough Neagh for public use and enjoyment. With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, I will list them briefly to give people a flavour of how many Departments and agencies are involved.

My Department, through the Rivers Agency, manages the lough's water levels within statutory limits as far as climate conditions allow, while taking into account the needs of various interests and stakeholders. As part of DARD's rural development remit that relates to Lough Neagh and its surrounding wetlands, my Department has provided funding to the Lough Neagh Partnership to take forward the development of the lough and the rural economy around it. That funding is now exhausted. Some improvements have been made to the infrastructure around the lough. The funding supported environmental projects and habitat improvements, and provided assistance to the commercial fishing sector and Lough Neagh Rescue. Although there was some positive work, it has been recognised in the debate that it was not enough and that, perhaps, that body needed more teeth to enable it to deliver more.

Waterways Ireland, a North/South body, is also sponsored jointly by DCAL and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. It is the navigation authority for the Lough Erne system and the Lower Bann. However, it is not actually responsible for Lough Neagh. A Member picked up on that point earlier. It has no statutory remit over navigation on Lough Neagh.

The NIEA is responsible for the protection and conservation of natural heritage and the built environment, with a remit to take enforcement action against polluters of Lough Neagh. The lough has a number of important environmental designations, such as that of an ASSI and a Ramsar site. NI Water provides water and sewerage services in the North of Ireland. Nearly 50% of the raw water that it treats and puts into the water supply is drawn from Lough Neagh.

11.45 am

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has a statutory remit to maintain the navigation channel and markers at the mouth of the Sixmilewater. DCAL also maintains 48 navigation markers in the lough as a non-statutory public service. It also enforces the provisions of the Fisheries Act 1966, as amended, and associated subordinate legislation with regard to fishing activity in the lough.

There are seven local councils with an interest and a management role in Lough Neagh, the Blackwater and the Upper Bann: Cookstown, Magherafelt, Craigavon, Antrim, Dungannon and South Tyrone, Armagh and Lisburn.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has responsibility for economic policy development, energy

for tourism, mineral development and health and safety. Therefore, its agencies also have a lot of interest in the lough.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency has a role in co-ordinating responses to incidents in the waterways. The Commissioners of Irish Lights have oversight of any navigation authority in respect of the aids to navigation that it places and maintains.

That is an exhaustive list of the public organisations that have interests in the lough. However, we also have to bear in mind the Shaftesbury estate, the Lough Neagh Sand Traders Association, the Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative Society, Lough Neagh Rescue, the Lough Neagh Partnership, the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland, and many others.

Mr Wells: I gave up after the twenty-ninth body that she listed as having some role in the management of Lough Neagh. Does that not make the point that this is a shambles? So many different bodies are pulling in so many different directions, and underlying that is the fact that so many of the interests are owned by a private family: it is a fiefdom. Surely, we need to look at the overall management of Lough Neagh. Indeed, in any other part of the world, this resource would be managed in the form of a national park or similar body, like Norfolk's Broads Authority. That would try to bring some sense of direction and protection to this incredible asset.

Mrs O'Neill: I totally agree with the Member. By outlining that exhaustive list, I was trying to make the point that that is why there is a need for a management structure to be in place. There is a need to balance the varied interests of all the different stakeholders, which is why the working group is the key way to move things forward. A cross-departmental approach will lead to the success of any work that is taken forward.

It is obvious that there is no known or agreed Executive position or co-ordinated approach regarding the management of Lough Neagh and the development of safeguarding it. The debate has highlighted that. As the Member pointed out, it is an unusual situation to have such a large body of water and to have no overarching public or voluntary authority taking responsibility for it.

Mr Kinahan: Everyone here seems to be attacking one owner. I spent four years on the Lough Neagh advisory committee, and the owner's name did not come up once. The smaller owners and the mass of different companies and other interests are the difficulty. That is why we are opposing the motion today. We want to get something that runs the whole of the lough better.

Mrs O'Neill: That is what the proposer of the motion set out from the start, but the Member obviously has a different view. There has been no deliberate attempt in the debate to attack any one individual. The Shaftesburys happen to be the estate owners, so they are obviously the people that we speak of. The Member seems to be the cheerleader, supporter or protector of the Shaftesbury estate. The point that we are trying to make is that we need to get together. There needs to be a co-ordinated approach, so that the public interest is protected. That is key. It is at the core of the debate that we are having today.

The point was made earlier that we believe that, in 2003, it was offered for sale. That is something that needs to

be explored again. However, first, the working group needs to look at the many issues that have been pointed out here today. We have to realise the potential that is there. Many Members talked about the potential for tourism, job creation, improved management, the fishing industry and all those benefits. There is massive potential there, and we need to exploit that. We need to look at the barriers, and we need to address that.

To conclude, it is very timely that the Executive take a fresh look at how Lough Neagh-related matters are co-ordinated, including the discussions on the potential for public ownership. There is such a large piece of work here to be taken forward.

I assure Members that I intend to bring the issue to the Executive to outline the reasons that have been highlighted in the debate today and to make sure that whatever way it is taken forward, or whoever takes the lead on it, all the Departments that have been identified here today — DCAL, DARD, DOE, DRD or the Department of Enterprise for tourism — all need to be around the table. The purpose of forming a working group is to pursue actively the potential for a cross-departmental approach to bring Lough Neagh back into public ownership.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Business Committee for allowing the motion to be debated in the House today and the Minister for being in attendance.

I, too, agree that Lough Neagh has the potential to be one of our biggest assets. What other location contributes so much to our economy yet is practically unused for tourism, fishing, farming, water supply and employment? I believe that all those benefits can reach their true asset worth only through public ownership. The benefit of that would be careful management, with a strong regard for the ecosystem. At present, the water quality is poor, so we must have a robust system to monitor the surrounding natural and built environment. That would allow the local population to have its say.

Water sports and cruising have a big part to play in the development of the lough, but the big benefit would be the link-up with the Ulster Canal and, then, to the rest of the inland waterways of Ireland. Members, the potential for recreational activities is immense.

What area of water are we talking about? Lough Neagh has a total area of 156 square miles, making it the biggest inland waterway on the island of Ireland. It is the third largest lough in Europe, and its shoreline touches five of our six counties. Some 43% of our rivers flow into the lough. That is six main and two minor tributaries.

Members, you just have to mention the Shannon and its waterways, and everybody knows where you are talking about. That waterway and its surrounding lakes are on everybody's lips, because the Shannon has been exploited to its full potential as a major asset. Ask any tourists or visitors about Lough Neagh, and they will probably never have heard about it.

Members, look at its accessibility. It is within easy reach of airports and ports and the M1 and M2. We have hotels, self-catering accommodation, first-class B&Bs, and so on. With

all that infrastructure, we have to ask the question, "What is the problem?"

If we look at tourism with a geographical theme and take a journey around the Six Counties, we see that we have the new Giant's Causeway visitor centre; the Mournes; the Fermanagh lakes; Derry, the City of Culture; the Antrim coast road; and, now, the Titanic Quarter. However, in the middle, we have a massive area of water covering 156 square miles that is crying out for development. Today, we have the opportunity to set up a working group to start that process.

The main problem at present is that it is in the private ownership of the Shaftesbury estate. While that situation remains, public money will not be invested, because we have no control over development rights, pollution or water quality. Under public control, all the relevant Departments would be involved. Up until now, because the lough is in private ownership, the Tourist Board has not been involved.

Water quality in places is so bad that some local authorities have banned water-contact sports, because of the bacterial illnesses that the water causes. Eels used to be held for up to two months after they were caught, simply because they could then be sold for the maximum market price. However, owing to the water quality, they can be held now for only 10 days. We are, therefore, losing out on income.

Public ownership would, for example, allow the Assembly to plan ahead and look at putting funding in place for projects. At present, the lough supplies around 40% of Northern Ireland's water. Can you imagine what would happen if ownership were to pass to the private commercial sector? We could be held to ransom over water supply.

Sewage is just as important but has not been mentioned here today. Sewage has the potential to cost us more if the lough were to go into private commercial ownership, because, at present, raw sewage going into the lough is leading to the bacterial illnesses. I believe in public ownership; it can be attained.

The commercial wild eel fishery is regarded as one of the most productive in Europe. It produces a total of 550 tons of brown eels and approximately 150 tons of silver eels each year. The fishery has an average of 160 boats, and each boat is required to have a helper. Some 320 people are employed.

It is estimated that, in the past 20 years, eel fishing on the lough has put some £65 million into the local economy. I believe that, with public ownership, we could attract European funding; funding for water quality, a new navigation system, training for boat owners and users, and conservation of the unique fish life, which includes the renowned Lough Neagh eel.

Today's debate, if successful, will allow the two Departments to set up a working group. Nobody should have a fear of that working group. It will be set up to involve all the relevant Departments and, as Mr Frew said, nothing can be done — what is brought back from the working group will have to come to the Assembly. Therefore, I do not understand the fear people have of this working group. I appeal to them to have a second thought on it and come on board. Really, there is nothing to fear here.

If the Assembly shows the same united support as we did for the Titanic project, we could have another potential signature project on our hands. We could, once again, be innovative and forward-thinking, as we have shown the world, just this week, we can be.

I will make a few comments in the time that is left. I thank Francie Molloy for moving the motion. Francie talked about drinking water and fishing, sand extraction and employment. He was quite right in that.

Simon Hamilton from the DUP did agree that there should be better management of the lough and a working group, but had queries on purchasing the lough. All those things would come out within the working group. I agree with him. Although he does have reservations on some things, at least he is mature enough to know that the only way to deal with and answer that is through a working group.

Danny Kinahan? Well — *[Laughter.]* He certainly has taken the whole theme of reds under the bed to a new level. I fail to see how a man of his mature years — *[Laughter.]* — can have so many conspiracy theories. He should really be writing books. I ask him once again to think about what is being debated and come on board.

I see that your new leader is here today. If you are the rising star within your party — and I do not doubt that — let us see some of your shine. You did not really shine today. *[Laughter.]*

Karen McKeivitt of the SDLP agreed with us, but had reservations on who would be a member of the committee. Again, that would all be part of the process of the working group.

Kieran McCarthy spoke for the Alliance Party, and invited us all down to the car park beside his house. I wonder whether that could be the Alliance Party's answer to Daniel O'Donnell's yearly tea parties — you could get everybody coming down.

Paul Frew was very intense when he talked about the fishing, and he was quite right too. I know his particular interest in that.

Michaela Boyle of Sinn Féin spoke highly of the tourism potential. She is quite right; the potential is there. We in this Assembly are supposed to be innovative; we have heard that before. Even the Finance Minister has said that, instead of looking for money all the time, we should go out and be innovative and look at ways to raise funding. Here we have an excellent way of raising funding on our doorstep. Let us look at that.

Jim Wells is an ex-worker on the whole thing. I have to take his experience on that, and I do not doubt him. He was quite right to say that there are far too many groups and the thing is not co-ordinated. I totally agree.

Jo-Anne Dobson — Jo-Anne, be careful there. *[Laughter.]*

Dolores, you said that you were reared beside the lough. I take on board your experience of being a lough shore native.

We had a history lesson from Sam Gardiner, right from —

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

Mr McMullan: — lords and ladies to prison camps.

I ask the Assembly to back the motion.

12.00 noon

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 62; Noes 15

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Doherty, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr I McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Gildernew and Mr Lynch.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McClarty, Mr McNarry, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Dobson and Mr Kinahan.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to convene a working group to explore and pursue actively the potential for a cross-departmental approach to bring Lough Neagh back into public ownership.

12.15 pm

Kinship Care

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. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Miss M McIlveen: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes and welcomes the growth of kinship care and acknowledges the valuable role it plays in providing care for the many children who cannot be raised by their parents; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to note the excellent and often invisible contribution made by kinship carers, to identify a number of key priorities and actions for their support and to consider amending the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 in support of kinship carers.

Mr Speaker: Order, order. There are a number of conversations going on round the Chamber. I ask Members to leave the Chamber in an orderly fashion.

Miss M McIlveen: I have spoken in the House on many occasions about concerns linked to looked-after children and have sought to raise and address issues related to their safety and well-being. These are some of the most vulnerable children, who may have faced significant hurdles in their life and for whom we as a society still have some of the worst outcomes of any group of children. In respect of health, education and employment, looked-after children do significantly less well. It is critical, therefore, that the Assembly demonstrates that such children and young people are a priority. It is for that reason that I tabled the motion, which focuses on children who live in kinship care arrangements, with the aim of improving their lives and providing support, where needed, to their carers. The level of cross-party concern and support on the issue is to be welcomed, and I hope that it will be reflected in today's debate.

At this stage, I pay tribute to the efforts of Jacqueline Williamson from Kinship Care NI for her tireless work in putting the issue on the agenda. Last month, I attended the launch of the Kinship Care Northern Ireland book 'The Hidden Voices of Kinship Carers' and listened to Patrick and Susan, who described their journeys to becoming kinship carers. Patrick cares for his nephews, and Susan cares for her niece. I listened with real admiration for their commitment and determination to bring up those children surrounded by the warmth, love and connectedness of their extended family. I heard how daunting that journey can be and about the real need for support to enable them to do that. Recently, I met kinship carers through the Fostering Network and was, again, struck by the sacrifices they make and the determination they have shown to raise children in their own family setting. It is very obvious that so many kinship carers have simply responded out of instinct to a child in their family who has become vulnerable and needs the adults around them to act out of love and protection.

It is imperative in this debate and in all our discussions that the best interests of the child are central. Any decisions that are made must fully reflect that and take it into account. On every occasion, the individual child's well-being is

paramount for all those concerned. As with so many things, there cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution to care provision. So, it is important that I put it on the record that each child requires an individual care decision and that we have available a variety of care packages that can be tailored to a child's needs. That means that there can be no hierarchy of care and that care must be developed to ensure that each child does, indeed, matter. Although I support the many kinship carers who have responded instinctively to the needs of children in their family, it is important to say that the decisions made in relation to care for children must ensure their safety and put their interests first.

The issue of kinship care can be confusing. Not all children living in kinship care arrangements are looked-after children, and it is not appropriate that they would be. Many families will make their own arrangements for children in times of crisis. In many of our constituencies, there are children who have gone to live with a close family relative because of a death, a physical or mental illness or another family crisis or tragedy, such as a parent in prison. For some, the arrangement may be for a short time, and for others it will become permanent. However, it is important that the role of families in coming together to support and protect children is valued and supported. The state should not undermine that, but, at the same time, it should ensure that families are not left to cope alone or become so overburdened that children are then put at risk.

It is still difficult to fully ascertain the number of children in Northern Ireland living in kinship care arrangements. We know that one third of all looked-after children here live in kinship care and that there has been a substantial increase in recent years. Indeed, between 2009 and 2011, there has been a 53% increase in the number of looked-after children living in kinship care. Of the entire population of children in care, 76% are in foster care, including formal kinship care; 10% are in residential care; and those remaining are in other family placements. Some estimates suggest that approximately 5,200 or one in every 91 children in Northern Ireland are in some form of kinship care, with 717 of them in formal kinship care arrangements. To put that in context, there are around 2,500 children in foster care and residential care combined. The Fostering Network, as the voice of foster care, currently provides support, advice and information for 450 kinship carers who are formally looking after children. However, the picture for informal kinship care is much less clear and is an ongoing issue of concern. Research by the University of Bristol, using the 2001 census, has suggested that, for children in Northern Ireland who live in informal kinship care arrangements, care is provided primarily by grandparents or older siblings. The research also suggests that informal kinship care is much more prevalent among lower-income households and that, particularly for grandparents who are carers, there are likely to be issues linked to disability.

It is clear that finding accurate information on informal kinship care is very difficult. The first step that needs to be taken is for the Health Minister and his Department to undertake research to ascertain the extent and numbers of children involved in kinship care arrangements. At present, we rely on extrapolated figures from GB research that may not accurately reflect the Northern Ireland situation. The 2011 census figures may well provide assistance in that regard.

What kinship carers, formal and informal, usually have in common is that they have stepped in at a time of crisis and with little thought of the long-term practical issues, such as the legal arrangements or the support that they may need. The Minister will be aware that I am concerned about the issues that they face and the need to provide support where possible. That is why I have tabled an initial proposal for a private Member's Bill on the issue. The Bill aims to assist with the private, temporary and informal arrangements in families that are currently unrecognised. It will use the definition of close family relations set out in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, which seeks to allow, without a court process, the transfer of parental responsibility. That will enable kinship carers to deal with some of the simple practical realities of bringing up a child, including being recognised by schools, authorising school trips, registering a child with a GP or applying for a passport. In order to be granted parental responsibility, kinship carers currently have to go to court and apply for a residence order, a process that is often daunting and time-consuming. I hope to begin a process of consultation and stakeholder involvement on the benefits of a Bill, and, in particular, I would seek to consult the full range of agencies that currently support kinship carers, formal and informal. This will include Kinship Care Northern Ireland, the Fostering Network, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC), the regional adoption and fostering team and the other statutory organisations that work with kinship carers. The aim is to create a Bill that will work effectively for kinship carers and make their job easier.

On the issue of supporting and assisting kinship carers, I understand that the Department has drafted standards for kinship care, and I hope that, in his response, the Minister will confirm when those standards and the kinship care policy procedures will be published. Furthermore, I would like the Minister to clarify where his Department sees kinship care fitting into the overall options of care. Clearly, there are issues that need to be addressed in kinship care, such as accommodation, support and mentoring. I ask the Minister to identify the key priorities affecting kinship carers and a range of actions to assist them.

Raising and caring for children is not only a huge emotional and time commitment, one which I am clear the kinship carers whom I have met give freely, but there are also financial issues. It is expensive to raise extra children. If a child is a looked-after child, it is appropriate that kinship carers have a formal approval process and receive the same allowances as foster carers. I hope that the Minister will confirm that the allowances paid to kinship carers are the same as those paid to non-kinship foster carers. In taking forward the issue, I am also aware that there may be other issues of financial constraint and poverty for informal carers of children who are not looked-after children. I ask the Minister to discuss a way forward with those of his ministerial colleagues and their Departments with responsibility for addressing child poverty and for whom these children are a central and important group.

I look forward to hearing the contributions of other Members on this important issue and the response of the Minister in order that a real difference can be made to those who selflessly give up so much. I commend the motion to the House.

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 opportunity to address the House as Chair of the Committee, and I commend Michelle McIlveen for securing the debate. In the course of the debate, you will probably find that most if not all of us will say the same thing, but I will say some things of behalf of the Committee.

Michelle mentioned that there are fundamental differences between kinship care and traditional foster care that make kinship care unique. It often first occurs in an emergency or crisis situation when a parent is taken ill, needs to take a job abroad or experiences some kind of breakdown. In such situations, a family member or close friend will offer to take the child in, usually on the assumption that it will be a temporary measure. People do that because their instinct tells them that they do not want a child to be taken in by social services, either to live with a foster family or in a children's home. Kinship care is often the best option for children, as they are able to remain close to the family circle and, indeed, in the area where they have grown up. It also means that, if the parent resolves their problem, the child can return home fairly easily.

The Committee initially held an informal meeting with representatives from the charity Kinship Care in December 2011. At that meeting, the Committee was made aware that kinship carers face difficulties in the support that they are getting or, indeed, not getting in bringing up the children that they have taken into their home. As a result of that meeting, the Committee agreed to have a formal session to hear again from Kinship Care and from departmental officials on the matter. That meeting took place on 22 February 2012.

We learned that there are likely to be between 8,000 and 10,000 children living in kinship care arrangements. I take on board the point that Michelle McIlveen made that there are no relevant or specific figures on that. Between 8,000 and 10,000 children live in those arrangements, and the vast majority of those children are in informal kinship care. Indeed, the vast majority are unlikely to have any contact with social services. That means that the kinship carers will not be receiving any financial support from the state or other assistance to look after the children, including emotional support or advice. As a result, many kinship carers find themselves under tremendous strain and pressure. As Michelle McIlveen said, we must remember that many kinship carers are grandparents. They might have their own issues to deal with, including health issues and psychological issues. Indeed, they are trying to bring up another child. In the words of my granny, they are trying to feed another mouth on a pension. That has detrimental effects.

In fairness, officials from the Department recognised that the number of children in kinship care as a proportion of looked-after children is growing. The Committee welcomed their stance that, where possible, children should be brought up and cared for in their own family. We were also glad to hear that the Department was committed to publishing kinship care and foster care standards by 1 April 2012. I am glad that the Minister is here today, because he can more than likely give us an update of where that is. We are now into 18 April.

Mr Wells: 17 April.

Ms S Ramsey: Sorry. I am always a day ahead of myself, Jim. It is important that we get an update on where that is sitting.

Officials stated that, for the most part, when social services become aware of a child being cared for by a family member, it is very unusual for social services to take the decision to end the arrangement unless it is in the best interests of the child. Indeed, the Committee acknowledged that and made the point to officials that many people have a fear, rightly or wrongly, of coming into contact with social services because there is a perception that they might judge the kinship carer not fit to look after the child because of, for example, their age and might take the child away. The Committee acknowledged that it is a difficult and sensitive area, and a primary and common-sense approach is needed. Indeed, I came across a case in my constituency where social services were involved and threatened to take children into care because the parent forgot to buy a fireguard. The common-sense approach to that was to ask why the social worker who was there to support the parent did not buy the fireguard, and we would not have had that issue.

The Department also talked about the role that special guardianship orders could play in formalising kinship care arrangements. Those orders require an amendment to the Children Order, and that could be done by means of the proposed Adoption and Children Bill. The Committee welcomes that and asks the Department to bring forward the Bill as soon as possible.

12.30 pm

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

Ms S Ramsey: The Committee is glad that there seems to be co-operation between the Department and the organisations involved in supporting kinship carers. I support the motion.

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 when the first item of business will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.30 pm.

2.00 pm

Assembly Business

Committee Membership: Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and Committee for Education

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before we move to Question Time, I inform Members that today I received the resignation of Mr Tom Elliott as Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the resignation of Mike Nesbitt as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Education. The nominating officer of the Ulster Unionist Party, Mr Mike Nesbitt, has nominated himself as Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Mr Nesbitt has taken up the appointment with effect from today. The nominating officer has nominated Mr Danny Kinahan as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Education, also with effect from today. Mr Kinahan has accepted the appointment.

I am satisfied that this correspondence meets the requirements of Standing Orders. I, therefore, confirm Mr Mike Nesbitt as Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and Mr Danny Kinahan as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Education, both with effect from today.

Oral Answers to Questions

Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 1 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Food Tourism

2. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the potential for food tourism across the island of Ireland. (AQO 1721/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. With the development of food tourism, visitors across the island of Ireland increasingly expect to eat and drink local produce during their stay, and many choose to visit eating establishments whose menus are based on fresh, local delicacies. That, in turn, drives up demand for our local produce and regional specialities. Although we already have a fantastic reputation for good, wholesome food, I have no doubt that there are further opportunities associated with food tourism for the agrifood sector to capitalise on. Initiatives such as Taste of Ulster, Naturally North Coast, Flavour of Tyrone and various farmers' markets already support the food tourism offer and promote local produce.

The Food Tourism Insights report of 2009 found that, in 2008, 33% of the £540 million spent by overseas and domestic tourists was spent on food and drink. That was the largest spend category and illustrates the importance of food and drink to visitors. You may be aware that the draft tourism strategy for the North emphasises the importance of local produce, and I encourage those involved in food production and hospitality to exploit the opportunities for collaboration with local farmers, growers, processors, farmers' markets and retailers. Also, the 'National Food Tourism Implementation Framework 2011-2013', developed by Fáilte Ireland, gives us the opportunity to work with Bord Bia, Tourism Ireland and others when considering food tourism on an all-Ireland basis.

To realise the potential of food tourism, it is important that we continue to promote our quality food. The EU's protected food names scheme is being used successfully to help to protect local products against imitation and to showcase the quality of food that we produce. My Department also administers the regional food programme, which is designed to raise the profile of quality regional food and thereby increase its consumption. The potential for food tourism presents opportunities for the agrifood sector to meet the demand for top-quality local produce and, in doing so, to strengthen our economy further and sustain farmers and the general well-being of the countryside.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for her answer. I was going to ask whether there is scope to work with the South in developing food tourism, and she has gone some way to answering that question.

Mrs O'Neill: I will add to what I said. The South has published 'Food Harvest 2020', which outlines its strategy for agriculture, fishery and the forestry industries. It outlines

plans to develop sustainable growth in the agrifood industry. Fáilte Ireland's national food tourism implementation framework also includes a priority task to improve the co-ordination of food tourism promotional activities between Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, Bord Bia and the NITB. A subsequent InterTradelreland report has shown that all-Ireland co-operation greatly benefits both sides, and there are, of course, similarities in our own Focus on Food strategy. Therefore, we hope that food tourism can be developed on the island as a whole. My Department will take that approach in supporting the activities of our tourism partners and looking at all the avenues open to us.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Minister give more detail on the recommendations of the InterTradelreland report on the agrifood industry and on what it is in her gift to take forward? Will she give us an indication when she, along with the ETI Minister, will announce the other members of the Agri-food Strategy Board?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will be aware that it has taken some time for the InterTradelreland report to be published. We now have the report and are actively looking at it, and I think that it will be a key tool for the new Agri-food Strategy Board in developing its work plan and looking at the potential that is already there. As I said, one area on which it focused was food tourism and the existing potential. I see that as a key and integral part of the new strategy in moving forward. Over the next weeks, Minister Foster and I will appoint the remaining members to the Agri-food Strategy Board. We will make an announcement shortly after that, within a number of weeks.

Mr Swann: Has the Minister any idea of the potential successes for food tourism under the rural development programme?

Mrs O'Neill: I am happy to write to the Member about any projects with all-Ireland co-operation that have benefited from the rural development programme. Many tourism and food projects have been taken forward through INTERREG programmes, and I am happy to write to the Member in more detail if he so wishes.

DARD: Headquarters

3. **Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department is consulting staff in Dundonald House in relation to the relocation of the headquarters. (AQO 1722/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has consulted and will continue to consult staff in Dundonald House in relation to the relocation of the headquarters. Under our agreed industrial relations mechanisms, known as the Whitley arrangements, a subcommittee of departmental and staff representatives has already been set up, specifically to consult formally with NIPSA on all issues relating to relocation. The first meeting of the subcommittee took place in January 2012.

Staff throughout the Department have been kept informed of progress in relation to relocation through regular monthly updates in the DARD staff magazine, 'DARD Bizz'. As we move forward, my intention is that all staff in DARD will continue to be kept informed of progress and, as appropriate, are fully consulted and engaged with throughout the programme. The previous Minister gave a commitment

to NIPSA that she would fully engage with it throughout the process: I stand over that commitment and reaffirm that position. To date, the engagement with NIPSA has been extensive and meaningful, and I intend to ensure that that continues.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister. I am familiar with the Department's argument that the new headquarters would help to share wealth across the economy. However, surely taking the £26 million that this may cost and adding it to existing schemes to tackle rural poverty could do that better and more pragmatically without creating staff uncertainty for those working in Dundonald House, which is in east Belfast.

Mrs O'Neill: The Member is being very parochial. I absolutely stand over the need to bring high-value public sector jobs into the rural economy. The benefits in stimulating the rural economy speak for themselves. There is the potential job creation in the construction and ongoing maintenance of the building and the increased local spend. As I said, I will continue to consult staff, from whom I have received positive feedback about their mood. It is important that they are kept informed as we move along the entire process.

Mr Frew: What criteria will be used to determine the proper location of the new headquarters?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will be aware that any project of this nature has to go through the normal DFP procurement procedure. The outline case has already been through DFP. The programme board has been established. It is formally constituted and includes representatives at senior level from DARD, DFP, Land and Property Services and the Strategic Investment Board, as well as a non-executive board member. That board is chaired by the Department's senior finance officer, and it is its job to work with the consultative forum and the unions to develop the criteria. That process is in hand. I am happy to keep the Member, who is the Chair of the Committee, up to date as things develop.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What views have been expressed by NIPSA about the relocation of the DARD headquarters?

Mrs O'Neill: NIPSA, as I have said, expressed support for the relocation. It is widely recognised that it has been a long-standing supporter of the policy of decentralisation. In an article in the February edition of 'NIPSA Reports', it updated its members on its participation to date with the programme through its work on the HQ relocation consultative forum and the ad hoc Whitley subcommittee on relocation. That article was very positive. NIPSA recognised that the relocation is a major opportunity for a large number of its members to get a job closer to their home.

Mr Rogers: What criteria will be used to determine the suitability of the location of the new headquarters?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said in answer to Mr Frew's question, the criteria are being worked up with the programme board. A number of issues and areas will need to be looked at, but I am happy to keep the House updated as we go along. At this stage, the outline business case has been approved by DFP. Other things need to be taken forward before I will be in a position to publicly say where the destination will be. Nothing is ruled in or out at this stage.

Rivers: Maintenance

4. **Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the criteria for designating a river for maintenance and whether the criteria are kept under review. (AQO 1723/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Designation is required to enable my Department to undertake maintenance and schemes for drainage and flood defence purposes at public expense. Applications to designate a watercourse should be submitted to the Drainage Council, which operates as an independent advisory non-departmental public body. Criteria for the designation of watercourses are used objectively by the Drainage Council to ensure uniform treatment across the North.

The two key overriding conditions are that the proposed works offer value for money, with benefits outweighing costs, and that the works have sufficient priority to be included in my Rivers Agency programme. Viable works are programmed, and the second condition has not resulted in designation being refused due to availability of funding. There are five additional criteria beneath the two overriding conditions, with an application for designation needing to satisfy one or more of them. The first is that there is a sufficient area of disadvantaged agricultural land that is subject to poor drainage or flooding. The second is that the works to reduce existing or potential flooding are outside the capability of the riparians to organise and carry out at their own expense. The third is where works are required but it is not possible to identify the occupier. The fourth is where the watercourse requires works but does not perform any function connected with the drainage of the land. The last one is that works are required to provide an outfall for increased run-off from a new housing or commercial development.

The Drainage Council has recently been reconstituted. At its first meeting on 15 March, members were asked to assess the current criteria to satisfy themselves that they remain fit for purpose. It is proposed to review the criteria after receiving comments from the Drainage Council members at the next meeting in June. My officials will recommend to the Drainage Council that the criteria for designation ensure that designation is determined on need and is not dependent on the availability of funding. A broader review, including a full consultation, of the whole designation process will be undertaken in the future as part of a planned review of the current legislation and potential drafting of replacement legislation to be led by Rivers Agency.

Mr Molloy: I thank the Minister for her reply. Does she have the opportunity to review a decision of the Drainage Council where designation has been refused?

Mrs O'Neill: No. The Drainage Order 1973 provides that any individual who is dissatisfied with the determination of the Drainage Council can have the matter reviewed on appeal by the Lands Tribunal. I encourage people to do that if they feel that it is necessary. I do not have a role to play in that process, but the Drainage Council has the authority to make those determinations in a way that will ensure uniformity of treatment across the North. As I said in my initial answer, I have asked the new members of the Drainage Council to look at the criteria to ensure that they are satisfied that they are relevant and reflective of need. As I also said, a bigger

piece of work will be carried out in the longer term through a review of the legislation.

2.15 pm

Mr Kinahan: Given that non-designated watercourses are the responsibility of riparian landowners, will the Minister indicate how frequently her Department's Rivers Agency inspects those non-designated watercourses? Will she further detail the timescale for enforcement actions to be taken under schedule 5 or 6 to the Drainage Order if inadequate maintenance is found?

Mrs O'Neill: I am happy to write to the Member about the technical nature of schedules 5 and 6 and the appropriate timescales. It is important that we continue to liaise with the landowners that the Member referred to and with the other Departments. Quite often, you will find that pollution or other issues may need to be dealt with. The focus of designation is drainage and the reduction of flood risk. Therefore, any potential negative impact needs to be reviewed.

Lord Morrow: Does the Minister accept that our rivers are one of our best natural resources? Will she tell the House what percentage of her budget she designates to the upkeep and maintenance of our rivers?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have the figures with me, but I am happy to forward that information to the Member.

Land Parcel Identification System

5. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she is taking to address the errors found in the test maps for the land parcel identification system, given that nearly a third of farmers found errors. (AQO 1724/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Following my statement to the Assembly on 21 November, a test was commenced to assess the processes for developing the maps, the quality and accuracy of the maps, the clarity of the guidance that we provide to farmers and the adequacy of support for farmers' queries via DARD Direct offices. Farmers responded with a range of issues, only a very small proportion of which could be said to constitute errors. Most of the responses concerned issues that had arisen after the photographs of the land were taken or areas that were not visible on the photography but may have needed to be included.

DARD made it clear from the outset that the test was a vital part of the map improvement process. We asked farmers to examine their maps carefully so that they could tell us about any inaccuracies and/or changes that had taken place in their fields since the date of the aerial photography. It is important to note that the maps that we produce are based on information from the most recent aerial photography available to us. So, they will always reflect a snapshot of the land at that point in time. It was always anticipated that clarifications and corrections would be required, as it is not possible to be fully up to date without information from farmers on, for example, buildings that have been added, scrub that has been removed or yards that have been extended. I cannot emphasise enough that the improvement of the maps is a joint effort, and, when farmers receive their maps, they should get out and walk their land and make sure that the maps are correct.

I am very pleased that a significant number of farmers responded to the test. The information received has helped us to refine our technical protocols for the correction of boundaries and the capture of ineligible features. Important lessons have been learned, and I will ensure that they are taken on board as we move forward. That was always a major planned benefit to be derived from carrying out the test. DARD will provide assistance to farmers who requested changes to their map to help them to complete their 2012 application forms.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her reply. The substance of her reply seems to suggest, to me at least, that she is putting an onus on the farmers rather than on her Department to rectify errors. However, as a result of those errors, there has been considerable delay in the single farm payments. What will the Minister do to assist those who have been so badly affected as a consequence of the errors?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member has taken me up wrong: I did not put the onus on farmers. It is very much a two-way process. It is about the Department producing the best maps that it can, but it is also about farmers walking their fields when they have the maps in their hands, identifying what should and should not be included and informing the Department. That will mean that the map that is used from thereon in is the most up to date and accurate. That was certainly not what I was trying to say; as I said, it is a two-way process.

A total of 94% — £248 million — of this year's single farm payments have been paid out to date, and 6% of farmers — just over 2,000 — are still waiting to be paid. Obviously, I have listened to the cases of many of those farmers, and often they are in financial difficulty. I have put additional staff into that end of the process and tried to get those payments made as quickly as possible. There are a lot of lessons to be learned from this year, and I hope that mistakes will not be repeated in next year's round. However, the number of people who are unpaid at this stage is 2,003, and we hope to have the majority of them paid by the start of July. Some 1,300 of those are inspection cases, but the remainder are the results of probate or failure to give correct bank details. There is a variety of reasons why some people have not been paid.

Mr Irwin: I represent a constituency in which there is a large area of apple orchards. Just last night, I saw a farmer who has orchard land, 99% of which is shaded as shrub on the map and therefore is ineligible for the single farm payment. Can the Minister give an assurance that that will be sorted out? A large number of farmers involved are orchard growers.

Mrs O'Neill: Absolutely. If the guidance that was sent out is unclear in any way, I encourage the farmer, through you, to contact the DARD Direct offices or Orchard House to ensure all that is clarified. When a farmer gets the map, if there is anything on it that looks like it is ineligible but is, in fact, eligible, that needs to be clarified. As I said, this is a two-way process. DARD wants to get it right, but we need the farmer to assist it in doing that.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Is the Minister confident that she has now resolved the technical and quality problems encountered during the test exercise?

Mrs O'Neill: We have revised the technical protocols for the capture of ineligible areas and boundaries in the light of the lessons learned. As I said, lessons have been learned as a result of the test maps that we issued across three areas. We have looked at the quality assurance process because that was an area highlighted as needing to be refined. Quality assurance is now carried out by DARD staff in the Land and Property Services offices, which negates the need for transfer of data between Land and Property Services and DARD systems. That has resulted in a significant saving of time and an improvement in the data. The ICT issues that were identified occurred due to the differences between the DARD and Land and Property Services mapping systems. That is being addressed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 6 has been withdrawn.

European Fisheries Fund

7. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given the number of fishermen adversely affected by developments in the industry, whether she plans to draw down funding from priority axis 1 of the European Fisheries Fund article 27. (AQO 1726/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Article 27 provides the opportunity to provide financial support for fishers affected by developments in fishing. Basically, it looks at socio-economic compensation for the management of community fishing fleets. It can involve diversification of activities, upgrading professional skills, retraining in occupations outside fishing, early retirement schemes and assistance for young fishers to acquire first-time part ownership or full ownership of a vessel.

Such investments were considered recently when looking at a range of possible interventions to address the current imbalance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities. That is the fundamental problem and, although the interventions noted above could address some of the consequences of the imbalance, they do not address or eliminate the root cause of the problem. DARD will consider implementing some complementary socio-economic measures as part of its fleet restructuring proposals once a decision on decommissioning has been taken.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for her response. Has she had any discussions with the Minister for Employment and Learning regarding the reskilling and retraining of some of the fishermen?

Mrs O'Neill: As a result of the decommissioning scheme which we are currently working up, some people will come out of the industry. Once that business case has been cleared and we move forward on it, there will be a clear need to look at reskilling and the provision of every opportunity to those coming out of the industry. I intend to do that.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for her response. She will be aware that the final report from the Fisheries Forum in the summer of 2010 recommended that processing companies should develop plans for the strategic uptake of resources from the European Fisheries Fund to make the most effective use of those limited funds for the long-term benefit of their businesses. Can the Minister provide an update on how her Department has worked with the industry on that recommendation?

Mrs O'Neill: My Department is very proactive with regard to fisheries and how it works with industry. At the moment, we are concentrating on the whole area of gear trials and meeting the requirements of the European Commission.

To date, we have worked with the industry to make sure that as much money as possible is drawn down from the European Fisheries Fund. To March this year, a £930,000 grant had been paid to beneficiaries of the fund. However, I am happy to write to the Member with any more detail that he may require.

Mr Ó hÓisín: Will the Minister update Members on the gear trials project to exempt the fleet from the days-at-sea regime?

Mrs O'Neill: There has been an extensive series of gear trials. I met AFBI yesterday, and a lot of proactive work is being done with the industry. The industry has come up with what it believes is a solution, which will be trialled over the next number of weeks. It will test a number of alternative, highly selective nephrops gears, which is what the Commission suggested that it wanted. If we are successful and the fishermen are happy with the resulting gear, I can have it fast-tracked through the European Commission's science team. If that is acceptable, we will have done what we said that we would do during our negotiations with the Commission in December, which is to exempt our fleet from the days-at-sea arguments.

Rural Development Programme

8. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the strategic projects that were requested from local action groups under the rural development programme. (AQO 1727/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In December, I announced a refocusing of axis 3, which was, in part, driven by low project spend and high administrative spend. I have asked for all areas urgently to examine their progress and to refocus by reallocating funds to higher investing measures and larger strategic projects. All clusters have been engaging with my officials to bring forward potential strategic projects. I thank them for that, although I am concerned about the lack of progress in one area. This year, we have an underspend against the targets set by the clusters in their implementation plans. Therefore, it is important that we underpin the programme with those strategic projects to help to boost investments in rural areas and avoid funds having to be returned to Brussels. I encourage those of you in the House involved in JCCs and local action groups to ensure that as many strategic projects as possible are brought forward in conjunction with the reprioritisation of funds across measures.

As Minister, I must emphasise that I will take whatever action I deem necessary to ensure that axis 3 funds are invested in our rural communities and not handed back to Brussels. I have asked officials to draw up mechanisms for more robust financial monitoring, including options for clawback, redistribution of funds and other contingency measures. Be assured that I will do whatever I can to make sure that the money is invested in rural areas.

Mr McElduff: Is it the Department's intention to invest further funds in rural broadband provision rather than, as the Minister said, handing the money back? The Minister will know of my interest in securing proper broadband provision

for rural communities such as those in Greencastle and Broughderg in County Tyrone.

Mrs O'Neill: I am very aware of the Member's interests and know that he campaigns strongly for those rural areas. He is a great advocate for our rural community, is Barry McElduff.

It is my intention to continue to invest in rural broadband. It has been one of my key priorities for almost a year, so I want to continue to do that. I have already announced that £5 million under this current phase will be invested in work, and we will work on a programme with DETI. However, it has to be about targeting not-spots with lines of under two megabytes, because those are the areas most affected. There is no point putting the money into broadband if we cannot be sure that it is being targeted at rural areas. That is key in the time ahead.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister and the previous questioner referred to broadband, and I am more than aware of problems with that in my constituency. The Minister spoke about working with DETI to, I presume, deliver broadband. During recent discussions at joint committees, there was a bit of a grey area in respect of government bodies being able to apply for funding. Is the Minister happy that DETI could not, indeed, fulfil that duty if the £5 million was available?

Mrs O'Neill: I recently met Minister Foster to discuss the £5 million and how best it could be spent, and we tasked officials to look at that. As you say, the issue was raised with the JCCs and LAGs. I am interested in ensuring that the money is spent to best effect. That means making sure that it is spent in rural areas rather than just bolstering money already available for a broadband package.

I want to follow through on that, and I do not want to enter into any agreement and work with DETI if that is not going to be the case.

Mr Cree: It was decided at the very beginning of the year that axis 3 required a new focus to assist with the low level of spend. Will the Minister detail the final underspend against the local action groups' projections at the year end?

2.30 pm

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have that figure with me. I can tell you that, since the start of the axis 3 programme, the local action groups have committed a total of £38.7 million, but "committed" and "spent" are two different things. That is what we need to address. We need to address the letters of offer that are out there and try to get them processed and seen through until the end. There has been underspend across the board. Some areas are better at spending than others, and I want to work with each group to make sure that they maximise the spend and that we spend all this money to the best effect for the rural communities.

Waterways: Drainage

9. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many times in the last five years her Department has taken enforcement action in cases where structures were found to be unsound with the potential to block waterways in contravention of the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order 1973. (AQO 1728/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Drainage Order 1973 allows Rivers Agency to issue enforcement orders under schedule 5 and schedule 6. Over the past 5 years, my Rivers Agency has issued three enforcement notices in cases where structures were found to be unsound and have the potential to block waterways in contravention of the Drainage Order 1973.

Mr G Robinson: What penalties were imposed?

Mrs O'Neill: In relation to the cases that are subject to the three enforcement notices, I will write to the Member to update him on where they are sitting. As I said, three enforcement notices have been issued. I think that people were instructed to remove the blockage, but, if that has not been successful, I will write to the Member to let him know.

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 2, 9 and 12 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

Cookstown 100

1. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding her Department provides for the Cookstown 100 road races. (AQO 1735/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. My remit in relation to road racing, including the Cookstown 100, is to encourage the organisers to address public concerns about safety in the sport. As part of that process, my Department, through Sport NI and the 2&4 Wheel Motorsport Steering Group Ltd, provided £2 million during the period 2009 to 2011 to support safety improvements in motorsport, including road racing. The Cookstown 100 road races received almost £26,500 of that funding to assist with the safety works within the paddock area of the circuit.

Mr I McCrea: At a recent press launch for the Cookstown 100, it was announced that it costs approximately £85,000 to £90,000 to run the event each year. Will the Minister give an assurance that she will task her officials with working with the Cookstown 100 officials to try to ensure that measures are put in place to help them?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's (DCAL) responsibility is primarily around safety. I am not passing the buck to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), but it is going to sound like I am. In 2010, responsibility for events, including major sporting activities, was transferred to DETI, along with some of the budget for them. In fairness to DETI, and I have asked it for input in the answer to this question, Cookstown 100 has not applied to it or to the NITB events fund for any programme costs.

I appreciate that, as an active constituency representative, sometimes you are led to believe that things are one way when there are sometimes things in between. October is usually the time when event organisers apply to NITB for funding for events the following year. I think that the process has closed for this year, and I certainly expect organisers, or anyone else for that matter, to be talking to NITB about their plans for future years.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister may be aware that this year is the 90th anniversary of the Cookstown 100 road races. Having been a local representative on the council, I commend the organisers, sponsors, participants and volunteers for making it such a success over those years. Does the Minister recognise the benefits that the race brings to Cookstown and the wider local area through the attraction of visitors?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I recognise those benefits. Certain events, particularly big sporting events like the Cookstown 100, attract visitors from near and far. It is unfortunate that the organisers missed an opportunity to apply to the Tourist Board, which, to be fair, has been very willing to try to support local events. As I said in response to Mr McCrea, if people do not apply, money cannot be awarded, and the Tourist Board cannot be accused of not helping events organisers or areas to promote activities.

Mr Molloy: Will financial support be available to the organisers to implement the code of practice?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The code of practice should be in place. The season will start around 26 or 27 April. The organisers are very much aware that it is incumbent on them to have the code of practice in place before the season can commence. DCAL has provided over £2 million in the past two years to help motorsport to improve physical safety at venues. Any further financial implications arising from this or any other code of practice will be a matter for the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland to consider, along with race promoters. The issue is not additional money but managerial and procedural practices for events organisers. They are more than aware of the amount of money that my Department has committed to ensure better provision for sporting safety.

Salmon Fishing: Netsmen

3. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on her discussions with the netsmen. (AQO 1737/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Discussions between the Department and the coastal salmon netsmen have centred on finding a formula that respects the position of the netsmen and provides them with an opportunity to confirm their readiness to take voluntary action to conserve salmon, as I called for in January. To date, four of the six netsmen have provided the Department with a satisfactory undertaking not to fish for salmon in 2012, and they have been issued with licences. Discussions are ongoing with the two remaining netsmen with the aim of achieving an agreed voluntary cessation for the 2012 season.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for her answer. What will happen if no such agreement is reached, they start fishing and we face EU fines? What actions can she take in such a situation? Will she assure us that people being granted licences will not lead to infraction proceedings?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The four netsmen who received their licences gave assurances to the Department. The licences were awarded on the basis of those assurances. The same assurances have not come from the two remaining netsmen. If they do not give us the proper assurances, they will not get licences. Anyone found fishing for salmon will be

prosecuted. The Department will make sure that we do everything that we can to honour the EU habitats directive. That is very important, which is why we brought forward this proposal in January.

Mr Rogers: Does the Minister feel that she has done enough to conserve and protect salmon stocks by entering into voluntary agreements with the netsmen, who she says will not fish this year?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question and congratulate him on becoming a Member of the Assembly. I feel that the Department has done everything that it can to ensure that no one fishing is killing salmon. It is catch and release. The commercial netsmen have given us a guarantee that they will not fish for salmon, and their licences were awarded on that basis. If anyone has any evidence or information that that is not the case, it is incumbent on them to bring it to the Department and the relevant authorities.

Mr McMullan: On what will the Department consult in the forthcoming conservation consultation? When will that consultation begin?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The consultation is due to commence at the end of April. A paper will be forwarded to the Executive and notification of the consultation will go to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. The consultation should, therefore, start in May and last for at least 12 weeks. If we find that the consultation runs into a holiday period and is impeded by that, I am happy to extend it.

The consultation should be broad based and robust. People should have every opportunity to feed into it. It will look at options to ensure that we honour our responsibility with regard to wild Atlantic salmon. It could look at our conservation policy and limited or extended seasons. It could even look at the possibility of not catching salmon at all. Rather than predetermine what it may look at, the Department will bring forward a paper to the Executive and the Committee. It will then put it out for consultation.

As is the case in all consultations, even what is not in the paper will be consulted on. I am looking forward to that. The fishing community, in particular, has been very robust in letting the Department know what is right and wrong. I appreciate that. They are the people who know better than me or anyone else. I believe that we will receive helpful suggestions in that consultation. We need to ensure that they are taken on board and brought forward.

Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant

4. **Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on her Department's preparations to mark the centenary of the signing of the Ulster covenant. (AQO 1738/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In March, the Executive agreed that they would help to set an inclusive tone by putting in place an official acknowledgement process—*gabh mo leithscéal*—to mark the significant centenaries in the decade ahead. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I will bring forward jointly a programme that is based on the principles of an educational focus, reflection, inclusivity, tolerance, respect, responsibility and interdependence.

Work on developing that programme has begun. However, organisations that are supported by my Department have already been planning a diverse range of events and activities. For example, NI Screen is part-funding a documentary called 'The Covenant Trail' and intends to use its digital archive to deliver illustrated talks that reflect on the events of the period. The Public Records Office (PRONI) will deliver a lecture series that explores the decade of centenaries. PRONI will also revamp its Ulster covenant website. Libraries NI is planning an exhibition on the covenant and a series of talks in branches throughout the North. The Ulster Museum plans to extend the section in the 'Plantation to Power Sharing' gallery that deals with the home rule crisis, the Ulster covenant, the Great War, 1916, and partition. Those are just a few examples. There will be more events.

Mr S Anderson: I thank the Minister for her response. A convergence of those events in 2012, when we remember developments such as the signing of the Ulster covenant, which retained Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom, could bring Her Majesty The Queen to Northern Ireland. The Minister talked about tolerance and respect in her response. If we talk about tolerance and respect, will the Minister reverse her previous assertion that she would refuse to meet the Queen?

Mr Deputy Speaker: One question, please.

Mr S Anderson: I have one question. Will the Minister reverse her previous assertion that she would refuse to meet the Queen, particularly given the recent statement by her colleague Martin McGuinness that he would not rule out such a meeting?

Ms Ní Chuilín: That is a bit of a hypothetical question because I have not received any invitation. I consider each invitation that I receive on its merits. Therefore, with regard to what his party colleagues have agreed with my party colleagues on bringing forward a series of events that are based on non-triumphalism and mutual respect, I suggest that Mr Anderson talks to his party colleagues about future questions and approaches to the decade of centenaries. We all have a responsibility to ensure that they are recognised respectfully.

Mr Allister: The core theme of the covenant was the preservation of our cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom — something that the Minister is in office to destroy. Therefore, rather than peddle the fiction that, nonetheless, the Minister will supposedly celebrate the covenant, I ask her for an assurance that she and her party will not sully the centenary by imposing herself in some false spectacle of support?

2.45 pm

Ms Ní Chuilín: Unlike Jim Allister, I believe in the Irish proclamation, which cherishes all the children of the nation equally. I recently attended an event in Dublin at which Peter Robinson delivered a lecture on Carson and referred to the Ulster covenant, and I did not impose myself, I did not sit on anybody's knee, and I did not become a nuisance. I did so willingly, in a genuine and respectful way, and other Members of this House were also at that event. Therefore, if anybody is being silly and imposing themselves, it is you.

Mr McDevitt: The Minister outlined the principles that will guide her and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment's approach to marking and planning the centenaries. They were principles such as understanding, but the word "reconciliation" was not mentioned. I wonder what place the Minister and Ms Foster have placed on reconciliation in the context of the decade of centenaries and the centrality of reconciliation in remembrance.

Ms Ní Chuilín: The word was not missing deliberately, Conall. I just threw some sentiments out by way of example. There are huge opportunities for reconciliation, and I fully appreciate the point that the Member is making. Our approach — and when I say "our", I mean the Executive — is based on the principles that were set out by the Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund. Reconciliation is in the middle, in the centre, sideways, in between and underneath those principles. Therefore, by the Executive accepting those principles, DCAL's arm's-length bodies, or anybody else applying for funds that may become available as a result of commemorative events, have to do so on the basis of signing up to those principles.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the mature approach that the Minister and other Ministers in the Executive are taking on this issue. A number of significant centenaries are coming up, including the 100th anniversary of the formation of the Irish Volunteers next year. The Minister has talked about what she and the Enterprise Minister are looking at, but what are the Executive going to do to mark those centenaries?

Ms Ní Chuilín: There is a list, which is not exclusive, but, within the decade of centenaries, we are looking at: the Ulster covenant; the First World War, 1914-18; the Treaty of Versailles, 1919; Easter rising, 1916; the battle of the Somme, 1916; the rise of the labour movement and the Belfast strike, 1917; Lloyd George's convention, 1917-18; male and limited women's suffrage, 1918 — there are people out there who think that women were given full suffrage, which is a myth; the general election, 1919; the war of independence; and the civil war and partition.

Those are just some examples of the things that the Executive have agreed. Work on developing that programme has begun, but I am sure that there will be others. We hope to advance the programme very quickly, based on the principles that I have mentioned from the Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Líofa 2015

5. **Ms Ruane** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will revise the current targets for her Líofa 2015 initiative. (AQO 1739/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Since I launched Líofa in September 2011, I am pleased to announce that it has received very good support across the North. We reached the target of 1,000 people in December, and we have already surpassed that, as more than 1,700 people have now signed up. Therefore, we are now looking at a new target, which is 2,015 by 2015.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat. I congratulate the Minister and her Department on the work that has been done. Cá huair a mbeidh an comhairliúchán um straitéisí na Gaeilge agus Ullans ag tosú? When will the consultations on the strategies for the Irish language and Ulster Scots begin?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The initial paper will be brought to the Executive at the end of May, and it will go to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure for consultation thereafter. As I said to Roy Beggs, I am conscious that we are moving into the summer recess. Therefore, I will extend the consultation period to 12, 16 or even 20-plus weeks to make sure that everybody, particularly the two sectors, who needs to inform and shape the structure of the strategies that we are bringing forward has an opportunity to do so.

Mr Swann: I note you intend to increase your targets for your Líofa 2015 initiative. Is there an implication there that Foras na Gaeilge or the other Irish language promotional bodies are not completing their remit or meeting their targets and that, therefore, this needs to be carried out elsewhere in an initiative directly within a ministerial remit?

Ms Ní Chuilín: No, Líofa has no implications for Foras na Gaeilge. Líofa is just about trying to get more people to learn the Irish language. If anything, it supports the work that is already under way in those groups. People who want to go to classes will probably go to classes that are funded by Foras na Gaeilge, or maybe not. For example, I go to a class in the local GAA club that does not receive any funding from anyone except itself. I go there because it is handy to me, and it has an excellent tutor. It is not to undermine any work that is being done by Foras or any other Irish language groups.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for her answer so far. Given that the project will conclude in 2015, can the Minister advise the House of what the cost of the project will be to the Northern Ireland exchequer between now and 2015?

Ms Ní Chuilín: You are probably talking in the region of, so far, £30,000, and that includes the recruitment of a development worker to roll out the Líofa programme. The initial costs of the launch were just over £2,000. I believe that those costs are very modest, considering what has been achieved. We will bring forward a better sense of what it will cost by 2015. It includes promotional events that have not been costed for. Ideas about how this can be done are coming from everybody, and they are all very good and very positive. However, as the Member and everyone else in the House knows, Irish language activists are taxpayers too, and they are entitled to a service, and I am going to make sure that they have it.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra a thug sí ar an cheist go dtí seo. Agus caithfidh mé a rá go bhfáiltím roimh an scéim seo, Líofa. Ach tuigfidh an tAire go raibh Gaeilgeoirí ag súil le beart i bhfad níos cuimsithí ná an scéim áirithe seo: le fírinne, le hAcht Gaeilge a bheith ann faoin am seo. Agus seo muid tar éis bliana gan tasc ná tuairisc air. An féidir leis an Aire a rá cén uair a fheicfidh muid a cuid moltaí ar an ábhar?

I welcome the Líofa scheme, but the Minister will understand that Irish speakers were expecting a much more comprehensive approach to the language than that particular scheme. Indeed, they were expecting something in the form of an Irish language Act. Here we are, after more than a year of the Minister in office, without any sign of that Act. Will the Minister tell us when she will bring forward her proposals on the Irish language Act?

May I take the opportunity to congratulate Raidió na Gaeltachta —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I think we have one question there.

Mr D Bradley: — on achieving 40 years of Irish language broadcasting in this country?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question and for speaking in Irish. It is helpful for me as a Líofa learner to hear people speaking in Irish and to try to pick some of the things up. Tá Gaeilge dheas agat. You have beautiful Irish.

I have not met anybody who signed up for or joined Líofa in conjunction with Acht na Gaeilge. I think that the Member has been very clever in wedging those in to make a point. At the end of the day, are people asking for Acht na Gaeilge? Yes, they are. They are absolutely asking for it. I expect the Member, along with other colleagues, to try to convince those who are yet to be convinced that an Irish language Act is a good thing. Rather than him asking me each month what I am doing about Acht na Gaeilge, I need cross-party support for it.

Mr D Bradley: I do support it.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I know that you are cross at times, but I assumed your support; I took your support for granted. We need to talk to people here who are yet to be convinced of the merits of an Irish language Act. I look forward to your endeavours, along with our endeavours, to see how you are going to do that.

One thing that does surprise me though — and maybe you are not aware of this, Dominic — is that your party did not raise Acht na Gaeilge once during negotiations on the Programme for Government.

Entertainment Events: North Down

6. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of North Down Borough Council's recent decision to permit in north Down only acts which can be broadcast on mainstream media. (AQO 1740/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I understand that North Down Borough Council's decision to permit only acts that can be broadcast on mainstream media relates to Ward Park and not to other areas of Bangor. The decision, however, is a matter for the council. My Department does not directly fund events at Ward Park. Funding in support of the arts is disbursed through the Arts Council, and administration of community festivals' funding is devolved to councils. Both operate competitive schemes, and applications are determined on the basis of merit.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for her response. The council's proposed policy goes further by targeting acts aimed at those aged over 25, in order to — in its words — avoid antisocial behaviour. Does the Minister agree that it is important that we include our young people in cultural events, in particular? Our youth often has little voice or input to society. For a council proactively to prohibit young people from engaging in events that it puts on is counter to a lot of the work that her Department is trying to do.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Absolutely. Aontaím go hiomlán. I totally agree with you. You are a member of the council. Councils

have a section 75 responsibility, which includes children and young people. All being well, children and young people will become ratepayers and taxpayers. Even forby that, they are entitled to services. The community festivals fund is administered by councils. They have to try their best to make sure that all the citizens of each borough get a service. If the Member wishes, he should ask for the Arts Council to meet the council to see how that is not the case. I support the Member's sentiments that children and young people are entitled to facilities in North Down just as they are anywhere else.

Mrs McKeivitt: Last year's performance by Eminem in Bangor brought great benefits to the local economy. Under the new decision, such acts will not be able to perform in north Down. Is the Minister concerned about the impact that the decision could have on the potential to grow the local economy?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I confess that I had to think who Eminem is. I am showing my age. I was thinking that it was M&Ms — chocolate or peanut M&Ms — but I know who he is.

Part of the issue is that young people spend money when they go to events. They spend money in the amenities. Why it did not have Eminem back is a matter for the council. It sounds like a missed opportunity. I have children who are young enough to travel into other areas, and I have gone to north Down for concerts. It seems as though there is a bit of censorship going on in the North Down Borough Council area. It is up to the Members from that area to sort that out.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Ms Jennifer McCann is not in her place.

2012 Olympics: Training

8. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many countries have confirmed their use of training facilities in Northern Ireland in preparation for the Olympics. (AQO 1742/11-15)

10. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the Olympic training camps being held in Northern Ireland. (AQO 1744/11-15)

13. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the preparations for Olympic teams using Northern Ireland for training. (AQO 1747/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 8, 10 and 13 together.

To date, there are nine pre-games training camps confirmed for here. The Olympic teams are the Chinese men's and ladies' artistic gymnastics team —

Mr Bell: At Salto.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Yes, your constituency, Jonathan. From a sedentary position, I hear you.

There is also the Cuban boxing team — yo ho — the Australian boxing team, the Kuwaiti athletics team, the Sudanese athletics team, the Egyptian athletics team and the Qatari athletics team. So far, the Paralympic teams coming are the Irish Paralympic team and the Jordanian Paralympic team. In addition to the nine teams that we have secured so far, negotiations are still under way, even at this

late stage, with other nations about securing pre-games training here.

Mr Easton: Does the Minister agree that the Olympic Games has great potential, with teams coming here, to bring great economic benefits to Northern Ireland? Will she assure us that she will continue to chase other teams to try to bring them to Northern Ireland?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Yes; I absolutely agree that there is huge potential. Even in the past week, the Chinese Government visited here. Our local media might not have been impressed because they did not get the access that they hoped that they would. However, I know that, when the Chinese gymnasts train at the Salto gym in Lisburn, we will have a lot of media from China, whose coverage will go into billions of people's homes around the world.

The Chinese team is number one in the world in its gymnastics field. That alone will bring huge benefits to the North, particularly the Lisburn area, even for people filming the activities at Salto. Between us, DETI and the rest of the Executive, that is the sort of initiative that we are trying to encourage with other countries, even at this late stage, because it will have a benefit.

Mr Hilditch: I welcome the Minister's comments. Could she indicate whether the level of sporting infrastructure was acceptable to interested countries and participants or whether that was an area that, at times, proved detrimental to attracting teams? Are we getting any feedback on that?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have just talked about the teams that we attracted. The Chinese team is number one, and the Cuban boxers are number one. They were more than happy with the facilities here. In fact, they were very, very impressed. They were impressed not just with the facilities but with the professionalism behind Salto and the boxing clubs in west Belfast. These people come with a worldwide reputation. I think that sometimes we do not have a strong appreciation of what we have here. However, facilities are not an obstacle to countries coming here.

3.00 pm

Mr S Anderson: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. For clarification for me and others in the House, was it in order for Mr Bradley to speak in two languages and to take the time that he did to ask a question?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The answer to that question is yes. It would be helpful if other Members remained quiet during Question Time. I had great difficulty trying to listen to Members speaking while others insisted on having conversations. I hope that that message gets around the Chamber.

I ask Members to take their ease for a moment, please.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Assembly Business

Mr Speaker: Order. Before we go back to the business that we left behind before Question Time, I want to address a matter that was raised by Mr Alban Maginness regarding remarks made by the Health Minister on Monday 26 March.

I reviewed the Official Report and footage of the proceedings in question upon my return from Kosovo. I spoke to the Minister directly and then wrote to him, the Alliance Party's Chief Whip and the Member who initially raised the point of order. I believe that the language used did fall short of the standards that I expect, and I asked the Minister to apologise. I convened a meeting in my office at 2.30 pm today, to which the Minister had indicated he was prepared to come and apologise to the Member. However, the Member, Mr McCarthy, was unwilling to attend to receive and accept the apology — *[Interruption.]*

Order. Standing Orders are clear: the Speaker's ruling is final.

Let me also say that I am not happy with how other Members have dealt with this issue. If something is referred to the Speaker, Members should leave it until the Speaker has dealt with it. What Members should not do is refer something to the Speaker and then go to the press, almost trying to second-guess what the Speaker's ruling on the issue might be.

I therefore consider the matter closed. The Minister agreed with my ruling and agreed to apologise at a meeting in my office with the Member. That is where the issue is settled. As far as I am concerned, the matter is now closed.

Private Member's Business

Kinship Care

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes and welcomes the growth of kinship care and acknowledges the valuable role it plays in providing care for the many children who cannot be raised by their parents; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to note the excellent and often invisible contribution made by kinship carers, to identify a number of key priorities and actions for their support and to consider amending the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 in support of kinship carers. — [Miss M McIlveen.]

Mr McCallister: I thank Michelle McIlveen for proposing the debate on kinship care. I also pay tribute to the work that she has done over the past number of years to highlight issues around children and young people who go missing from the care system. This is an important issue, and I welcome the debate. I have worked with her in the past to see how we can achieve better statistics and follow-up action on this issue. It is important to keep chipping away at it and to see how we can improve the outcomes for children.

As colleagues have said, our primary focus should always be on outcomes for children. We want the best outcomes for children and young people who enter into an arrangement, whether formal or informal, in kinship care, foster care or the care of the state. Those children are often at a very difficult stage of their lives. I will be interested, if Miss McIlveen introduces a private Member's Bill, to see what it contains. I look forward to it coming before the Health Committee so that we can scrutinise it and see what value we can add to it.

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

There are statistics on children going missing, and one thing that alarmed me when the Committee had a presentation from Kinship Care recently, was the number of children that can fall out of the system, particularly if the kinship care arrangement is informal. Although you would hope those numbers are very small, there is a risk of some children falling between two stools. That is a worrying aspect of any part of the provision of care for our children and young people. I am interested to hear whether the Minister will mention any better ways of keeping a closer eye on how we can manage that. We must make sure that children are not falling between those stools and possibly being placed in danger.

I pay tribute to those involved in kinship care for promoting the concept. The issue has really moved up the political agenda over the past year as a worthwhile way of dealing with and helping to secure good outcomes for children and young people. Many in this House will have seen it on an informal and possibly on a formal basis. The fact that it works well has been recognised.

We should support kinship care, and, as colleagues have mentioned, we should support it not only through our words in this House but through our actions, and through financial support to families. Ms Ramsey, in her contribution as a Sinn Féin Member and as Chair of the Committee, talked about the possibility of grandparents picking up that role,

some of whom may be on little more than a state pension. Although they would not want to see children turned away or be unable to fulfil that role, they might find it very difficult financially. We should and must take our duty seriously in providing that financial support.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he accept that, at times, the Department or social services may take advantage of the love that those families have for those children in the family circle? Those families would not want the children to be given up to the wider care system, and would look after them even though they do not have the financial support or remuneration to do so.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McCallister: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. My colleague makes an excellent point. As Mr Elliott and Ms Ramsey said, no one would want to turn away a child, so of course they make the sacrifices that the Member talks about. That is why it is incumbent on the House to make sure that financial arrangements are put in place to make support available and to do what we can to support the system and carers. Very often, the care given to children and young children who are kept in the family circle provides excellent outcomes. We should all cherish that and want to keep it going. We have to make financial resources available to ensure that that happens and that when it happens, it is supported and works well.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the motion tabled by Michelle McIlveen, and I wish her well on her trek towards her private Member's Bill. I sincerely hope that the Department, if not taking the lead in producing legislation, fully co-operates with her. The legislation will be hugely important in providing kinship carers with some equality and protection.

Like the mover of the motion, I want to thank Jacqueline Williamson and a number of other kinship carers who have taken the lead and championed the cause for a short time. Thankfully, those people were prepared to take the lead. They came at it with an array of experience, but they also struggled with it greatly. The Minister is coming into the Chamber now. I certainly hope that, at some stage, Kinship Care Northern Ireland will get more capacity and that his Department will find a way to provide money to enable it to deliver its programme. Awareness and the availability of information are important, because, in many respects, kinship carers become parents when they take on that role. So they need access to information, and I make a direct appeal to the Minister to ensure that that is provided.

Today, I want to draw attention to the relatives and friends of children who are collectively known as kinship carers and take responsibility for raising someone else's child. The research paper on kinship care that we received states that there are between 8,000 and 10,000 unrecognised kinship carers. The mover of the motion pointed out the importance of having adequate research so that we know exactly how many formal and informal kinship carers there are across Northern Ireland. Once we have that research, the Department can look at the outcomes of children in kinship care compared with those of children in other caring environments. Hopefully, the Minister will also take that on board.

The research paper also identifies that most families involved in informal kinship care are not supported and are,

therefore, experiencing huge financial difficulties, as many Members said. We need to find a way of remedying that. The paper refers to a study that shows that the work of many kinship carers goes unrecognised and unsupported and that kinship families are more likely to experience poverty. That sets off alarm bells with us all, especially when we are trying to provide equality and an environment in which children are not caught in the poverty trap. The consequence to a family's lifestyle of adding a child can clearly be financially detrimental, because there is an extra person to feed, clothe and care for. One more child may not sound like a great deal to a lot of people, but the commitment required by those who have not had the experience of raising a child can be onerous and daunting. For those who have had the wonderful opportunity of raising children, it can be a gift, but it can also be a financial burden and a test of mental strength for the people involved.

The hurdles faced by kinship care families are tremendous because of the lack of Executive support. Under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, a private agreement between birth parents and relatives or friends does not require legal notification to social services. There is no pressure from the Executive to make that process legal. However, there is a sense of fear, and that keeps families from applying to become formal kinship carers. It is a fear of being denied the opportunity to take care of a very close family member because the trust deems that a caregiver does not have the appropriate accommodation or, importantly, the appropriate welfare. There is no room to account for the love, affection, effort, compassion and security that kinship carers give and share with the children whom they look after.

3.15 pm

The revision of the 1995 Order to include assistance for informal kinship care is important and absolutely essential. It is important that the Minister makes a commitment to ensuring that there is equality and recognises the need for a public awareness campaign across Northern Ireland aimed at families and professionals, backed with an advice and information line to support kinship carers at a time of crisis.

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

Mr P Ramsey: It is important that Kinship Care Northern Ireland has the capacity to go forward, for which it needs funding.

Mr McCarthy: I wish to put on record my thanks to Michelle McIlveen and Mr Wells for bringing this important topic to the Floor of the House. It has been said many times that our children are our biggest asset, and of course they are. Our future depends on the generations to come, so it is imperative that we, in this generation, do our utmost to nurture, encourage, rear, educate and love all our children to the best of our ability, from the moment that they come onto this earth.

Human nature dictates that the parents of our children have a duty to bring them up in a comfortable and loving home. Unfortunately, for one reason or another, that simply does not always happen, and because we live in a society, thankfully, in which our Government take their responsibility for safeguarding our children very seriously, measures are taken so that our social care services ensure that those vulnerable children are looked after.

We are all very aware of fostering, adoption and children's homes, all of which provide excellent services. Recently, the service of kinship carers has been brought to the fore, and of course we acknowledge the excellent work of friends and relations when a young member of their family requires a loving and stable home environment in which to grow up.

The motion is worthy of support. It asks the Minister:

"to note the excellent ... contribution made by kinship carers"

and

"to identify ... key priorities and actions for their support"

so that this sometimes invisible work can be recognised, and we can help to continue this valuable service.

As a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I welcomed the opportunity on 22 February 2012 to hear about the work, dedication, hopes and aspirations of Kinship Care Northern Ireland, presented by Jacqueline Williamson, who was accompanied by Kevin Wright. That presentation made a clear distinction between formal and informal kinship care. As they saw it, when children and parents have difficulties, kinship care was or should be the first option, if at all possible, for children, simply because, as Ms Williamson said, children in kinship care:

"maintain an important sense of identity and belonging"

and

"have greater placement stability because they live with people whom they already know".

She went on to say:

"Kinship care is also an effective form of early intervention because it avoids the need to place children in the formal care system."

However, it seems very unfair that youngsters who are looked after in an informal setting find it much more difficult to receive sufficient support for this vital assistance. Kinship care represents a cost-effective way to help and support youngsters who might otherwise end up in residential care or other institutions, costing, I understand, anything up to £2,000 a week.

It is vital that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the trusts listen to the voices of ordinary people. It seems to me that Kinship Care Northern Ireland has the knowledge and experience to do just that. Its main aim is to improve outcomes and life chances for children who are unable to live with their own parents. It wishes to see kinship placements have a better chance of success, and it envisages a cross-departmental working group that includes external experts, including voluntary sector organisations, to produce an integrated and coherent kinship care strategy.

What is required is a statutory framework that places a statutory duty on all health trusts to provide children who are being raised by family and friends and their carers with proper support in relation to contact, access to respite, mediation and therapeutic support, as well as specialist counselling, advice, training and information services. The

least that our authorities can do is listen to the experiences of children and their peers and work together to ensure a better and brighter future for all of our youngsters who, unfortunately, find themselves in these difficult situations. On behalf of the Alliance party, I fully support the motion.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to support the motion, and I commend my party colleagues for bringing this important issue to the Assembly. Kinship care plays a very important and special role in Northern Ireland. It often goes unnoticed just how great a sacrifice and dedicated service kinship carers provide daily in supporting vulnerable children and young people who rely on kinship carers to meet their daily needs. Kinship carers themselves are often among the most vulnerable and often make great personal and financial sacrifices to provide care for those children who rely on the love, care and support that those dedicated carers so freely give.

The benefits of kinship care for the child are wide-ranging and cannot be bought. They may often only be realised by children in later years. It is the preferred choice of the vast majority of children and young people who, for one reason or another, are not able to live with their natural parents. We need to do all that we can to give these carers the necessary support that they deserve. Kinship carers should not be disadvantaged in comparison with foster carers in the support that they receive. It is a very difficult and challenging job and one that merits suitable government help and support. Children in kinship care can often have a wide range of challenging and difficult needs due to a very disruptive and sometimes traumatic upbringing during their early years.

As well as the obvious benefits to the child, kinship care also helps to reduce the need for a child to be placed in residential care. Residential care is more expensive and often has poorer outcomes for the child compared with a child in a kinship care arrangement. I commend the work of Kinship Care Northern Ireland, which helps to support and improve the lives for kinship carers and children. I was most impressed with the work of that organisation during a briefing to the Health Committee last December.

One practical avenue that could be further explored is the campaigns to improve public awareness on the level of support that are on offer to kinship carers and on education around accessing support. Public awareness campaigns are often cost-effective and can bring long-lasting benefits on many issues. Given that numbers are growing and that more children are now living in kinship care than in foster care and residential care combined, this is now estimated to affect between 8,000 and 10,000 children in Northern Ireland. Now is the time to put in place the right infrastructure to support and develop the role of kinship carers and ultimately ensure the best outcomes for children. I support the motion.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. Until relatively recently, I was not familiar with the term "kinship care". The Health Committee, of which I am a member, has had a number of presentations on kinship care. It is coming more to the forefront. Part of the reason why it is not that widely known, is that there no legislative definition of a kinship foster carer, formal or otherwise. The term "formal kinship care" has been coined by the Department to describe an arrangement

involving a child who is a looked-after child under the Children Order 1995 and who is placed with a kinship foster carer. I think that it stated that the use of the term was deemed necessary in response to a number of Assembly questions for the purpose of clearly distinguishing between a looked-after child arrangement made with the approval and agreement of a health and social care trust and other kinship care arrangements established within and by a family outside of a looked-after child arrangement. It really describes an arrangement where a child lives with and is cared for by relatives and/or family friends. Here, kinship care is divided into informal kinship care and formal kinship care, or kinship foster care, where the state, in the form of social services, is responsible for the care and upbringing of a child, and, where a decision is made for the child to be formally looked after by social services, the child can be placed with relatives or family friends. That is formal kinship care.

A number of statistics have already been mentioned, and, interestingly, children here in the North are living with relatives. Almost one third of children are living with relatives and family friends, and, between 2009 and 2011, the number of looked-after children in kinship care increased by 53%. That obviously needs to be addressed urgently. The statistics show that, in the North, we have the highest prevalence of sibling kinship care, with 49% of children being raised by an older brother or sister. It is stated that children in formal kinship care arrangements are satisfied with the standard of care that they receive from relatives and friends, and, most tellingly, many kinship carers live in poverty. That needs to be addressed.

In 2001, an English court ruled in favour of relative foster carers who are not being paid the same rate towards the cost of caring for a child by their local authority as non-kinship foster carers. That became known as the Munby judgement, which ruled that a local authority policy that financially discriminated against foster carers who are related to the children they foster was unlawful, and more recent cases in England and Wales have ruled in favour of kinship grandparents, who won cases against the local authorities for not providing remuneration equivalent to that provided for traditional foster carers.

The Minister, in response to an Assembly question, said that the HSC board has indicated that while there are no direct measures in place to monitor the Munby judgement, all five trusts have indicated that they are compliant with that judgement. He said that specific funding has not been allocated to enforce the judgement in the past three years; rather, trusts are required to deliver all their legislative responsibilities from within their overall financial envelope. The difficulty is, of course, that there is no legislative framework for kinship care, and Michelle McIlveen mentioned bringing forward a private Member's Bill to put that in place, because, at the moment, it seems to be a very ad hoc arrangement by the trusts. That needs to be addressed, and I ask the Minister to look at that.

There should be an awareness campaign on kinship care aimed at families and professionals and backed with an advice and information line to support kinship carers at the time of crisis. A lot of these situations arise at a time of crisis, and research is needed to evidence the current level of provision of formal and informal kinship care here in the North, to assess outcomes for children in kinship care compared with those in other care provision and to take into

account the additional difficulties faced by formal kinship carers. I ask the Minister to look at the current legislation and to amend it to enable kinship carers to deal with the practical realities of bringing up a child and to ensure that proper remuneration is made available. I support the motion.

Ms Brown: I support the motion proposed by my colleagues. Kinship care allows children who can no longer live with their birth parents for whatever reason to live with other family members or friends instead of having to be placed into the care of a foster care family or children's home. There are two types of kinship care: formal and informal. Formal kinship care involves social services, whereby the health and social care trust acts in accordance with the law. Informal care is the care of children by family without the involvement of social services and is more likely to happen in circumstances where there are no child protection issues.

The safety of children unable to live with their birth parents is paramount, and, although many of those children are unable to live with their birth parents for a variety of reasons, social services are most likely to become involved in cases where children are at risk of abuse or neglect. The make-up and circumstances surrounding family units differ, and I suspect that there are many children who are cared for by other members of the family whom we do not know about. Those children, therefore, do not show up in the official statistics.

3.30 pm

It is generally conceded that the outcomes for children who live and grow up in an established family unit with people they know are better than those for children who go to live with unrelated foster parents or in a children's home. I therefore support kinship care where at all possible and believe that social services should ensure that all possibilities for trying to place a child with another family member or friend are exhausted before other options are considered.

I pay tribute to the families who offer up their homes and lives for fostering. I know that, in the previous mandate, the issue of foster care was discussed, and the fact that the number of foster carers is in decline was raised. That places an onus on every health and social care trust to look at placing a child with another family member or friend with whom the child is familiar.

At a presentation to the Health Committee earlier this year, a representative of Kinship Care Northern Ireland gave evidence. It was stated that just under one third of children in foster care are placed with other family members or relatives. That number was found to be increasing, with the number of looked-after children placed with family or friends going up by 53% between 2009 and 2011. Kinship care is therefore on the increase and is more popular than it was.

Although I believe that social services have the best interests of the child at heart, as laid out in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, the state is sometimes overwhelmed by bureaucracy in such cases, with the best options prioritised under procedures. For that reason, I believe that kinship care must be allowed for and prioritised in legislation and potential changes must be investigated to provide a child with a home in a settled, comfortable and, most important, safe home environment. I therefore support the motion.

Mr Gardiner: Of 2,500 young people in care in Northern Ireland at any one time, 76% are in foster care, and, of those, 30% are in kinship care. Of the 1,700 individual foster carers in Northern Ireland, there are 450 kinship carers who care for 717 children and young people.

Formal kinship care increased by 53% between 2009 and 2011. A major study published in 2011 by the Buttle Trust and the University of Bristol revealed for the first time the number of children being brought up by a relative other than their mother or father. That research was based on the 2001 census and showed that over 170,000 children across the United Kingdom were being raised by other family members because their parents were unable to care for them. That equates to one in every 77 children. The report's authors believe that that figure will have increased significantly in the past 10 years.

The study found that more than 90% of kinship care arrangements in each region were informal agreements between parents and relatives, and carers were, therefore, not entitled to financial support from social services: an invisible population who have little contact with social services. The report shines a light, for the first time, on that hidden group, who play a critical role in raising a generation of children and young people with little assistance, financial or otherwise. Even in economically difficult times, we owe it to those families to give them the support they need.

Kinship care is a positive solution for many children, and it is vital that we plan for their needs to improve their life chances. The study revealed that in Northern Ireland half of all kinship care children were being brought up by a sibling, as opposed to another generation of the family. It also found that, in each region of the United Kingdom, one in five sibling-headed households was overcrowded, with more than one person per room. If the Government are to meet their target to reduce child poverty, children in kinship care must be recognised as a group with specific needs. That is why I support the motion and wish it well.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I join colleagues in the House in thanking Michelle McIlveen for tabling this important motion. I am pleased that the Minister is here to hear most of what has been said, because this issue needs to be taken seriously by him and by the Health Department. I am delighted to participate in the debate. I also thank people such as Jacqueline Williamson who have brought kinship care to our attention. As the Chair of the Health Committee said, we had a successful informal meeting followed up by a formal meeting with the Health Committee, which I, unfortunately, was not able to be at.

Rather than repeat what has been said — I cannot disagree with anything that any Member has said in the House today — I would like to make a few observations of my own. People talked about a child being able to stay in their own area, but one of the points not raised is that in rural areas that can make the difference in whether or not they are able to stay at their own school. A foster care place may only be available 10 or 15 miles away in a rural area. If kinship arrangements cannot be put in place to facilitate a child staying in their local area, taking that child not only out of the community and away from the people that they love but out of the school that they have been attending is a further blow. That is just one point that has not been made that

needs to be highlighted as we try to create as much stability and continuity for children during a trauma, whether it is a bereavement, marital break-up, illness or the consequence of drug and alcohol abuse. I would say that not one of us, as constituency representatives, is unaware of the fact that drug and alcohol abuse can lead to children being displaced and taken away from their home and family. There are a myriad of reasons why children may need to be taken into care or looked after, to which, I believe, there is one very practical, pragmatic and sensible solution.

The poverty issues that many Members have raised are real and tangible. Like a lot of parents, you sometimes think about worst-case scenarios and ask "What if?". Coming back from a function late at night, my husband and I may think, "What if you are hit by a drunk driver? What if you have an accident? What if we are not able to raise our children? Who will pick up the pieces and give those children a stable home?". I have three wee ones, the youngest only three. My family and my husband's family would obviously want to rally round and help, but it is a big undertaking for anybody to take in three children and to clothe, feed and look after them for 15, 16 or more years. In many scenarios in many homes, that would create real problems of poverty and deprivation for those children. The fact that families cannot access even basic rights, such as family allowance, if the proper arrangements are not in place, can lead to huge poverty for those children. That is a very serious issue that needs to be addressed.

I recall a conversation that I had with the Minister one evening before Christmas. We were talking about other things — I think that it was the night before the Compton review came out. We talked about looked-after children and the number of children in foster care. I said to the Minister that evening, "Two words, Minister: kinship care." I felt that that was the solution that would work for everybody and, most importantly, for the children. I noticed that Michelle's opening comments were that the children were the number one priority, and that is very true. We have fabulous foster carers. Families have adopted children and given them a loving home, but kinship care is the best way forward for looking after such children, whether the arrangement is temporary or permanent. I do not want to break confidences by repeating what was said that evening, but, if there is a feeling in the Department that people would cynically use the issue to get money that they were not entitled to, I do not feel that that is the most helpful way of dealing with the issue.

There are many ways that families can be traumatised —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to bring her remarks to a close.

Ms Gildernew: There are many ways that families can be traumatised, and they would not put children into foster care if it could be helped. The Minister could take an approach through the public awareness campaign, the research and the current legislation — the Children Order — which should be amended to deal —

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

Ms Gildernew: — with this issue. Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

Ms P Bradley: I thank my party colleagues for bringing forward the motion, which I support. Historically in Northern Ireland, there have been few families where kinship care has

not happened in some guise. Research has indicated that children's first choice of placement would be to be cared for by another family member or a close friend. The reasons why children may have to live apart from their parents can be varied and complex. Ms Gildernew touched on it, but it is worth noting that 80% of care orders in Northern Ireland are due to drug or alcohol misuse. That is a very worrying statistic. Ultimately, regardless of the reasons, a child having to live elsewhere is an unsettling experience. Therefore, common sense suggests that, where possible, the first option should be to place a child or young person in a setting with which they are familiar.

Kinship care can be a positive experience for all involved, although there are limited resources that the carers can access. Often, the carers in informal arrangements receive very little, if any, financial assistance, which, in turn, can lead children into poverty. We already know that outcomes for children who live in poverty are lower than those for children who do not. Why many are reluctant to inform the necessary authorities of their informal arrangements needs to be understood and addressed. It can be as simple as the arrangements being temporary while a parent is ill, or it could happen through fear either of authorities or removal of the child due to family circumstances, such as the involvement of an elderly relative, which was touched on earlier. Often, that fear is through misconceptions of the role of social services. We must ensure that people know what they can expect and what the role of social services is.

There are no statistics to suggest that informal arrangements go wrong more often than formal kinship arrangements or other types of fostering arrangements. We must ensure that no stigma is attached to that vital service that families provide. We must be satisfied that we, as elected Members, ensure that all vulnerable people, including carers and those who are cared for, are adequately protected. Children in informal arrangements are there for the same reasons as those in the formal structures. They need access to the same resources and services as formal arrangements have. The carers have the same financial and family pressures and personal issues, and they also need to be helped and supported. We must ensure that the arrangements for those who are placed informally are not seen as second class simply because the family does not, for whatever reasons, wish to invoke a formal arrangement. The reasons for that can be varied. I support calls for that important service, formal and informal, to be recognised and for more information to be made available to the public about kinship care and how it can be formalised. I also support calls for people in informal arrangements to have the same access to support services as those in formalised arrangements.

Kinship care, in the right circumstances, is an invaluable resource. It has the potential to reduce the number of children in care. With the number of registered foster carers falling, it can ensure that children and young people do not have to enter the care system. That has a dramatic saving for our society, but, more importantly, it can provide positive outcomes for families and our communities.

3.45 pm

Mrs Hale: I also welcome the opportunity to speak on my colleagues' motion. As Members, we all have a duty to ensure that children who are unable to live with their parents

due to a variety of life-changing circumstances can be cared for in the best possible way, while ensuring that their voice is at the centre of all decision-making. It is vital that the Assembly and wider society recognise the vital contribution that kinship carers make to the lives of children and young people who cannot be raised by their parents. Indeed, their role in society not only dramatically lowers the costs associated with looked-after children but provides a stable and caring environment for children and young people who cannot remain in their family home.

I spent three and a half years working in a residential unit, looking after children who were placed there on full care orders, so I have an insight into how young people view themselves, their families and the childcare provision provided by the state. With the shortage of available foster care homes, coupled with the view that children in kinship care are more likely to attain better educational results and less likely to become involved in crime, it is vital that we do all in our power to support relatives and friends who are able to offer a caring home at a time of great need and emotional distress. It is a testament to kinship carers that, of the 2,500 children and young people living with foster carers today, approximately 30% are in kinship care. There are large numbers of unseen friends and relatives who have never received any recognition from statutory authorities for the role that they play in children's everyday lives. They offer stability and continuity at a time of uncertainty and great emotional upheaval.

I welcome the fact that my colleague Minister Poots and his Department are in the process of finalising kinship care standards and arrangement services and the training, guidance and support procedures that need to be in place to help to meet the needs of kinship carers and the children they care for. I believe that will greatly enhance the support available to kinship carers and recognise the important role that they play in our society.

Going forward, it is vitally important that key points and issues are addressed to ensure that kinship carers feel equally supported and that the culture of misinformed perceptions and fears associated with becoming a formalised kinship carer are challenged. This must be needs-led. Issues and priorities that should be addressed include kinship carers being represented on fostering panels in a lay or non-professional capacity and the experience of kinship carers and their children being reviewed as part of a statutory review process. We need to ensure that no kinship carer, either a relative or a friend, is put at a financial disadvantage. We should be aware of issues of poverty among children in formal and informal kinship care situations, give those full consideration and address them in a child poverty strategy for Northern Ireland. We need to look at how we can close the gap in educational success by increasing access and equity to children in kinship care so that they can have every success in life.

One area that I am slightly cautious about in informal kinship care is that there is no legal requirement to inform or notify social services of any voluntary arrangements for children. I have slight concerns that informal kinship care may face some difficulties in relation to child protection and safeguarding issues and that social services would be unaware of children and young people who may be subject to trauma or difficulties in their life. It is widely accepted that, often, problems that separate children and parents are

endemic in the wider family structure, and informal kinship care in those cases would not be in the best interests of the child or young person. Although I am sure that regulations and processes such as inspections and reviews may seem unpopular and excessively bureaucratic, they are vital in ensuring that children and young people are safeguarded and protected from adverse risk.

If barriers and fear exist that prevent carers from coming forward, they should be challenged. If grandparents fear that a child or young person will be taken away by social services due to their age, financial standing or health, we need to challenge that cultural stigma. We also must ensure that we educate people in how the formalised process works and remove any perceived and actual barriers, so that they may be encouraged to come forward.

I make no apology for taking the view that children and young people who find themselves in this position need to have the best possible care and support available to them. The voice of children and young people should be at the centre of all decision-making, and it is clear from consultations with children and young people that there is an indication of a preferred option, which is to be cared for by other family members or close friends.

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

Mrs Hale: I welcome the debate and support my colleagues Michelle McIlveen and Jim Wells on their motion.

Mr McClarty: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to take part in the debate.

Although kinship care is a relatively new term, the concept is very much older. It is not uncommon now, or indeed in generations past, for grandparents or older siblings, for example, to assume the role of a parent to a child whose own parents, for whatever reason, were unable to fulfil that obligation. That does not make the role any less important; on the contrary, kinship care plays a valuable role in providing care for many children who are unable to live with their parents, whether in the short or long term.

It is also important to point out that kinship care can occur in circumstances as simple as those of a parent falling ill, with grandparents assuming care. It is not always a reaction to extreme and difficult situations. I appreciate the fact that the Department is working on a strategy to address the issues surrounding kinship care, but to date there is limited research. I urge the Department and the Assembly to explore kinship care extensively. We have an obligation to acknowledge and support the valuable contribution of kinship carers in our community.

There are several reasons why kinship care is the preferred option, but the welfare of a child should always be central to the debate. That is not to say that other reasons are not valid and should not be taken into account. Savings to the public purse are significant. The financial aid provided to kinship carers by the state is substantially less than, for example, that to children in residential care. Kinship care also eases the pressure to find suitable foster parents, of whom there is a shortfall.

I go back to the linchpin of the debate, which is the welfare of a child. Of course, kinship care will not be for everyone,

and in some situations it suits that a child be placed elsewhere. Everyone accepts that individual needs will be assessed and the right outcome put in place for specific circumstances. However, in cases in which there is an option, kinship care should be prioritised, and I support the motion for the Department to consider amending the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 to ensure that.

It is important to point out why kinship care is the preferred option, and many Members have already done that. I will reiterate some of those points to ensure that we highlight the positive role that kinship care plays. Uprooting children for whatever reason is unsettling. It is important to maintain a smooth transition and ensure that their sense of identity and belonging is not interrupted. Kinship care is the only option that will nurture that. Kinship care provides greater stability because children are placed with people whom they already know and are more likely to be placed with siblings and maintain regular contact with birth parents and members of the extended family. That is important because most cases of kinship care are temporary, and it is expected that a child will return to his or her parents. Maintaining close contact will facilitate that. Kinship care can also be an effective form of early intervention because it avoids children being taken into formal care. The existing family connection and bond mean that kinship carers love the children and will do anything and everything to protect them and place their needs above all others. I have not exhausted the positives of kinship care, whether stand-alone or compared with other forms of care. I think that that only goes to prove why it should be given priority.

There is another side to the debate, which concerns the support already provided by the state. Over 700 children in Northern Ireland are in formal kinship care arrangements. It is speculated that 5,000 and possibly up to 10,000 children live in informal kinship care arrangements. That is a huge difference at either end of the scale, and it suggests that there is an issue involving the state. Of course, informal kinship care arrangements are populated with those who do not want and/or do not need financial or non-financial support, perhaps because the arrangement is very short term. Others, however, are reluctant to involve the state because of the bureaucracy and perceived interrogation that is involved.

I know that I have almost run out of time. I support the motion.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I have listened with considerable interest and welcome the opportunity to respond to the debate and the issues that Members have raised.

I suppose I have some interest in this, in that my mother was raised in kinship care. Her mother died when she was five years old. She had six older and two younger siblings. The 14-year-old sister, who was the eldest in the family, took on the role of raising the family. That was mighty hard work, and she did a very good job of it in terms of the family that was raised.

My Department has, for some time, consistently stressed the importance of family and friends and kinship care. A key principle of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 is that, where possible, children should be brought up within their own family, with one stipulation that we should not

move away from: when it is in their best interests to do so. The guiding principle of the Children Order is carried through to 'Care Matters in Northern Ireland', the strategy that was published in 2007. Once again, it promoted the placement of children with family and friends in circumstances where they are unable to live with their birth parents. It will not come as any surprise to learn that that is what children and young people themselves tell us that they want. What child, in circumstances where they could not live with their mother or father, would not want as an alternative to live with the grandmother, grandfather, uncle, aunt, sister or brother?

Research tells us that a kinship placement can produce better outcomes for children and young people than may be achieved in other care placements. It is because it can work better for children that kinship care has the support of my Department. I welcome the fact that there has been a significant growth in the number of kinship carers in recent years. A percentage increase of 53% in just three years demonstrates the degree of commitment to that. However, I acknowledge that kinship care comes at no insignificant cost to the grandmothers, grandfathers, uncles, aunts, brothers or sisters who selflessly enter into care arrangements. The book of short stories, 'The Hidden Voices of Kinship Carers', launched in March of this year by Kinship Care Northern Ireland, illustrates not only how quickly decision-making can be thrust upon families and friends but how a decision about kinship care can impact on the whole family to an extent that life and lifestyle will probably never be the same again. For that reason, kinship carers need support, including financial support.

A main aim of the Care Matters strategy is to offer more support to kinship carers and, where possible, to make becoming a kinship carer more flexible and sustainable. When a kinship arrangement is put in place with the approval of a health and social care trust, those supports should also be made available. Maintenance and enhanced allowances are paid, and training is made available to meet the needs of individual children and their kinship families. However, all of us need to acknowledge that a kinship arrangement will not be possible in all cases simply because the problems that separated the child from his or her parents can be endemic in the wider family structure, and we must remember that as an Assembly. I return to the paramount consideration: a decision to place a child in kinship care or any care arrangement must be in the child's best interests.

I want to take Members through some of the initiatives that have been brought forward by my Department and the Health and Social Care Board to support the continued growth of kinship care. First, we are in the process of finalising kinship care standards and guidance, which will set a minimum standard of practice by health and social care trusts across Northern Ireland. The emphasis of the standards is on placing the child or young person at the centre of the process and making their welfare, safety and needs paramount; ensuring that payments to kinship carers are maintained at the same levels as those for foster carers —

Mr Wells: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Poots: Yes.

Mr Wells: Is that the same document that the acting Chair of the Health Committee mentioned in her speech, which

she indicated was to be published by 1 April? If it is, when does he expect that document to be published?

4.00 pm

Mr Poots: We will come to that shortly.

One of the other standards that we want to deal with is the provision of services that are delivered consistently, effectively and efficiently and are capable of achieving equity of services provision for all young people and carers. We want to publish those standards in the near future. We do not have a precise date for that, but I am very hopeful that it will be next month. I do not want to be wholly definitive on that in case there is some slippage, but I am very hopeful that it will be done within the next month.

The Health and Social Care Board is in the process of developing regional kinship care policies and procedures, which will be modelled on the Department's standards and guidance. The board has also established a regional adoption and fostering service, which centralises training and recruitment services. It is anticipated that a new assessment process, supported by a training programme, will be introduced regionally. It is hoped that the introduction of a new process of assessing kinship carers will lead to an increase in their number, provide them with a better understanding of their role and purpose and, ultimately, provide greater protections to looked-after children on the ground so that they are being cared for by trained, supported families and friends who are working in partnership with the trusts.

In terms of legislative change, you are aware that it is my intention to introduce an Adoption and Children Bill in 2013, which, among other things, will make provision for new special guardianship orders. Those new orders have the potential to work well in kinship care situations. They have been working in England and Wales for a number of years, and we are considering their operation there before making final decisions as to how they should be implemented in this jurisdiction.

There are a number of other Adoption and Children Bill proposals which could, again, help and benefit kinship carers. Those proposals include a reduction in the time a child is required to live with a foster kinship carer before the carer can apply for a court order, such as a residence order, which affords the carer parental responsibility and empowers him or her to make decisions relevant to daily living. We will, of course, give consideration to any other changes to the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 and kinship developments in other parts of the United Kingdom that could provide better support for kinship carers and potentially improve the standard of care being provided.

We also need to look at some of the initiatives that have already been brought forward by my Department to determine whether, with some modification, they could become a resource for kinship carers. I am thinking specifically of some of the developments under the Families Matter strategy — the parenting helpline and the family support database, for example.

I will deal with a number of the comments brought forward by Members. First, on the issue of best interests, I thank Members for acknowledging that any care decision must be based on the best interests of each child. What works for one child may not work for other children, so decision-

making must always be based on the assessed needs of the child. Where it is assessed that placement with family and friends best meets the needs of the child, I am clear that that arrangement should be supported to ensure that it works for the child.

In terms of support for kinship carers, I can confirm that supports, including financial support, are already provided to those formally caring for the children of family members, which follows the Munby judgement and is in line with the allowance paid to foster carers. My Department also provides funding to a number of organisations, including Fostering Network and the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), which provide advice and information to kinship carers. That has been acknowledged in today's debate.

Perhaps we need to consider how those supports can be tailored to the specific needs of kinship carers, and we are happy to work with Fostering Network and BAAF to see how that can be done. I have also referred to some of the supports provided to parents generally, and perhaps we need to look at how, with a bit of tailoring, those can be made more relevant to, and inclusive of, kinship carers, who are effectively undertaking a parenting role.

Some Members raised awareness of what is available. That ties in with awareness-raising. Unless kinship carers are aware of the support available to them they will never be able to access it. I agree that there is work to be done to raise awareness of the support available to kinship carers. I will ask my officials to look at how that might be taken forward. In that awareness-raising activity, we could also address the sense of fear experienced by kinship carers.

A number of pieces of research in connection with kinship care have been undertaken, some of which have been referred to in the debate. Michelle McIlveen mentioned undertaking research in bringing forward her private Member's Bill. I welcome that and look forward to seeing what it finds. My Department is more than happy to support applications for research into kinship care. We recommend that bodies recognised for their expertise in this field of research consider and formulate proposals and forward those to my officials.

I can confirm that my Department continues to pursue the use of the 2011 census to provide a more up-to-date measure of the extent of kinship care in Northern Ireland, including care provided without the involvement of social care agencies. It is hoped that we will have updated prevalence rates for kinship care Northern Ireland by the end of 2012.

As regards working with other Ministers and Departments, Members are correct that the needs of kinship carers can be met in a range of ways. We heard, for example, that some kinship care is carried out in families who experience poverty. There is a need to get the needs of kinship carers onto the agenda of other Ministers. We have an established mechanism to do that, namely the ministerial subcommittee for children and young people. This issue is of relevance to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Social Development Minister, the Education Minister, and the Employment and Learning Minister. I will ensure that the needs of kinship carers are brought to the attention of all the relevant Ministers through that ministerial subcommittee.

Standards are always important. Unfortunately, our timetable for the publication of kinship care standards has slipped. As I indicated to Jim Wells, I hope to have it published in May 2012. I will give an undertaking that the standards will be reviewed again within two years of their operation. I understand that the policies and procedures being produced by the Health and Social Care Board will be published within six months of the publication of the Department's standards. The standards will cover a range of issues raised in the House today, including the payment of allowances to kinship carers.

As regards key priority actions, we are reviewing the strategy relating to the care of children. In the context of that work, we will consider future priorities and actions in connection with kinship care. That will extend to consideration of an appropriate statutory framework. As already stated, there is opportunity to make changes to legislation through the Adoption and Children Bill.

We all need to be aware of the point about children falling between stools. Statutory and voluntary agencies also need to be aware of the needs of children. In circumstances where a child needs our help, there is an onus on all of us and all the appropriate organisations to bring it to the attention of social services. I thank Kinship Care Northern Ireland for the work that it has done in profiling the issue of kinship care. We will continue to work with that organisation and other organisations that are relevant to this agenda.

The research based on the 2001 census indicates that the majority of kinship care placements were in urban settings. I accept that there may be issues specific to those living in rural areas. Regardless of where the arrangements are put in place, we must ensure that they are in the best interests of the child and that we meet all the expected safety standards.

I accept that educational outcomes for children in care are not as good as those of their peers in the wider population. We have made good progress in recent years to narrow the gap between the outcomes for children in care and those of their peers, particularly in education, but more needs to be done.

The costs of providing residential care are greater than other forms of care for children unable to live with their parents. However, we must accept that residential care can be the best and, indeed, the preferred option for some children. In that respect, the comparison of costs is unhelpful.

I realise that my time is gone. I thank everyone for their comments and look forward to hearing the winding-up speech.

Mr Wells: I thank everyone who took part in what I thought was an interesting and comprehensive debate. Useful points were raised from all sides of the House. I congratulate Michelle McIlveen on proposing the motion. She attracted strong cross-community support for her views on the issue. She was absolutely right to pay tribute, at the outset of her speech, to Jacqueline Williamson from Londonderry, who is the main organiser of Kinship Care Northern Ireland.

I have to be absolutely honest and say that, even though I have been a member of the Health Committee for quite a long time, I had never heard the phrase "kinship care" until I received a letter from Jacqueline. She then came to meet me. I was lobbied intensely for an hour on the subject. I must say that my knowledge of the subject grew dramatically in that 60 minutes. Much of what has been discussed today

by honourable Members is almost entirely the result of information that has been supplied by Jacqueline and her organisation. That is a very interesting example of what can be achieved by one dedicated individual who has genuine concern on an issue. With very little support and funding, she has achieved so much in such a short time. She is to be congratulated. Several Members, including Pat Ramsey and Kieran McCarthy, also paid tribute to her work and that of her organisation.

Michelle McIlveen outlined the sacrifices that are often made by those who are involved in kinship care. Often, that is based on instinct. Coming from a rural area and looking back on it, I can now think of many examples of situations in which a mother or father died young or in tragic circumstances and the automatic assumption was that a grandmother, aunt or other family member would take control of the situation and care for the children. It was informal. It happened. It was probably never registered with anyone. However, it meant that many people who would have ended up in care had very fulfilled and happy childhoods. We need to pay tribute to those who did that without recognition for so many years.

Many Members who spoke in the debate, including the proposer of the motion and, of course, the Minister, made the fundamental point that whatever decision is taken on care must be in the child's best interests. The child's needs are absolutely central. As the proposer said, each child has different needs. In the vast majority of cases, kinship care is the best option. However, as Brenda Hale, quite rightly, outlined, that is not always the case. There can be complex issues that surround the reasons why the child required care which may have travelled around the family. Therefore, it cannot be assumed automatically that kinship care is the best way forward. However, in many cases, it is, of course, and should be encouraged.

There was considerable debate on statistics by many Members. I am not quite sure whether Ms Ramsey is the acting, interim or permanent Chairperson. I do not know. We will find out in a few weeks. Ms Ramsey made the point that the statistics are not clear. We seem to be very aware that, in the past three years, there has been a 53% increase in kinship care arrangements and that there are 717 formal care arrangements. Beyond that, however, the statistics are a bit hazy. We need more information on the extent of this important issue. In her contribution, the Committee Chairperson stated that the likely figures are between 8,000 and 10,000 arrangements; the vast bulk of them, of course, being informal. That is quite a wide range. It may not even be an accurate range. We need to get more hard and fast statistics on that.

Ms Ramsey questioned the whereabouts of the document that was promised on 1 April. I am glad that the Minister clarified that issue. We now have a commitment from him that the document will come in May, which is good news. I am sure that, as he has delivered on all of his other promises on health during the past year, he will deliver on that as well. No pressure.

Mr McCallister knows an awful lot about childcare from his ruthless exploitation of the recent birth of his child. However, he raised the more serious issue of the need for strong financial support for those who are involved. I have been watching Pat Ramsey carefully over the past few months. I

have noticed his ruthless campaign of written questions to the Minister on the issue. Every aspect of kinship care has been scrutinised through written questions to the Minister. That is what he is there to do. There is no doubt that he represents the strong lobby from his neck of the woods that I have also encountered. That has been very helpful in producing additional information about kinship care in the formal sense. Two years ago, very few people in this Chamber would have even known about it. Therefore, I was pleased that Mr Ramsey was able to tease that information out.

Uniquely, he raised one very important issue, which is that, as far as I know, Kinship Care Northern Ireland has received no core funding from any trust, Department or government organisation. It has almost been an entirely voluntary effort, and it indicates just how successful it has been if it has received no funding for its campaign. One of the issues that I urge the Minister to pick up on is whether we should consider some form of core grant for the excellent work that that organisation is doing. I am not talking about vast amounts of money. A few thousand pounds would make the world of difference to how that organisation functions. I think that it has shown itself to be capable of using such money wisely and efficiently.

4.15 pm

Mr Ramsey also indicated the importance of public awareness and tried to increase the public's perception of this important issue. I will be very careful about what I say about Mr McCarthy, given the Speaker's earlier ruling. He made a very interesting and positive contribution to the Assembly, and I do not want to criticise him for one moment. He highlighted the importance of the event that was held in the Assembly on 22 February, which I and many others attended, and we heard, at first hand, the experiences of those involved in kinship care. I was particularly impressed by the contribution made by Kevin Wright at that very interesting meeting.

The Member for North Down Gordon Dunne highlighted the importance of the informal kinship care role. As usual, Mickey Brady gave a very interesting insight in his contribution. He has vast experience of income support and other benefits. He became the welfare rights officer in Ballybot House in Newry just before the Boer War. Certainly, I cannot remember a time when he was not the welfare rights officer in Newry. He brought a unique contribution in the Munby judgement, which was made in England, and he tried to tease out the implications of that judgement for Northern Ireland, which, of course, is another part of the United Kingdom. It is important that we assess court cases in other parts of Her Majesty's realm and decide whether they are relevant to us, and I know that Mr Brady was very keen to do that.

The Minister alluded to that court decision, but I am not 100% clear whether it is binding on providers in Northern Ireland. It will be interesting to know whether that decision applies throughout the United Kingdom or whether it is discretionary and can be taken or left.

Pam Brown paid tribute to those involved in kinship care and emphasised the crucial work that they undertake. Michelle Gildernew, who is not with us, has made her return, phoenix-like, to the Chamber after her recent injury in the Dáil. If you insist on foreign travel, that is what happens to

you. She emphasised another interesting point, which is the importance of kinship care in rural areas. Often, that can be forgotten about. In a rural area, that can be so crucial, because the trauma of moving a child who has suffered some terrible tragedy in their life from a rural community into some form of care home in a town or city could be absolutely traumatic. Again, in rural areas, I have found that the norm is for an aunt, uncle or grandparents to take on that role.

Paula Bradley made the point that informal care must not be a second-class option, and she made the useful interjection that more information must be provided to the community on the issue. I am glad that Brenda Hale raised this issue, and we have to face it square on: the fact that it is kinship care does not simply mean that those arrangements can escape the scourge of various types of child abuse. If a relative takes on that role, it usually means that the child is safe, but it is not automatically the case. Therefore, we cannot have such a blinkered view on kinship care that we ignore the risks, and, if there is any perception of risk, that cannot be an option for the child. I have to say that those issues are few and far between, but we have to be aware of them.

David McClarty was very supportive and said that everything must be done to avoid children being taken into formal care. The Minister made the point that the best interests of the child must be paramount. He also spoke of the problems relating to the costs to the carers, which are often borne with no recompense whatsoever. He made the very welcome announcement that the guidance and standards would be implemented in May.

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

Mr Wells: I thank everyone who took part; it was a very useful debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes and welcomes the growth of kinship care and acknowledges the valuable role it plays in providing care for the many children who cannot be raised by their parents; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to note the excellent and often invisible contribution made by kinship carers, to identify a number of key priorities and actions for their support and to consider amending the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 in support of kinship carers.

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Counselling Services: East Belfast

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes in which to speak, the Minister will have 10 minutes to respond, and, on this occasion, all other Members who wish to speak will have approximately eight minutes.

Mr Douglas: I am pleased to bring the Adjournment debate on counselling services in east Belfast to the Assembly. I thank the Minister and other colleagues for attending this late session, although it is not that late yet.

Yesterday morning, three local parents called to my office on the Newtownards Road. They were very distraught that needles used by illegal drug users had been found near their homes. That find was in addition to the discovery and seizure of needles in a play area close to Connswater shopping centre last Friday night. Before I go on to my main points, I pay tribute to the Police Service of Northern Ireland and Belfast City Council for their rapid and professional response to what was, after all, a very dangerous and frightening situation for residents in the Connswater area.

I am not using that example solely to highlight the growing problem of drug abuse and the whole aspect of drug abuse with needles, because that is not the biggest problem in east Belfast. I certainly do not want to highlight it as a huge problem; it is one of the smaller problems, but a problem nonetheless. It is not about only drug abuse, but alcohol abuse and other addictions. With that growing problem of addiction there is a growing need for preventative work and support for cost-effective counselling services. Let me give an example: statistics given to me recently show that one in four people in Northern Ireland are affected by a mental health problem. The cost of mental ill health in Northern Ireland is approximately £1,680 a head, and investing in preventative psychological therapies, for example, would cost just £250 a head. It is, therefore, very much about preventative care as well.

When we look at what counselling is available currently in east Belfast, it is obvious that excellent work is being carried out by a number of community and voluntary organisations. I am sure my colleague Chris Lytle would agree with me on that. Some sterling work is being carried out. However, it appears that that sterling work, much of it voluntary, is under-resourced, lacking in cohesion, and, at this time, there is no agreed strategy or plan, to my knowledge.

I want to put things in perspective. The current service provision includes East Belfast Community Counselling, which is based in inner east Belfast. It dedicates 95% of its service delivery to the local community of that area and currently works with 35 to 40 clients weekly. It does an excellent job in the area. In fact, I would go so far as to say that it survives not only on minimal grant funding, but client donations. It is the only voluntary and community organisation in the area working on the suicide prevention helpline, Lifeline. It has also been awarded a small contract

with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to provide counselling sessions. All counsellors are members of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy and adhere to its code of professional standards and ethics.

Pathways is another organisation. Its base is on the Newtownards Road. It provides counselling for loyalist ex-prisoners. People who have been in prison or have been involved in the conflict may, many years later, struggle with their past and with coming to terms with life outside prison. It is funded through Charter Northern Ireland. To my knowledge, it is the only counselling service in east Belfast funded under the Public Health Agency's Protect Life strategy.

There are other organisations, such as Anchor Counselling, which is very much a church-based organisation. It provides Christian counselling to anybody who comes to the Christian Fellowship Church on the Newtownards Road. Addiction Northern Ireland is a voluntary organisation operating in the area for those affected by addiction. It has been operating from its base on the Albertbridge Road for something like 24 years. Addiction Northern Ireland has seen a growth in demand for services in all locations, but it is interesting that the biggest growth in demand has been in east Belfast. We should take note of that.

An organisation outside east Belfast is New Life Counselling. It is a charity. Although it is based in north Belfast, it works in east Belfast and offers one-to-one free counselling services for children, young people, adults and families. It is funded through a range or cocktail of funding.

We also have the East Belfast Community Development Agency's health development and connections programme, which seeks to support local individuals, groups and community workers engaged in improving health and well-being. Finally, we have the East Belfast Partnership. It is involved in regeneration, but part of its remit is about tackling health inequalities.

That is just a snapshot of activity in east Belfast. In my constituency office, I meet people who are affected by stress, anxiety, depression, relationship breakdown, drug and alcohol abuse, bullying, self-harming and suicidal thoughts and actions. We all remember last summer's rioting and disturbances in east Belfast, which led to trauma. A lot of people in the area fled their homes. Many of the people affected by that have had to receive counselling. Nearly a year later, they are still receiving that treatment. That is a new aspect for us in relation to the recent conflict.

For me, there is little doubt that a significant problem exists around the issue of mental health in east Belfast. I acknowledge that considerable efforts and successes have been made in regeneration, particularly through organisations such as the East Belfast Partnership, and we are talking about some of the most disadvantaged wards in east Belfast. However, there is a need to provide support for the emotional well-being of our local residents. It is clear to me that the area is under-resourced in terms of counselling and that there are insufficient services to help people in need of support.

The latest East Belfast constituency profile, which is from last September, shows that East Belfast is a constituency with an estimated 13.8% of people on prescribed drugs for mood and anxiety disorders. The Northern Ireland average is 11.5%. At a recent meeting in east Belfast on the

Welfare Reform Bill, there were major concerns that various benefit cuts will exacerbate the problems around mental health and well-being; in particular, for those in the most disadvantaged areas. There is certainly a fear out there that the welfare reforms will have a major, negative impact on many communities, particularly those in disadvantaged areas. There is a feeling in advice agencies and counselling services that their workload will definitely increase, and I certainly agree with them.

We need a defined strategy and clarity of vision to provide a joined-up service. It can be very confusing to work out who has responsibility at different levels. I suggest that we agree an area action plan to include all the current providers and to find out what level and type of counselling services are available in east Belfast.

I understand that a mapping exercise, commissioned by Belfast local commissioning group, for east Belfast counselling and support provision is under way.

4.30 pm

Finally, I hope that the debate will be the springboard for a more effective, efficient and proactive counselling service provision. That should lead to improved partnership working between providers, such as the various groups that are involved in counselling, the Public Health Agency and, indeed, the Minister's Department. Again, I thank the Minister and other Members for attending today.

Mr Copeland: I support the Adjournment topic and congratulate those who brought it forward. I endorse and underscore, in so far as it is in me, what Sammy said. I do not intend to go through the range of organisations that are involved or the statistics for the problem, because that would simply mean that we have both been reading the same briefing notes.

How do you judge a place? Do you judge it by its scenery? Do you judge it by its climate? Do you judge it by its industries, its roads or its infrastructure? Do you judge it by the cleanliness of its streets? Do you judge it by its education system? Or do you judge it by how it looks after those who are least capable of looking after themselves?

I know something of counselling, but I have never been a beneficiary of it myself — although it has been suggested to me on a number of occasions. My wife found counselling necessary shortly after being injured in a shooting incident while serving as a police officer. She eventually trained as a cognitive behavioural therapy counsellor, paying for that through the Police Rehabilitation Trust. She currently works in a number of institutions that are largely to do with bereavement and that are centred particularly on cancer, which she herself survived. In many ways, she has made herself a receptacle for the unpalatable troubles of others, as have all those who put their head above the parapet and care enough to become involved in this as a profession — if profession is the right word. It is a profession that requires very high standards of training and dedication and a very large begging bowl when you go to get somebody to pay you for doing it. Those people have made themselves receptacles to such a degree that, in pursuance of the exercise of their skill, they have to attend supervision regularly so that, in some way, their own mental health can be protected from their efforts to protect others.

The problem does not exist solely in working-class districts. It is more prevalent there perhaps, but depression, black-dog days and potential thoughts of suicide and self-harm affect everyone in society. Indeed, Winston Churchill, one of the greatest wartime leaders of all time, was perpetually plagued through the darkest of days by deep, deep depression.

This morning at 3.00 am, I received a call from an unknown phone to my mobile. When I answered, a voice that I knew but could not place said, "Michael, I can't take this any more. I'm going to kill myself." I spent from 3.00 am until 7.30 am trying to work out who it might have been, before eventually establishing at 9.30 am that nothing had befallen the 20-year-old female. She is a product of the city and district of her birth, but she cannot yet find either a relevant place or slot in life, an outcome or something that gives her a reason to believe that she is special and can contribute. I know all the organisations that Sammy talked about.

East Belfast is peculiar in some ways. We have a very high proportion of ex-servicemen. There is a condition, post-traumatic stress disorder, which I know that many senior officers in the army do not believe exists. The Minister will recall that I have plagued him — I think that he would agree that that is the right word — with questions on post-traumatic stress disorder. We have a very high proportion of ex-servicemen in our community. That includes not only those who served in the locally raised units during the Troubles but those who currently serve in Iraq or Afghanistan or in any of the other corners of the earth where democracy has to be defended by force of arms. When the comradeship of the mess, the unity of the platoon and the guidance of the officer have gone, some of those people find themselves in a lonely place.

One case in particular sticks in my mind: that of a soldier who was sitting in the back of a Land Rover many years ago preparing to go out on a patrol when his company quartermaster sergeant recognised him as someone with stores experience. He took him out of the vehicle and placed him in the stores, replacing him in the Land Rover with an 18-year-old who I believe was on his first day's duty. Twenty minutes later, the soldier was taken from the stores, put into a Land Rover and taken to the scene of an improvised explosive device. There was a hole in the ground, at the bottom of which was a red stain. That was pretty much all that was left of the Land Rover and the four people on board.

He broke down in our office recently, and I do not mean that he threw a hissy fit. He shook and sobbed. He could not understand why his source of income — employment and support allowance — had been removed on the basis of a test that was carried out in the absence of any medical records. He just walked out.

A burden falls on us as a society to do what can be done. As Sammy said, the cost of mental illness or depression — call it what you will — left unattended is around £1,680 a year, while spoken therapies cost £250. The difficulty with spoken therapy is that you cannot tell how well it is doing because you cannot tell how many drugs have been given. You cannot have a photograph taken at a nice, shiny building, and there are no instant fixes. However, I will tell you, as my wife tells me, it works. Not in all cases, but in enough cases to make the effort worthwhile.

Therapies have difficulties with the medical profession, which tends to look at non-chemical or non-physical interventions with a sideways gaze. We are building up long-term, massively disabling conditions in all sections of our community.

Mr Douglas rightly referred to welfare reform. I understand and accept the need for a realignment of the economy, as does his colleague the Minister for Social Development, but the difficulty is that it took 30 years to bomb and destroy our industries, communities and the streets that people came from. Now, because of a fiscal requirement in Westminster, we are being given the same treatment as everybody else, disregarding the fact that it will impact here in a way that it will not do on the mainland.

Living with single-room rates and in houses of multiple occupancy are things that we do as students. I do not want to be prescriptive or make bland statements, but generally in Northern Ireland if you are by yourself and you reach 35 years of age, there may in some cases be a reason why. A suitable antidote to that is not to stick you in a house with a bathroom and kitchen that dear knows who is using, a common living room, and then, up the stairs, a bedroom of your own. That will simply reinforce the difficulties that were there to begin with. Sometimes I think that the people who come up with these policies need to go and experience what life is like in certain quarters.

I do not know whether what we are talking about is the solution, but I believe that we need to develop a strategy to establish at least whether it is worthwhile. I heard the Minister a few moments ago pledge financial assistance for kinship care, and that is laudable and supportive, but I ask about his travels through his admittedly empty coffers. Well, the coffers are very full, but there are many demands on them. I am not sure that we have ever adequately come to terms as a society with the long-term emotional effects of living on or near interfaces, spending every single day of your life thinking about your children playing in the back garden, your car parked out the front or every rattle on the roof. We need a piece of work on the long-term effects of living in those locations for the folk who are living on them. I know many cases of people with absolutely impeccable character who, within six or seven months of moving home, have acquired a criminal record. Generally, the criminal record is rooted in the person taking the law into their own hands, because the law failed to take sufficient steps, in their terms, to protect them, their homes and their families. There are many questions. My view is that spoken therapies, the gentle hand of friendship and an emotional lifebelt will always work more satisfactorily than drugs or other therapies, which, in my view, can be very addictive. I support this. Thank you for your time.

Mr Lyttle: I, too, support this and thank Mr Sammy Douglas for securing the debate. Mental ill health is no respecter of party political background, and I have welcomed the opportunity to work with Mr Douglas at constituency level. Indeed, I think that it is incumbent on all the MLAs for East Belfast to come together to work on the issue. Mr Douglas mentioned an area action plan and referred to some of the mapping exercises that are ongoing at the moment. It is my understanding that the East Belfast Partnership's health strategy manager, Linda Armitage, is overseeing some of that work. It has been my pleasure to redirect some groups to the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's south and east

Belfast mental health community of interest group; it is a bit of a long-winded title, which the group will maybe reconsider at some point in time. It is the working group that is bringing together groups from south and east Belfast to focus on the issue. Hopefully, the MLAs for the area can work together to support that work.

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on what is a serious issue not just in east Belfast but across Northern Ireland. As we have heard, it is increasingly the case that many of us will have direct experience of mental ill health. I have close friends who are dealing with the issue at the moment. Indeed, I lost a close friend to suicide a while ago. He had exceptional abilities and a wide and diverse background, as has been mentioned, and I pay respect to him. It is true that, for many years, the issue of mental health has carried a stigma that has prevented people from accessing the help they need. I hope that the Assembly will play a leading role in defeating that unnecessary shame and in providing the resources to which people are fully entitled.

I think that it is important to base an examination of provision on evidence, and I would like to thank Assembly researcher Dr Lesley-Ann Black for her work in examining the extent of mental ill health in east Belfast compared with other constituencies in Northern Ireland. The facts about mental illness among people in Northern Ireland speak for themselves. As has been said, it is estimated that one in four people in the region will be affected by mental health problems at some point in their life. As Mr Copeland said, there is a difference in terms of mental health problems between Northern Ireland and England, Scotland or Wales, and consequently, incidence of such problems is 25% higher in Northern Ireland. That, of course, comes from having a legacy of violence and a divided, rather than a shared, society. I agree that there is a lot of work to be done in relation to dealing with unique interface challenges.

There is a range of indicators that allow us to examine the extent of the problem in east Belfast, and those have been mentioned throughout the debate today. Indicators such as self-harm admissions, anti-depression drug prescriptions and suicide rates show that east Belfast is in need of assistance in that area of provision. Statistics show that the east Belfast constituency has the third highest hospital admissions for self-harm, is the fourth highest dispenser of antidepressant drugs and has the joint second highest suicide rate of any constituency in Northern Ireland. I know that the increase in suicides is of serious concern to the Members present today and to the Assembly and that Minister Poots is committed to responding to that painful and difficult issue. It is clear that there can be no more painful consequence of mental ill health for any family than suicide. In mentioning that, I pay tribute to the work of the Survivors of Suicide organisation, under Bobby Cosgrove and Bobby Duffin, for the work that it does to highlight the need for assistance.

4.45 pm

There are approximately 1,000 patients with a mental illness on the GP register in east Belfast. Unfortunately, however, there appears to be a lack of available resources to cope with the situation at present. Mr Douglas mentioned the contact that we have had with New Life Counselling in the run-up to this debate. It is a charity that supports the

emotional health and well-being needs of people through the provision of counselling and therapeutic services across Northern Ireland. It is quite worrying that, between April 2011 and March 2012, despite that organisation being based in north Belfast, it received a total of 120 referrals from east Belfast from 16 separate east Belfast GPs, along with self-referrals from people in the constituency. It is also worrying that people who availed themselves of New Life Counselling's services did so without there having been any proactive promotion of the charity's work in the constituency. I know that there are many other organisations that can bear testimony to the increasing demand.

There is, therefore, a serious need for high-quality psychological therapy services — Mr Copeland mentioned spoken therapies in counselling services — to be well organised, resourced and co-ordinated across east Belfast. The Bamford review identified the need for improved access to services and for a more co-ordinated framework for provision to be developed. A good strategy was launched in 2010, but the budgetary reductions to its implementation have caused a lot of problems.

Early intervention, prevention and treatment across all ages have been referred to today, and it is important that we help everyone: mothers; children; young people; workers; older people; carers; and, indeed, people in the criminal justice system who have experienced unique challenges in life. Provision must be multi-agency, and the health service and the voluntary and community sector must have an opportunity to work together, as has been mentioned.

I definitely want to pay tribute to the many voluntary and community-based counselling organisations in east Belfast that are working in the most difficult of circumstances, with limited resources to improve the health and well-being of members of our community. Adequate support for that work would not only alleviate the pain and distress of mental ill health for individuals, families and communities but would prevent more major crises from occurring further down the line.

My party and I support the provision of community-based services that the Compton review has proposed, but those services have to be adequately resourced and organised. Support should be given to enable the health service and community and voluntary groups to work together, for example, to provide good communication so that people are aware of the range of services that is available — there is some doubt about the co-ordination of that communication at the moment — and to provide appropriate referral mechanisms and supervision pathways.

As Mr Copeland and Mr Douglas said, we know at first hand through the work in our offices that the economic downturn, welfare reform and other unique challenges in our constituency are having a negative impact on the health and well-being of our constituents. It is incumbent on us to lobby for those additional resources that we need. That, combined with the recent history of the Troubles and deep division, means that there is a clear need to increase the availability of high-quality counselling and psychotherapy services in east Belfast and across Northern Ireland. I sincerely hope that the Minister can respond positively to the work that is being done.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Mental health services should be of

significant importance to us. Historically, investment in community mental health services in Northern Ireland has not kept pace with the rest of the UK, in spite of the fact that we have greater problems with mental health. It is estimated that one in four people will suffer from a medically identified mental illness during his or her lifetime. Mental ill health costs an estimated 3% to 4% of our gross domestic product, mainly through loss of productivity but also through the cost of healthcare and social security benefits. In 2010-11 in Northern Ireland, we spent £228 million on mental health services. That represents around 8% of the total budget spend on health and social care.

We had a number of key messages from Bamford on the prevention of mental ill health: the requirement for new mental incapacity legislation; a shift from hospitals to community-based services; the development of specialist services for children and young people, older people, those with addiction problems and those in the criminal justice system; and the need for an adequately trained workforce. Bamford envisaged that doing all of those things would require a 10- to 15-year programme of reform and a doubling of the healthcare budget to approximately £400 million per annum.

A ministerial group was set up to drive that forward and to monitor the broad strategic changes. That group is chaired by the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The Bamford task force in the health and social care sector was set up in late 2009, and it is jointly chaired by the HSC board and the PHA. The Bamford monitoring group was established in September 2009 and is led by the Patient and Client Council (PCC).

I thank Mr Douglas for bringing this Adjournment debate to the House. There have been three very valuable contributions, and I hope to respond to the points that Members raised. First, I confirm that I recognise the need for and the value of counselling to overcome a number of difficulties that people face here, such as support with family relationships, dealing with bereavement and helping individuals cope with mental health problems, trauma or overcoming addictions. Part of the Bamford vision was to improve access to talking therapies, and a strategy for the development of psychological therapies in Northern Ireland was published in June 2010 and is underpinned by an additional £4.4 million a year. The Health and Social Care (HSC) Board chairs a multidisciplinary group that is taking forward the implementation of the strategy.

The main funding streams for counselling services are: the HSC Board for those organisations that provide the services regionally; the Public Health Agency for those organisations that provide services in relation to public health, such as suicide prevention, trauma, drug or alcohol abuse and teenage pregnancy; and the trusts for organisations that provide local services in areas such as bereavement, pregnancy, self-esteem, sexuality, relationships, suicide and other mental health issues. It is for the Health and Social Care Board and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to —

Mr Copeland: Will the Minister give way, please?

Mr Poots: Yes, certainly.

Mr Copeland: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate your graciousness in this matter. Will you agree, sir, that post-traumatic stress disorder is particularly prevalent in certain sections of the Northern Irish community, given the Troubles

and the continued service in the military? Do you share the slight concern that appropriate treatment for soldiers tends to be given at Hollybush on the mainland? As yet, we have not developed a suitable resource in Northern Ireland to tackle that problem satisfactorily.

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for raising that point. I agree that there has been a strong association with the military in Northern Ireland. The problems that we have currently are not yet, to a great extent, directly related to Afghanistan. A lot of the problems relate to Iraq, and a lot of the problems relate to the Troubles. Post-traumatic stress does not normally materialise within months or a few short years. Generally, it is considerably further down the line, and we have a considerable problem in that respect. I acknowledge that that is an issue that we need to communicate about to identify the best solutions.

Just yesterday, we had a fairly lengthy discussion about the use of drugs in dealing with mental health. That meeting included the Chief Medical Officer, and the general conclusion was that drugs help but do not cure. It is the talking therapies that make the difference. Do we simply want to shelve the problem, or do we wish to deal with the problem? If we wish to deal with the problem, there is a requirement to invest further in talking therapies. How we do that is a very significant challenge, but I recognise from the conversations that I have been having that that is where the best opportunities lie. You need to stack that up against what I referred to: the loss to our gross domestic product through lack of productivity, people not working, people receiving income support and all of that. That also happens in a range of other areas across the health sector.

It is for the Health and Social Care Board and trusts to consider the needs of local populations when commissioning counselling services. Counselling can have many benefits and can help to minimise the negative impact that the issues that I described earlier have on individuals, families and children. Practitioners in counselling organisations should be qualified in the therapies that they provide. Many people take on the mantle of being counsellors without having had training to support that, and we believe that they should be registered with a recognised body such as the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy and be appropriately supervised. Those key indicators offer commissioners the confidence that the services that they acquire are safe and are delivered by qualified practitioners to recognised standards.

I will mention adult mental health services. The Northern Ireland Community Addiction Service, the Forum Against Substance Abuse and New Life Counselling all provide counselling services in east Belfast, and the trust currently expends around £198,000 on adult counselling in east Belfast. The Victims' Commission also funds counselling services for those affected by the Troubles and for those who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, and I encourage Members to send people in that direction at this point. My Department also provides funding for a number of regional organisations such as Relate NI, Accord NI and Lighthouse Ltd, which provide counselling services across Northern Ireland.

I will turn to Members' contributions. Sammy Douglas talked about prevention. We recognise the value of counselling services and acknowledge the benefits of locally based

counselling services. It is for the Belfast Trust to assess the value of the services provided and to fund those services accordingly. In our opinion, psychological therapy services are a cost-effective alternative to prescription medicines for some mental health problems, and a strategy of development of counselling services is being implemented by the Health and Social Care Board. That encompasses the statutory and voluntary services.

Mr Copeland spoke of the strategy for the development of psychological therapy services and recognised the benefits of counselling for people with psychological conditions or mental health problems as well as for carers and people who are socially isolated, including older people. He also raised the issue of ex-service personnel, members of the forces and veterans, and there is much more evidence around today, including National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidance, on the benefits of talking therapies.

Mr Lyttle raised a number of issues, including that of the voluntary sector. Once again, we want to say that it is very active in removing the stigma that is associated with mental illness. That is important.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can I ask the Minister to draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Poots: Certainly. The aim of psychological therapy services is to provide a range of services on a multi-agency and multi-sectoral basis. Once again, I thank Mr Douglas for bringing the debate today. We will take the matter seriously.

Adjourned at 4.59 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 23 April 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I ask for your guidance on Standing Order 20A, as it affects today's proceedings. It deals with questions for urgent oral answer. I sought to table such a question this morning before 10.30 to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) to ask if they retained confidence in the Attorney General. I was then informed by the Business Office that the question would not be taken, not because you had ruled that it was not urgent but because OFMDFM claimed to be unable to provide a Minister.

Standing Order 20A sets two criteria for admissibility. The question must be submitted before 10.30 am and the Ministers or Department must be given a minimum of four hours' notice. Nowhere does it suggest that a Minister can simply say that they are not available. There are four Ministers in OFMDFM. Can you confirm that that matter did not get to you for a decision and that someone in the Business Office took a decision that it would not be acceptable because OFMDFM claimed that a Minister was not available?

Mr Speaker: The Member will know that there is a clear convention around the issue. We normally check first to make sure that a Minister is available. On this occasion, a Minister was not available. If Ministers are not available to come to the House to answer the question for oral answer, we have to look at a different situation. I would have thought that the Member understood that. It has been practised over and over again. I suggest to the Member that he might resubmit his question for oral answer. That might be useful to the Member.

Mr Givan: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I had also tabled a question for the Justice Minister to answer orally about the same issue and got a response back to say that he would not be answering, yet he appeared on 'Hearts and Minds' and was quite willing to talk about the case. I have been told that we cannot raise it in the House, even though that Minister is available to answer questions for oral answer, because he does not want to address it in the House. Mr Speaker, will you advise on what protection you will give to allow Members to express themselves in the House without fear of being brought before the courts by the Attorney General?

Mr Speaker: Let me reflect on what the Member has said, because I am not aware that he submitted a question for oral answer to the Justice Minister. Let me reflect and come back to the Member.

Committee Membership

Mr Speaker: As with similar motions, these motions will be treated as business motions. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Tom Elliott replace Mr Basil McCrea as a member of the Committee for Justice; that Mr Tom Elliott replace Mr Danny Kinahan as a member of the Committee for the Environment; that Mr Danny Kinahan be appointed as a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister; that Mr Roy Beggs replace Mr Ross Hussey as a member of the Committee for Finance and Personnel; that Mr Ross Hussey replace Mr Roy Beggs as a member of the Committee for Regional Development; that Mr John McCallister replace Mrs Sandra Overend as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee; and that Mrs Sandra Overend replace Mr John McCallister as a member of the Business Committee. — [Mr Swann.]

Resolved:

That Mr Sean Rogers replace Mr Conall McDevitt as a member of the Committee for Education; that Mr Conall McDevitt replace Mr Mark Durkan as a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety; that Mr Patsy McGlone replace Dr Alasdair McDonnell as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; that Mr Patsy McGlone replace Mr Colum Eastwood as a member of the Committee for Justice; that Mr John Dallat replace Mr Joe Byrne as a member of the Committee for Regional Development; that Mrs Dolores Kelly replace Mr Patsy McGlone as a member of the Committee for the Environment; that Mr Dominic Bradley be appointed as a member of the Audit Committee; and that Mr Colum Eastwood replace Mr Patsy McGlone as a member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. — [Mr P Ramsey.]

Private Members' Business

Preschool Nursery Provision

Mr 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. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mrs Cochrane: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to take immediate action on the findings of the review of the preschool admissions arrangements and remove the July and August birthday admissions criterion for the 2013-14 academic year; and urges the Minister to prevent a repeat of the problems being faced this year in relation to the 2012-13 academic year, by ensuring that there are sufficient preschool places for all children in the required locations.

Members will know that the issue of preschool provision has been debated in the House on various occasions. Indeed, it was the topic of my maiden speech in June last year. Since then, I have written to the Minister; I have tried to meet him; and I have asked questions on the issue, not to try to catch him out or to score political points but simply to try to resolve what continues to be a serious problem in my constituency of East Belfast and, I understand, in various areas across Northern Ireland. I need not remind Members of the merits of preschool education, about which I think we all agree. Having seen the changes in my youngest daughter over the past seven months as she progresses through her preschool year, I have testament of that.

I was pleased when the Minister announced the review of the preschool admissions arrangements. However, a review is meaningless if action is not taken on its recommendations. Therefore, many of you will recall my delight when the Minister made his statement to the House in January this year on actions that he intended to take on the back of that review.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): I am going to hold you to that. *[Laughter.]*

Mrs Cochrane: I did not hear that.

Mr Lyttle: He says he is holding you to it.

Mrs Cochrane: This brings me to the reason for the debate. Let me quote a little from the Minister's statement:

"I have also identified some actions that I intend to progress immediately. The report confirms previous findings that the July/August birthdays admissions criterion can potentially disadvantage younger children in their preschool year. I intend to revoke that criterion in the 1999 regulations and remove it as a priority criterion for non-statutory providers." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 70, p56, col 1].

When I probed the Minister a little further, he said:

"I acknowledged that a lot of the report's actions will not come into effect this year. They will affect the programme

of work for 2013-14." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 70, p59, col 1].

He went on to say:

"The Member referred to the July/August birthday issue. I hope to deal with that in legislation connected to ESA ... If that is not felt to be the appropriate manner in which to address the issue, I will introduce separate legislation, but I am keen to remove that provision from the statute book." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 70, p59, col 1].

In February, during Question Time, I asked the Minister whether the removal of the July/August criterion would happen in time for the 2013-14 intake. I explained that the admissions booklets would be produced in September of this year and so he really needed to act. He said that he would do it as quickly as possible. I am extremely dismayed, therefore, to hear from the Minister's officials that he wants to wait until he has something more appropriate in its place before he removes the priority criterion.

I understand that the social disadvantage criterion needs to be looked at in more detail and that it will be a more complicated change given that research shows that children from a socially disadvantaged background benefit more from a preschool experience than children from families who are not in receipt of income support or jobseeker's allowance. However, we could still ensure that those children receive a place; it just might not necessarily be their first preference.

Let us be clear: we have established that the July/August criterion is wrong and that, potentially, it disadvantages younger children who are in the same academic year.

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): Will the Member give way?

Mrs Cochrane: I would rather not at the minute. I have a number of points that I want to cover. If I have time at the end, I certainly will.

The Minister said that he would introduce separate legislation if the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) legislation was not in place quickly enough. Although the ESA legislation is progressing, it will not be complete in time. The Minister has the power to act now, and the parents want action.

I take this opportunity to comment on a few other findings of the review and actions that the Minister specifically referred to in his January statement. Have any steps been taken to ensure that the statistical data that is collected to inform local area planning will be improved? Has the Department even asked the education and library boards and the preschool education advisory groups for better data? The Belfast Board was trying to gather figures for this year on July and August birthdays, but it was struggling. Has the Department reviewed its policy on enrolment numbers to see whether greater flexibility can be introduced, for example, for time-limited extensions outside of a development proposal? That is particularly important for this year's intake, as it may allow some of the children who are without an offer to receive a place. However, I add a caveat: I have spoken to nursery principals who have suggested that the 13:1 ratio is already quite difficult, particularly at the start of a school year, when many children have very little independence.

Has there been any progress on area-based planning? I understand that the planning of places is particularly challenging, as there can be significant variations in numbers in a location each year. It is difficult, but it is not rocket science. I have been able to work proactively with preschool providers and the boards to try to alleviate problems in east Belfast. For example, additional sessions have been secured in St Colmcille's at Ballyhackamore. Area planning works only if you have in place criteria that prioritise the children who live in that area. Continuing to include the July/August birthday criterion will continue to allow children from elsewhere to displace children who live perhaps a few streets away. For example, in the current intake — I appreciate that it is still ongoing — some east Belfast nurseries have had to offer places to children who live in Conlig, Dunmurry and Greenisland because they were born in July or August. That may suit their parent because of where they work or where a grandparent lives, but it is not fair and should not be allowed to continue.

I have done an analysis of the situation in my constituency. To be fair to the Minister, there has been an increase in the number of places over the past few years. A rough estimate shows that we are now short of places by approximately 10% when comparing P1 intakes over the past three years with the number of preschool places available. That 10% figure would be in line with the Department's suggestions that approximately 10% of parents do not want a place for their child or do not take up the offer of a place because it does not suit their personal circumstances. My experience is that parents do want a place. The personal circumstances for many of them are simply that they work and are unable to juggle to get children to a part-time session, especially an afternoon session. If that is their only choice because they have a job, that is hardly fair. The Department needs to take note of that when looking at the preschool admissions code in the future. Many parents cannot take up the offer of a part-time place because they need to juggle it with their working patterns. Often, that is not possible, no matter how hard they try. Not everyone can afford to pay £40 a day to place their child in a day care environment that can drop the child to a session at 12.15 pm and pick them up at 2.45 pm. That is just one example of what many parents face.

12.15 pm

Finally, I want to ask whether any improvements have been made to the application process, including the creation of a better communications strategy. I wrote an article for the 'Belfast Telegraph' last December to encourage parents to visit preschool settings and talk through the admissions criteria with individual providers. That might assist parents to make choices with positive outcomes. I trust that the letters of offer next year will not be sent out when the schools are closed for Easter. I spent most of recess talking to distressed parents who felt that they had nowhere else to turn for advice. The timing of the letters also put pressure on those working for the boards, who were inundated with calls.

The Department is taking positive steps but not quickly enough. Following an Alliance Party proposal to amend the admissions procedure to make it a two-step process to give priority to children in their immediate preschool year over those in their penultimate year, the previous Minister made those changes, and they have made a difference. Minister, I ask you to take the next step now and remove the July/August criterion in time for the 2013-14 intake. Children are

in their preschool year only once. In two years' time, they will be in primary 2, and fixing the problem then is just not good enough.

Mr Storey: I first want to make a few comments as the Chair of the Education Committee. I can inform the House that, because of concerns expressed by parents and from within the education system, the Committee has had to revisit this issue annually. The Committee has also had to revisit the 0-6 early years strategy or the lack of it. The Education Committee is considering whether it should initiate its own inquiry and will have further deliberations on Wednesday. The Committee is less than satisfied that the process of preschool admissions, set in the context of an early years strategy, is delivering to the best benefit of children and parents in Northern Ireland. I will return and inform the House on how the issue will be progressed.

I also want to make some comments as a Member. I am well aware that, over the weekend, Judith Cochrane's party leader, Mr Ford, warned her to be afraid of people like me. Maybe my colleagues and I are the big bad wolves and Judith Cochrane, Anna Lo, Chris Lyttle and Trevor Lunn are the four little Alliance Party piggies. I do not know whether that is the case as we debate the issue, but the Member has nothing to fear from Members on this side of the House.

The motion asks two things of the Education Minister. The first is that he take immediate action to remove the July/August birthday criterion, and I asked to intervene when the Member referred to that. We need to be absolutely sure that, in moving to remove the July/August anomaly, we do not disadvantage another set of parents. If you listened to 'Good Morning Ulster' this morning, you will have heard from two teachers. One texted the programme to say that it was as a result of the July/August birthday criterion that a place had been accessed.

Mrs Cochrane: Thank you for giving way. I understand what you are saying, but getting rid of the July/August birthday criterion would not create another set of disadvantaged parents. It would mean that children who are born between September and June would no longer be disadvantaged. That would create an equal playing field for all the children who should be going to preschool or school in the same academic year.

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added to his time.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for her intervention. However, we need to ensure that, as we move through any process in the House, the actions that we take do not disenfranchise another set of parents.

In his announcement of just a few weeks ago, on 17 January, the Minister said that his priority as Minister was:

"to create an education service that ensures that all our young people receive a high-quality education."

He went on to say:

"That applies to preschool education in the same way as to any other sector." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 70, p55, col 1].

The previous Education Minister said that this was an issue. In its preschool admissions review, the Department of Education said that this was an issue. We can go back as

far as 2004, when the Department of Education identified this as an issue. Just in case there is still an issue with numeracy in the Department, let me tell you that we are now in 2012. Why is it that, annually, we come to this point with this issue?

I know that the Minister will stand up in the House today and tell us that £60 million has been spent and 24,000 children have been given the service. Yes, that is probably where we stand today. However, what about the 10% who have not received a place? What about those — the Member referred to this — in, for example, Hillsborough who have been offered a place in Newry? What about those who live in Ballymena and have been offered a place in Carrickfergus? Is that what we are honestly saying? Is the Minister prepared to do that, despite his and his party's view that a child should go to its nearest school? Remember, we get beaten over the head by the Minister on this issue: when it comes to post-primary provision, you should always go to your nearest school. However, when it comes to preschool, if you are aged three, the Department is happy to put you on a bus or in a car and allow you to travel 40 miles. Clearly, the Department has an issue.

What this debate will ensure is that, yet again, the genuine concerns of working parents are placed on record in the House. There are clearly concerns that the current process could become a disincentive for working parents. If we are trying to encourage people back into employment and to create an environment in which families can have a lifestyle that accommodates all their challenges and needs, clearly, this policy, as it is currently constructed, is not able to deliver.

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

Mr Storey: Finally, I say this: when will the Minister produce a 0-6 strategy? We wait, we wait —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Mr Storey: — and we wait. The wait is nearly as long as that for admission to a preschool provision place.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Members who tabled this motion. As the proposer of the motion said, similar motions have come before the House. That indicates how big an issue this is for parents. That has to be recognised. It also has to be recognised that the Minister has been very proactive on the issue. As was said, a review of procedures associated with the preschool programme was carried out. There is no doubt that that will continue to be a key priority for the Minister. The establishment of ESA will, of course, offer a changed context in which to take forward actions identified in the report. That should not restrict the Department from bringing —

Mr Storey: Could the Member explain to the House what will happen if we are ever to reach the point of being in the promised land of ESA, given that that is one organisation? If five organisations — the education and library boards — cannot sort out the problem through preschool education advisory groups (PEAGs), how does he envisage that a large authority like ESA would deal with the problem?

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added to his time.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The benefits of ESA are there for all to see. It has been

agreed by the Executive. The key is that we move the issue of ESA forward as quickly as possible, as the Member will understand. There is no doubt that the establishment of ESA is important in this context. It is important, too, for those employed by the boards, to remove the uncertainty that has been created around ESA. They want to see the issue move forward so that they can move on with their respective careers.

There is no doubt that the strategic planning of places is challenging. There are significant variations in the numbers and locations in a single year. The Department has indicated that it will look to the education and library boards, the preschool education advisory groups and, subsequently, ESA to improve the statistical data that is needed to inform area planning.

The overwhelming majority of applicants have been offered a place at a preschool setting that their parents identified as one of their preferences. However, we must continue to work to ensure that those without a place are allocated one. The key issue is ensuring that the spare places that exist are in the correct location, matching supply and demand. It is not reasonable in anyone's view to expect a parent to travel a considerable distance to access that preschool provision. That is the challenge that the Minister has undertaken. I welcome the work that is under way to address that, and I am sure he will elaborate on the work that has taken place. Progress has been made. The two-stage admissions process introduced by the boards last year has helped to maximise the uptake of target-age children and increase choice for them. It is to be welcomed that the previous Minister brought that change about.

Departmental officials have been before the Committee many times about the issue. February was the last meeting at which they discussed this. At that meeting, they indicated that over 90% of need was being met in some areas, and in many areas 100% of need is being met. It is not a issue in those places. However, that should not take away from the fact that we should aim to have 100% coverage in this matter.

The January report indicated that the July/August admissions criterion can disadvantage younger children in their preschool year. The Department and Minister recognise that fact, and the Minister has indicated that he plans to revoke the criterion. I agree with the proposer of the motion that that should be acted on as soon as possible and everything done to ensure that that is brought forward.

We in Sinn Féin support the motion absolutely and look forward to the Minister implementing the Programme for Government commitment on available places. That commitment was demonstrated by the significant investment that the Minister announced in this area in January. I have no doubt that that commitment will continue.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome the challenge I have as Deputy Chair of the Committee and am very pleased to be there. I also welcome wholeheartedly the motion, although I regret it has even proved necessary. The Ulster Unionist Party fully supports the motion, and I congratulate the Members on bringing it forward.

The beginning of the motion calls for immediate action. That made me think that this institution is not very good at knowing what "immediate" is. The Collins dictionary says "occurring at once". This report brought forward 17

actions in mid-January, and we have seen nothing yet. Yet some of them seemed easy enough to put in place. I often wonder what happens to the actions after a report such as this comes out. Are the pens just put down and people take a break? I am sure that to produce those actions they must have knowledge and an idea of how they will put them in place. That is really what we ask for. We ask for those actions to be thought through, carried on and put in place quickly. I have been here two and three quarter years, and we continually see no sense of urgency. We rarely see target dates and timescales, so this is really a plea to every MLA and Department to let us look at how we can do things more quickly.

In the brief that was put together for us today, one little point was a member of the Department mentioning that politicians make the decisions. It was almost as if it was a cast-off remark: "It is not my job." We need everybody. If it is your role to write the briefs and advise Ministers, keep pushing them. It is our jobs as politicians and on the Committees to keep pushing them. Let us see things happen quickly. "Immediate" is, I think, a bit hopeful, but at least push for it.

The rest of the motion focuses really on two areas: revoking the criterion of July and August, which we wholeheartedly agree with, and looking at how we prevent the recurrence of the problems that happened again this Easter. I was told by somebody yesterday that there are parents planning their children's births so that they happen during July, August and September. So, it is no longer a headache, it is "No. Think of the nursery places." But enough of the joke. In three or four years' time those children will be the ones for whom we will want to have got rid of this.

We must have action and give the groups a way forward. In my patch, in Cammoney, there are three nurseries and 182 children's places, yet no place for a child with two working parents. That is why we have to review this matter. In Crumlin, the integrated school has a possibility of 24 places but was given only 10. There were 21 first preference applications that could have been taken, yet at St Joseph's there are 104 places.

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

So, again, we need to look at what we are doing and think it through. We are meant to be promoting integrated education, but we do not seem to be doing it in Crumlin.

12.30 pm

Mr Storey: The Member has hit on a very important point. Part of the difficulty is that the provision across Northern Ireland basically falls into two categories: provision in the maintained sector and a range of either controlled sector or voluntary and community sector provision. The point that he makes about the provision not being in any way integrated is a very valid one.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much. I thank the Member for the intervention.

In Templepatrick and Parkgate, we had problems last year, and I assumed, not being on the Education Committee, that the Department would be resolving them. I spoke to somebody from the PEAG over the weekend who said that

there has been no change in the numbers this year, so we have exactly the same problems arising. Yet, when I asked him what was behind the difficulties, he said the problem was funding. He said that a private nursery school gets less funding than a public one, which would initially seem fair. However, when you have to have one teacher for eight children, instead of one for every 13, it means that you need more money to fund the teachers. So, there is a matter that we need to resolve. He also said to me that if you look at the book 'Open Criteria', you will see that they are anything but open. We need to review that to make sure that they are open.

So, the problems are funding, the regulation and the need for many more places, and we need to see action now. I am very pleased to be part of a Committee that will really look into the subject. The UUP supports the motion.

Mr McDevitt: I am very happy to support the motion, although it deals with just one symptom of the problem. It is a multifaceted problem that has many more symptoms, because while we discriminate against children born in July and August today, we will continue to discriminate against children of working parents in the future. That will remain the case as long as we have a policy that does not put a duty on the state to provide every child with a preschool and nursery place if their parents so want it.

I have read Sinn Féin's manifesto in which the party tells us that it will cherish equally all the children of Ireland. Yet, it is perpetuating, through its Minister of Education, a policy that is based on a fundamental inequality that, by definition, requires the state to discriminate against some children in order to be able to match the number of places against the demand for them. Where is the equality in that? Where is Sinn Féin's republicanism? Where is the commitment to transforming this nation and making it a better place for all our children?

I had a young mother come into my office last week. She is a very fortunate woman: she is a solicitor and her husband is a very qualified man. He gets on a plane every Monday morning at 6.30 am and flies to London to work, and he comes home on a Friday. He does that because he and his wife want to bring up their kids here in Ireland. They left London when their kids were born to rear them here, because here is the place they call home and here is a society they want to be part of rebuilding. Yet, she was coming in to tell me that there is no nursery place for her child in south Belfast. Why? It is because he was not born in July or August and his parents work.

I am the first to say that we should have policies that benefit those who need them most in our society. However, we do not need to have policies that tackle inequality if they just perpetuate another inequality. That is why this Minister needs to move from fiddling with a policy to bringing in a right — a human right — to a preschool or nursery education for every child whose parents wish to avail themselves of that. For months, he has simply refused to entertain the possibility of doing so, and I do not understand why.

However, it does not really matter what I think, because parents do not understand why. They do not understand why, when we profess to be committed to transforming education and putting young children first — something I know Mr Rogers, who will make his speech later, feels passionately about — we continue basically to build a preschool and

nursery system on a policy that discriminates and is built on inequality.

I agreed with the Chair of the Education Committee when he asked the very simple question: where is the 0-6 strategy? It is like everything else. It is like ESA, area-based planning, special educational needs (SEN) and God knows what else that has just been lost in some massive bureaucracy in the Department of Education.

I do not blame the Minister personally for all this. It is a difficult Department, and this is a very political issue. However, there are some things that the House does not disagree about. It does not disagree about the need to put young children first. All our manifestos commit us to doing that. So, why are we not working on that common ground and looking to improve the lot of those who have yet to enter formal education? You cannot build an education system that starts when children are four and finishes when they are 16 just because the law states that that is technically when education starts. You have to have the courage to move with the times. This policy does not belong in these times, and it will certainly not allow us to move with them.

I do not wish for any colleague to have to bring a similar motion to the House next year. What I wish is that we will be debating law that will allow every child aged three to have the right to a nursery or preschool place if their parents so wish.

Mr McKay: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member is putting forward quite a strange position, given that some of his party colleagues would disagree with what he is saying about the current preschool policy. If you follow his logic through, is the SDLP now saying that we should do away with free school meals?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McDevitt: There is no logic in what Mr McKay says, but what can I say about a man who took a whole three minutes to defend his Minister's position? In fact, that was a record. Mr McKay does not normally take more than two minutes to defend his Minister's position in the House, as that is all he needs to sink slowly into silence. The issue is that Mr McKay is promoting a policy that is based on and promotes inequality. This is not the same as free school meals at all. In fact, it is totally opposite to free school meals. The free school meals policy is built on rights. Every child has the right to be at school, and some children have the right to more support when they are in school. This policy does not even give every child the right to a place.

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

Mr McDevitt: Your Department is standing in the way of children having the right to a place. Get with the times and give them that right.

Mrs Hale: I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion. This issue, which has been brought by the good Member on my right, underlines a deep-seated problem in our education system. If left unchecked, I firmly believe that that could isolate children and their families throughout Northern Ireland from their communities and society.

Three weeks ago, I met the Minister with my Lagan Valley colleagues to discuss this very issue and to put forward the

plight of a number of families in Lagan Valley who have been forced to travel long distances outside their communities on a daily basis so that their children can access a preschool education. Indeed, it is worth noting that one family from Ballymacash in Lisburn was offered a preschool place in either Bangor or Newcastle. Many rural families in Dromore and Moira have also contacted me about being unable to access preschool education, as the number of available preschool places does not reflect the needs of my local community.

It is just unacceptable that a family who have lived in Lisburn or Dromore all their lives are being asked to travel approximately 60 miles a day to access preschool education. That creates an added financial burden and puts stresses and strains on the family unit, which we, as a Government, should not be placing on families, especially on this issue. The pandemic is just not a phenomenon in Lagan Valley. Listening to other Members here today, it is clearly a trend throughout Northern Ireland, especially in our rural areas.

Due to the associated practicalities and costs, families are being forced to consider relocating outside their local community or to stop employment. Some are even having to consider relocating their children with other family members rather than be forced to spend up to three hours a day travelling to access their educational place.

Sadly, the issue does not stop there. As many Members may well be aware, the first criterion for places in most primary schools is that a child seeking entrance will have attended the local feeder preschool. This means that many children will be forced outside their community for most of their educational lives, and, for some, the problems of travelling, costs and relocation will remain a burden for the entirety of their school lives. That life cycle of being unable to access education in or close to your community can also cause mental and physical health issues for the parents, due to the unfavourable lifestyle choices that many could be faced with making. I ask the Minister to strongly consider the concept of changing the entrance cut-off point as a way of easing the numbers entering preschool for each academic year. Research has shown that if that criterion were adopted, it would create the necessary places. Although that may not be a long-term solution, the Assembly must act to ensure that no families are placed in the unnecessary position of having no control or other viable solutions other than to move away from their community and their support networks.

Access to education should not be based on the ability to travel, income or location. All children should be able to access preschool places in the community in which they live. As Members of this House, we should be able to provide the resources and direction to ensure that no family is faced with the problem that I have just mentioned in trying to get their child a preschool place. I welcome the debate and support the motion.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, thank the Member for bringing the motion to the House. I and my party support the motion. As the mover of the motion said, preschool education is important for a child's development and learning in their early years. As every parent knows, as soon as our children are born, we tend to wish their lives away. We cannot wait until they say their first word, we cannot wait until they crawl, and we cannot wait until they walk. Indeed, it is in the first years of our

children's lives that we start to think about where to send them for their preschool education. Many parents may decide to use a provider that other children in the family have gone to, or the one that is closest to their home, or, for many working parents, one that is close to their grandparents or childminders. Like many of my constituents, I was delighted with the Minister's announcement in January of the review of preschool admissions. The preschool admissions criteria have been a bone of contention for a long time, with many parents left feeling disadvantaged and that the criteria have let them down.

The Department's admissions criteria specify two priorities: children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, as we know, and four-year-olds with July/August birthdays, because they will not enter compulsory education until after their fifth birthday. As we know, that targeting process was part of the Department of Education's wider strategy to reduce the levels of underachievement in the long term, and it has been in operation since 1999. A child who fits the criteria will be given priority, wherever they live. In January, the Minister stated that the July/August criteria can disadvantage younger children in their preschool year, with many children losing out, and many parents being left frustrated and angry. Therefore, we welcome the review.

There has also been much debate over children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds being given priority. It seems to me that it has almost become a debate about children whose parents work and children whose parents are unemployed. Recently, there has been much conflict in that area in the media. One would almost be forgiven for thinking that there was a war brewing: parents who work versus parents who do not work. I do not wish to be responsible or to be a cheerleader for demonising the unemployed.

Other Members spoke about rural areas. The demand for preschool places in rural areas changes annually, and I believe that many providers get frustrated every year with the demand being higher than other years. That is an issue in rural areas.

12.45 pm

Many preschool providers set their own criteria, which can include a number of factors, such as proximity, sibling attendance for preschool or chronological age. Those criteria are at the discretion of the board of governors and the managing committee of the school or playgroup, and those, too, present problems in themselves.

Although the review has come too late for the 2012 intake, I ask the Minister to ensure that the recommendations of the review are brought forward. Sinn Féin will be supporting the motion.

Mr Craig: I, too, support the motion. When I was reading through the motion, I noted that it was 1999, I think, when there had last been a real overhaul of the preschool allocations criteria. This is not the first year, or even the second year, but the third year in which I have found myself in huge difficulties over the issue in my constituency. The simple truth is that there has been a lack of provision in the local area with regard to preschool allocation.

Minister, I will be honest: although I can understand something happening once, and even forgive someone for getting it wrong twice, I find it hard to believe that, with regard to

my constituency, the Department and the boards can get it wrong for three years in a row. Clearly, there is some fundamental flaw in how the Department and boards are looking at the numbers that are being provided. I can never understand why that is the case, because the one thing that would be made available to the Department and the boards is the census figures and, obviously, the birth rates in localities. I, therefore, have difficulty in understanding why there is a mismatch between places available and the birth rates of children in a locality.

Some of the cases that are coming are very severe. Some parents are not even receiving a place for their child in their fourth choice preschool facility. Minister, that is something that is going to have a roll-on effect in our primary schools as well. This is the first year that I am getting an indication that that is the case in my constituency. This is the first year in the long number of years, maybe five or seven, in which this has been an issue that we are seeing classes in local primary schools being filled to capacity and children being turned away.

I appeal to the Minister: although we are looking at preschool places, the criteria that are being used there and how places are allocated, think long and hard about the issue, because it has a roll-on effect on places and available capacity in our education system, even at primary school level. That will happen very quickly, as these children move on.

Among the criteria that seem to be causing huge difficulties for parents is the July/August birthday criterion. I know we have debated that issue to death in Committee, but there is a problem, regardless of whether your child ends up being one of the eldest in the class or one of the youngest. There will be underdevelopment or overdevelopment of the child. I have experience of that issue, at both ends of the scale, occurring in my family. One has developed very well, and the other has developmental problems, because of the age criterion and that month. If there was some flexibility around it between the education system and the parents, I think it would be an issue that could be fairly easily resolved.

We have targeted deprivation, and it is one of the key figures used when choosing, under the criteria now. I live in a constituency where there are, definitely, issues around the underachievement of people coming from deprived backgrounds. I fully recognise that fact, and I think that that is one of the tools that the Minister and his Department have used in the past to try to rectify the situation. What I will say, Minister, is that although it is a tool that may be used to rectify a situation, we have, as a Government, signed up to providing places for everyone. So I start to wonder whether that criterion is out of date. If we are going to provide preschool places for all children, do we still need that as a key criterion and marker within our schools? There should be provision for all, so I ask the Minister to review the criteria and have a serious look at how capacity matches birth rate in all localities.

Mrs Dobson: I support the motion. I also thank the Member for bringing it to the House and giving us the opportunity to debate an issue that is at the forefront of so many young parents' minds. Unmet need for funded nursery places has a devastating effect on parents and their children at this time every year. However, the damage that it will wreak on our young children will remain for generations to come.

As a newly elected MLA last June, I was honoured to make my maiden speech on the issue of nursery school provision. That was during a debate on an SDLP motion that called:

“on the Minister of Education to ensure that adequate nursery school provision is available for all children; to conduct an immediate review of current provision to ensure that unmet need in areas of high demand is addressed in advance of the next school year”.

Although I am pleased that, since then, a Programme for Government commitment has been given to entitle every child whose parents want one to a funded preschool place, it does not take away from the fact that children are being turned down for places. Families and parents across Northern Ireland are being forced to make financial decisions because of being denied a place for their child. I know that all Members have cases in their constituency offices of anxious parents who feel totally let down by the system and who would desperately love to secure a nursery place for their child, but the fact remains that not enough places are available.

If we were to base the beginning of a child's academic life on privilege, there would quite rightly be uproar in the Chamber, but, in a way, we are doing that. If hard-working people are privileged enough to hold down a job while bringing up their child, the plain fact is that their child is less likely to secure a funded place at nursery school and, therefore, less likely to get the same start to their education journey as other children — children who may even have been born in the same hospital ward at the same time. Those children are missing out on the opportunity to take up the excellent provision and start in life that is offered by the dedicated staff at statutory, voluntary and community nursery schools across Northern Ireland.

I ask the Minister of Education to listen to the voices of hard-working people who are expressing disgust and anger — those are their words — at the present system for allocating funded preschool places in Northern Ireland. Will he give a commitment, in line with the Programme for Government, to review the process by which his Department gauges demand, numerically and geographically, for preschool places based on birth statistics and begin the process of strategically planning to meet future demand? We need to sweep away the injustice of working parents receiving letters in the post to say that their child has not been successful in securing a funded place.

The first rung on the ladder of the education system in Northern Ireland is broken, and parents and their children across Northern Ireland are being disadvantaged because of it. Again, I thank the proposers of the motion for bringing it to the House to enable us to debate it and bring the views of our constituents to the Floor of the House. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response and the concrete steps that he intends to take to provide academic fairness for each and every child born in Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As this is the first occasion on which the Assembly will hear from Sean Rogers, I remind the House that it is the convention that the maiden speech is heard without interruption.

Mr Rogers: I am honoured to represent the people of South Down, following in the footsteps of Margaret Ritchie, Eddie McGrady, P J Bradley and Éamonn O'Neill. I commend

the work of Margaret, and I know that, as an MP, she will continue to deliver. I am particularly proud that I am the first nationalist in 50 years to come to the House from the kingdom of Mourne. I look forward to working with my colleague Karen and, indeed, all representatives of South Down, to ensure that all aspects of our constituency are well represented. I welcome Chris as the other new start from South Down.

It is with great pleasure that I deliver my maiden speech on what has been my vocation in life: education. As a parent and educationalist, I have had contact with children who have enjoyed an enriched learning experience from birth, and many who have not. Research tells us that the formative years in a child's life are the most crucial. Next to a secure and loving home environment, quality early years provision is one of the most important factors in a child's cognitive, language and social development. I pay tribute to all providers of preschool education: they do fantastic work.

We in the SDLP are fully committed to giving each child the best start on their educational journey. I note that there have been many debates on preschool education in the House. In 2006, the Department expressed its concerns in a report about social disadvantage criteria, and six years later, children from working families are still being discriminated against as they fail to access a nursery place. We cannot fix our education system until we get the foundations right. I can assure you that it is extremely difficult to address the deficit in numeracy and literacy at post-primary level. Early intervention is the key.

I wish to highlight the positive role that parents can play in their child's educational development. Parents need to be encouraged and supported in becoming engaged with education, right from the time of conception. It is encouraging to see some fathers getting involved, but there is a bit of room for improvement.

I recently attended a presentation by Sure Start at the first anniversary celebrations of the South Down family health initiative in my local area, where a young parent outlined how the parenting programme had helped her to bond with her child. Many of today's parents live in a pressure-cooker environment that is aggravated by social problems, the economic situation and family breakdown. They all need help to develop coping skills, and there needs to be better access to such programmes.

Sadly, we can no longer assume that good quality interaction takes place between parent and child. Unfortunately, technology has taken over. One young parent thought that she should read a bedtime story merely to get her child to sleep, but the parenting programme taught her the importance of positive interaction, which enhances attachment and language development. TV and other electronic devices cannot compensate for real interaction, just as standing on your Wii Fit in front of the TV is a poor substitute for a good walk in the Mournes.

There is no quick fix, but there is a strong economic argument that investment in early years would provide the biggest return for society. Our descendants will sit in the House and debate what we did and what we did not do. They will judge us harshly or be proud of our achievements. To reinvigorate our economy, we must get education right. It must be built on strong foundations and ensure a preschool

place for every child, not just the older ones, irrespective of their socio-economic background.

I thank those who tabled the motion and support it fully. Let us have less talk and more action and make early years education a reality for every child. Let us put children first.

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

Mr Rogers: I commend my party colleague Conall for his work on the Education Committee, and as a new SDLP Member, I look forward to working with the Minister and the Committee.

1.00 pm

Mr Weir: Like others, I welcome the motion. However, I echo Mr Kinahan's remarks about the fact that, in many ways, it is a pity that we have to debate this ongoing issue. I cannot claim to have the same level of background as the Member for South Down who spoke previously, given the number of years that he has been involved in education. However, I suspect that I can claim to have longer involvement in dealing with the issue than most Members of the House. Fourteen or 15 years ago in what was then the Northern Ireland Forum, the Education Committee, of which I was a member, did a special report on preschool education. The current Chairman of the Education Committee was probably running around in short trousers then.

Mr Storey: I was at school.

Mr Weir: He was at school.

As part of that review, there was a clear acceptance that investment in early education was vital to the future of our children and, indeed, our country, because it does not just pay off in respect of providing educational dividends but plays a very important role in addressing a whole range of social problems and helping to prevent them. The report recommended that the Education Department should make available to every child at least one year's preschool education: that was a key finding of the report. To be fair, a certain amount of action was taken. However, if you look at the statistics, you will see that there has been very limited progress in the past 10 years, which is one of the problems. For example, in 1998-99, around 13,000 children received one year's preschool education. By 2001-02, that number had risen to 21,000. However, the number now is only 22,500.

For many, there is no real choice. There is a pretence of saying that every child that has the opportunity. In practice, parents whose children are refused a local place are having to choose between paying through the nose to send them to nursery school — indeed, I heard only last week of nursery schools charging £30 an hour for a private place — or sending them to one of the schools on the list from the local education board in which there are still places, which may involve a round trip of 20 miles, 30 miles, 40 miles or 50 miles. Under those circumstances, what real choice do people have?

Mr Craig said that some people in his constituency could not get their children into their fourth-choice school. Certainly this year and, indeed, over the past few years, a number of parents have come to me saying that they have filled in the form for all six local choices and have been refused places at all of them.

Steps were taken in the late 1990s to give some level of priority because there were a limited number of places. For example, priority was given to children with July and August birthdays and those experiencing social deprivation. Those steps might have had some merit at an early stage when there were a limited number of places. However, I think that those criteria are now very much out of date. I have to say that I have never favoured the idea of giving priority to those with July and August birthdays, because, as the proposer of the motion said, it does not create a level playing field for all children. Rather, it creates a situation where about one sixth of the population have an advantage over the rest on a very arbitrary basis. Mention has been made of the recommendation in the review to remove that criterion, and I would like to see that happen. I think that we have seen a lack of action. If the current provision is put in place, I do not want to see that inaction follow through to another year.

The criteria are causing widespread resentment among a lot of parents, because they think that the current system discriminates against working parents. Such parents see children who live quite a distance away going to their local nursery school, which they perhaps live just round the corner from and which they cannot get their child into because they are working parents. That is fundamentally wrong. We need a radical review of the implementation of admission arrangements. We need some strategic action. We also need a strategy to ensure that the mismatch between where the available places are and where the demand is properly tackled. It strikes me that if we reach a situation where people genuinely have the choice and are able to get their children into nursery schools —

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

Mr Weir: — I suspect that some of the tensions, particularly those between working parents and people who are socially disadvantaged, can be dissipated and removed. I support the motion.

Mr Allister: I want to begin by congratulating Mr Rogers on his maiden speech in the House. It was thoughtful and delivered in a manner that indicates that he will, undoubtedly, make a significant contribution to the House. As my speech follows his, it is right that I congratulate him sincerely on his contribution.

Some of us might have been forgiven for thinking that the matter of preschool nursery provision was resolved or going to be resolved, when we think back to the day when the proposer of the motion, Mrs Cochrane, threatened amorous demonstrations towards the Minister. Of course, it turned out to be yet another false dawn as far as the Minister is concerned. The promise that many people thought was in his statement turned out not to be there at all. We are, therefore, still on the long finger as far as that matter is concerned.

The issue needs to be addressed. Its many dimensions have long been crying out to be addressed. One of those dimensions is the disparity of provision across the Province. The very fact that people are offered a place does not mean that they have one. If someone is offered a place that is a 20-mile round trip or further away, that says that, in some areas, there is over-provision — otherwise they would not be able to offer provision to outsiders, so to speak. It is no provision for those who are asked to travel because it is

unrealistic and utterly unsuitable for children of that age. Therefore, for the Minister to say that there are enough places is not the answer if they are not in the right place. That problem has yet to be addressed. It is a particular problem in some rural communities.

An even greater and overriding concern that is yet to be addressed is the inequality in provision. Preschool provision is vital in so many ways. It is vital to the child, the family unit and the working family unit. The section of society that is probably most discriminated against with regard to that provision is the working family unit, due to the prioritisation of places for those who do not work. Those who sit at home on benefits and are available all day to be with their children are getting places in advance of those who also want places for their children, are anxious to do their best for their them and, therefore, go out to work so that they can provide the best for them. They find that they cannot get places other than at extortionate prices in some private facilities.

A further area that undoubtedly needs attention is ensuring that there is adequate provision in many rural areas. I have declared previously and will do so again that I have an interest as chairman of the board of governors of Moorfields Primary School. It is a rural school that serves a hinterland that does not have adequate preschool provision or a preschool unit, as many other schools do. Parents in that scattered rural community have to send their children to private facilities, in the main, which are inconveniently located. If we are to address that issue seriously, we need to do so through state provision as well. If we are not to move towards giving preschool children the right to a place, at the very least, we need to ensure that the network of schools is adequately provided with preschool units. Certainly, in the case of Moorfields Primary School, that has been a longstanding demand that has, so far, gone unmet. I trust that, by raising it again, it will, one day, fall on the ears of those who need to act.

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

Mr Allister: Then, that provision will, indeed, be met.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Fáiltím roimh an deis freagairt ar dhíospoireacht an lae inniu, agus beidh mé ag iarraidh roinnt ceisteanna atá ag déanamh inní do Chomhaltai a fhreagairt. I welcome the opportunity to respond to the debate, in which Members highlighted issues of concern. I recognise that some genuine concerns were raised following what I emphasise is only the first stage of the application process. However, I will not join in the chorus of demonisation conducted by some Members, led today by the SDLP and Mr Allister, alongside media commentators, of those who, through no fault of their own, find themselves on benefits. Let us make it clear —

Mr McDevitt: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Let us make it clear: there are many hard-working people —

Mr McDevitt: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister has indicated that he is not giving way.

Mr O'Dowd: For the assistance of a smooth debate, I will not be giving way to anyone. I have a speech to make.

Mrs Dobson also referred to hard-working parents. I know many hard-working parents who are currently unemployed through no fault of their own. In case some Members have not heard, there is a recession on. People are becoming unemployed who never thought that they would be unemployed, and it is wrong of Members to demonise them.

Let us face the facts. The preschool admission process is ongoing. Stage 1 of the process ended on March 30 and stage 2 ends on 1 June. Ninety-four per cent of applicants, all in their final preschool year, have been offered a place in a setting that their parents identified in their list of preferences. This is a significant level of success for the programme, which attracted 22,800 applications from January 2012. Furthermore, of those placed, some 84% have secured a place in their first preference setting. The reality is that the vast majority of children have already been allocated a place in a setting of their choice.

Nevertheless, as I stated, I understand the genuine concerns expressed by some Members and the difficulties experienced by some parents whose children are unplaced at the end of stage 1. There are 1,429 children without a place at this time. Although 1,742 places remain available across the education and library board areas, I fully recognise that not all those places may be in the right location to meet the demand. I have never been on record as saying that the offer is right in all places. I am determined, however, that we will move quickly to deliver the Programme for Government commitment to provide places for all who want them.

Steps have already been taken by the boards to address the need for additional places. I have brought in new providers to meet the shortfall in some areas, and other requests for new providers are being examined with a mind to bring them on board this year. Some existing providers are offering new additional sessions. Last week, ahead of the motion being tabled, I had already tasked my officials to meet the boards as a matter of urgency and to report back to me on the scope for additional early actions to more closely align supply and demand by September. That meeting will take place on Thursday of this week.

In considering any workable proposals that are put before me, I will operate in a flexible and imaginative manner within the current legislative framework. In order to improve this year's processes, I took a series of steps, again, before today's motion was tabled and before the media attention.

In light of Mr Kinahan's comments, based on information from his source in one of the PEAGs, I suggest that he gets a new source, because his information is not correct. Earlier this year, I invested a further £1.2 million to increase the number of preschool places available in the voluntary private sector. I recently approved development proposals that will increase preschool places in statutory settings by 130. Again, in response to Mr Weir's comment that little has changed over 10 years, the figures suggest that things are much different.

In the past two years, the number of new statutory places has increased by 442 with the establishment of 17 new nursery units. A total of 29 additional voluntary private providers offering 404 funded preschool places have come

into the preschool education expansion programme in the past two years. In addition, there was an increase in the number of funded places allocated to voluntary private sector settings that were already participating in the scheme.

Overall, the number of funded places in the voluntary private sector has increased by 1,405 between 2009-2010 and the current year. That is not a sector standing still; that is a sector increasing its capacity to meet demand.

1.15 pm

Members will be aware that I have been reviewing the education budget, and, as a result, I am in a position today to make an announcement of further additional funding for preschool and early years. Today, I am allocating a further £1.4 million. That fund will be available for additional preschool places. Over the past two years, additional funds have made available to voluntary and private providers on a year-by-year basis. Today, I announce that that additional funding will now be recurrent. A total of £1.3 million will be made available on a recurring basis to voluntary and private providers to further close the funding gap between statutory and other sectors. That was one area of concern, Mr Kinahan, that your source had right. We do need to close the gap, and the funding that I have announced today will assist in doing that.

In addition, I plan to extend Sure Start coverage to the 25% most disadvantaged areas. This will cost a further £1 million, rising to £2 million by 2014-15. If more investment is needed, I will look at it urgently. The funding that I have outlined today amounts to almost an additional £6 million towards early years and preschool education. That is proof, if proof were needed, that I and my Department are serious about preschool education and determined to meet our Programme for Government targets.

Concerns have been raised about the process of the allocation of places, and I wish to emphasise a couple of points. No child is offered a setting for which the parent has not submitted an application. Places are only offered on the basis of parental preference. I emphasise "parental preference", not "parental choice". There is a distinct difference. At the end of stage one, parents are advised of all of the settings where places are still available in a board area. Clearly, these cover a wide geographic area, but I make it clear that I do not consider a suitable preschool place to be one where a parent and child are expected to travel long distances.

Finally, my focus is on the provision of a year's quality preschool education. At times, there appears to be a perception in some quarters that we are providing childcare. I am the Minister of Education, not the Minister of childcare. Although I fully accept that preschool, like school, assists in the planning of a child's care arrangements, that is not its primary purpose. We do not send children to primary school to assist parents in their childcare. Children are sent to primary school for the benefit of the child and their education. We send children to preschool for the benefit of the child and that child's education. Parents should be aware in submitting an application that they are advised to select preferences in a number of statutory and voluntary private settings in the programme as it is not always possible to meet parents' first preferences. Members should note again that it is a preference, not a choice. Inevitably, some

settings will be more popular than others. Parents who do not identify a full range of preferences across the sectors will limit their options, as it reduces the number of settings that may be able to be offered to them.

I turn to the entrance criteria that are used by my Department. The Department currently specifies two priorities: social disadvantage and four-year-olds with July and August birthdays. Schools and preschool settings will then set their own criteria to select children down to the last available place where too many children apply. The social disadvantage criterion was introduced as part of the Department's wider efforts to tackle educational underachievement.

I am surprised by Mr McDevitt's contribution. He claimed that we are discriminating against working parents. Has the Member never heard of positive discrimination being used to alleviate disadvantage —

Mr McDevitt: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: — or to rectify inequality? From his comments, it appears that he does not. I understand that Mr McDevitt is moving over to the health brief for the party.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Will he be telling people from poor, disadvantaged backgrounds, who, as studies show, suffer the worst health outcomes, that it is their fault? He appears to be telling people from poor, disadvantaged backgrounds that their educational outcomes are their fault.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Minister give way? Let me answer that.

Mr O'Dowd: The state —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister has the Floor. I ask that all remarks be made through the Chair.

Mr O'Dowd: The state has a duty to ensure that it uses whatever mechanisms possible to tackle social disadvantage. This clause is about tackling social disadvantage, and, again, I emphasise that the demonising of people who currently find themselves in unemployment is totally unacceptable.

The principle of retaining the social clause criterion has been queried, and there have been suggestions that this can disadvantage working parents. That is a false argument. We have to achieve coverage across the North and make places available to all parents. The argument about working and non-working parents is a distraction but is one that I will not be distracted by.

The Programme for Government also insists that we challenge underachievement in such circumstances. I intend to meet that target. The continued use of those two priority criteria was considered as part of the review of preschool admission arrangements, which concluded that the definition of social advantage needs to be reviewed and brought up to date. That will have to wait for the outcome of the Executive's deliberations on universal credit.

The debate raised the issue of the July/August birthdays as a priority criterion. At no time during Mrs Cochrane's contribution to the debate did I think that she was point scoring. I believe that the Member is genuine about the matter. I am not sure where the officials briefed her that I am awaiting a better opportunity, and I cannot remember

the exact term that you used, but I would like to inform the House that I will have the legislation that is necessary to remove those criteria with the Assembly before the summer recess. It can wait no longer. I had hoped that the other legislative vehicles would be there, but they are not available to me at the minute.

Earlier this year I announced the outcome of the review of preschool admissions arrangements. That will introduce changes to improve the system for children and parents and will impact on policy and practice. Implementation of key elements of the review will be taken into account in considering the steps that need to be taken to deliver the Programme for Government commitment. Some aspects of the review will also be considered as part of the early years strategy. Members rightly asked, "Where is the early years strategy?" I will announce the outcome of that to the Assembly before the summer recess.

As I indicated, the preschool admissions process is still under way and places are still available. My Department, working with the board, will make further places available in areas where demand cannot currently be met and to all providers in areas that are oversubscribed. The preschool programme is referenced in the Programme for Government, and there is work to be done to meet the commitment of ensuring that a place is available for every child whose parents want it. I have asked officials to consider what further steps need to be taken to strengthen and invest in the Programme for Government in the long term.

Already today, I have announced almost £6 million of additional funding towards preschool and early years. In the immediate future, I am prepared to be creative and flexible in finding solutions to address any problems in placing those children who have not yet received a place. That work continues.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for the commitments that he outlined, and I thank everyone who made contributions to the debate. There are clear commitments in the Programme for Government on preschool provision, and those are the frameworks around which we can address concerns about social disadvantage and, indeed, the July/August birthday issue. I give a wholehearted welcome to the news today that answers the call that we made in our motion. For the sake of child development, it is important that local preschool places are guaranteed, and the longer that it takes to resolve all the issues with that matter, the longer we will fail families across Northern Ireland in all our constituencies.

I put on record my thanks to my Alliance Party colleague Judith Cochrane for putting the issue on the Assembly agenda today to engage the Minister on and press him into action on delivery for nursery places for our children. I also thank her for all the work that she has done to promote the practical steps that can be taken to move us towards the goal of locally based preschool places for all our children.

I will move on to Members' contributions, starting with that of Mervyn Storey, the Chairperson of the Education Committee. He recognised a lot of the challenges with the issue and chose to take an opportunity to have a pop at us for proposing the motion. He likened us to little piggies and the DUP to big bad wolves. On this issue, it looks as though he is more of a sheep in wolf's clothing when it comes

to holding the Minister to account, but we welcome his contribution nonetheless.

Mr McKay MLA recognised that it was hoped that ESA would be the legislative vehicle through which some of the criteria that were causing problems could be removed. Indeed, the target set for delivery of that legislation was 2009. It is regrettable that that has taken so long to come forward, but, again, we welcome the Minister's action to move with other legislation to deal with some of the issues in lieu of that. He also advocated for 100% coverage in the provision of nursery places, and we agree with that also.

Danny Kinahan called for immediate action and acknowledged that this House does not have a reputation for such. Hopefully, we will be able to work together to act much more quickly on all the outstanding items in relation to nursery provision. Conall McDevitt, rightly, acknowledged that we are looking today at the symptoms of a wider problem and that we need to resolve the confusion that reigns among many parents with regard to more widespread nursery provision.

Brenda Hale acknowledged that this is a Northern Ireland-wide problem, especially in rural areas and to such an extent that families consider relocating or stopping work in order to overcome difficulties in this area. Michaela Boyle, rightly, acknowledged that, according to reports and research, July and August birthdays are a disadvantage to many people. However, she cautioned against creating conflict between working parents and those who are not currently in employment. I agree with that as well.

Jonathan Craig called for the better use of birth rate data to overcome the problems. That is certainly something that we have been calling for from the Minister, and we welcome his commitment today to look into that area. Jo-Anne Dobson, on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, represented the many parents who feel let down by the current system and called on us to listen to their voices. Hopefully, the Minister is showing that he is starting to do that. Jo-Anne also called for the better use of data and informed area planning, which is essential to making further progress.

Sean Rogers made his first contribution to the House, and I congratulate him on his appointment to the Assembly. I wish him well in all his work for the people of South Down, whether it is on Wii Fit issues or walking in the Mourne. You are very welcome indeed. Your unique contribution referenced the importance of high-quality early years provision and the importance of recognising the hard work of all staff in preschool education but also —

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: Yes; I am happy to do so.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member. I will take off my disguise and not be a sheep in wolf's clothing. On that point about high-quality provision, we heard the Minister, who, unfortunately, was not prepared to take any interventions today, say that he is allocating an additional £1.4 million. Does the Member agree that there is a serious issue that has to be addressed to get to the point of high-quality provision, given that the chief inspector said that:

"the highest percentage of good to outstanding practice remained within the statutory nursery schools?"

There is no quality assurance and there are no guaranteed outcomes in relation to the money that has been announced today.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for his intervention. It is good to see a robust intervention being made about the Minister's contribution. We absolutely need to upskill those in all sectors of nursery provision. That is also a way that we can help to overcome some of the shortages in statutory provision. We heard from Sean Rogers about the importance of positive parental interaction with children as well. That is essential to their development, and it is an economic imperative for wider society to have less talk and more action on this issue, and rightly so.

Peter Weir acknowledged that the July/August criterion was particularly arbitrary, and he recognised a need for all parents to have better local access to provision. Jim Allister referred to my colleague's profession of amorous demonstrations to the Minister if he were to make progress on these issues. I fear the scenes that we might be met with later today. I look forward to that — more so than my colleague, perhaps. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Allister also recognised a wider disparity of provision that needs to be overcome. He said that everyone needs to have access to a place and that we are making unrealistic expectations of many parents, particularly those in rural communities, as regards travel. However, I urge Mr Allister to avoid falsely setting socially disadvantaged children in conflict with others. Nevertheless, I agree with him that widespread provision is the framework that will overcome that type of conflict and confusion.

We welcome the announcements made by the Minister of Education about investment and taking the action that is needed to make the application criteria more balanced.

He rightly acknowledged, however, that we have many children across Northern Ireland who are unplaced at stage 1 of the application process and recognised that many of the places on offer are not in the right location for families. I welcome his commitment to better address the supply and demand issues relating to nursery provision and his willingness to improve the application process in general.

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

I ask the Minister whether we will see improvements in the way in which data is collected and around the communication strategy. There is a real challenge on our hands to make sure that we help parents to better understand how to list preferences and to understand the criteria that apply to their application process.

1.30 pm

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for giving way. I think that he has touched on the nub of it in terms of how data is collected. In conversation with senior educationalists in the South Eastern Education and Library Board, I became aware, a couple of months ago, that several hundred places were going to be oversubscribed. You cannot put nine pints into a gallon drum. It is essential that we have the adequate number of spaces and that that preparation is put in place. That is where the nub of the problem exists. It is in certain areas.

Mr Lyttle: Absolutely. We really need to see better area-based planning in action. We would like to know from the Minister if there is more flexibility around enrolment numbers for limited extensions outside the development process, which is particularly important for people who have been let down by the area-planning and have oversubscription in their area.

In closing, I urge the House, the MLAs who have supported the motion, members of the public, families who are affected by the issue and the media to make preschool provision for our children a critical issue for the Executive and the Minister, to prove that this is an institution that is capable of delivering on real issues for local people. The Executive, the Minister and the Assembly would do well to realise that members of the community care more about these issues than issues such as, for example, what flag we fly on the top of this building.

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

Mr Lyttle: They care more about whether their children will receive access to the education that they deserve. Those are the issues on which the Assembly should be working and, indeed, should be judged.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to take immediate action on the findings of the review of the preschool admissions arrangements and remove the July and August birthday admissions criterion for the 2013-14 academic year; and urges the Minister to prevent a repeat of the problems being faced this year in relation to the 2012-13 academic year, by ensuring that there are sufficient preschool places for all children in the required locations.

Multiagency Support Teams

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

Mr Beggs: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the success of the multiagency support teams and equivalent bodies in detecting and addressing problems which children may experience in the early stages of their education; recognises the effective partnerships that are in place between the health service, schools and parents to address the needs of children; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to work closely with the Minister of Education to review the model of service provision and expand the service to the schools and nurseries which are not currently part of the scheme.

I am very pleased to move the motion. I declare an interest as a founding member of the Carrickfergus Children and Young People's Partnership, now perhaps known as a locality group, and also of Horizon Sure Start, which operates in Larne and Carrickfergus. In both those organisations, the issue of how health and education are intertwined is central. It is clear how education is important to address health issues on occasion and how it is important that health issues that a child might have are addressed in order that they can progress in their education.

The importance of early intervention has been widely recognised internationally and, increasingly, locally. I think of the Nobel prize-winning economist Professor James Heckman, who recognised that addressing issues at the earliest stage so that people can progress and become productive citizens benefits not only the individual, family and society but brings a bottom-line benefit to the economy. I also recall hearing Scotland's Chief Medical Officer, Harry Barnes, during a seminar on Northern Ireland held by the Northern Investing for Health Partnership, recognise the importance of education in trying to address health inequalities. So the two issues are clearly intertwined. Health inequality can cause problems to our young children, and equally, as I said, if there are problems with education, there are problems in getting across health messages. Education has a role to play if we want to improve our society's health by encouraging healthy eating, improving exercise levels and ensuring that people have resilience against drug and alcohol misuse.

Historically, Northern Ireland Departments operated largely in silos. The Education Department was responsible for schools and the Health Department for hospitals. Thankfully, with the recognition by each Department of its importance to the other, they now cross over. I recall that the first Assembly had a funding package for children and young people to encourage cross-departmental working, and, when devolution was removed, that type of funding continued under the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Multiagency working was one of the important schemes to be established.

In my area, the body currently operated by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust is known as the multiagency

support team for schools (MASTS), which is important because it addresses a range of issues that may include speech and language issues; communication needs; emotional, social or behavioural needs; and sensory, motor or perceptual needs. However, specifically, there must be two or more issues before the multiagency team will get involved. If there is a single issue, the single professional can deal with it, but one form of need frequently triggers other issues and other complex needs that must be addressed. That is the beauty of the multiagency team, which includes speech and language therapy, behavioural therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, clinical psychology, specialist language teachers — certainly in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area — therapy assistant support and, indeed, clerical support for it all to work. It is also important that one of the scheme's aims is to give nursery and primary school staff the confidence and knowledge to identify and meet the needs of children with difficulties in the areas that I mentioned. So it has brought about improvement in the close working and abilities of teachers and, ultimately, the headmaster, to whom issues must be referred when assistance has to be brought in.

Parents of children with special needs must have considerable determination to work their way through our system. It means working through your GP, perhaps travelling some distance to see a consultant, and perhaps getting referred on again. Not every parent has the ability, determination or the means to travel outside their area to have their child's special needs addressed through the system. Through my involvement in Horizon Sure Start, I have met parents whose children had speech and language issues that had not previously been addressed. However, staff had identified such issues, the need was addressed and resources were brought in so that those children would be much more ready to start their primary school education.

Sure Start schemes operate in tightly defined geographical areas, and not every parent of a child who is entitled to attend engages with it and brings them along. The beauty of our primary school system is that there is a statutory requirement to attend school, which means that every child must go. It is important that that statutory service integrates with other services and catches any child who may have been missed at an earlier stage.

The various multiagency teams have different names. As I said, there is the MASTS team in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area. In the Belfast area, there is the children's interdisciplinary schools team (CIST). In the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area, there is the additional support for children in education team (ASCET). In the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, we have action for children in education (ACE), and, in the west, we have the western education support team (WEST). A range of teams carries out similar duties in different areas. It is an important opportunity to pick up issues and address them at that early stage in primary school.

As I said, my knowledge has been built largely in my area. I am aware that there are teams elsewhere, but I will draw on the knowledge that I have gained locally. Every child must attend primary school, and teachers have a vital role and must be given the training and the network to bring in that extra support. They, too, can even work in a classroom; it is not always left to the professionals. However, under the

guidance of a professional, issues can be addressed so that children are better able to benefit from their education.

One of the scheme's benefits is its multidisciplinary nature. A range of issues can be dealt with by using a child-centred approach. I will demonstrate how one issue can frequently trigger others. What if a child has a speech and language problem and arrives at primary school? They are not able to communicate well with their teacher, and they may not integrate with the rest of the classroom. They are likely to have behavioural problems that will flow from that. They might be very withdrawn or disruptive, which, ultimately, will affect other children in the classroom. So, because there is a fundamental problem, other problems can arise. The beauty of the scheme is that it can bring in the professionals required to help the child and the family to overcome the difficulties and benefit from education.

I would like the multiagency support team to be available for every child in not only my constituency but Northern Ireland. I understand that, in the Northern Trust area, 46% of schools are not covered by the scheme; the support is not there. In the Carrickfergus area of my constituency, five of the 13 primary schools are not supported; in the Newtownabbey area, 13 of the 35 primary schools are not supported; and, in the Larne area, 17 of the 18 primary schools are not supported. There is a huge gap in the system in that children are not being helped. It was largely based on whether the schools were proactive and volunteered to join the scheme when it was introduced originally. I am aware that a lot more would wish to join the scheme now.

Feedback on the scheme from parents, teachers and children has been very positive: 78% of principals and 69% of teachers highlighted that the children benefited from the intervention of the MASTS service; 95% of parents and carers highlighted that the children benefited from the support; and 92% of the children who have been interviewed indicated that they would recommend it. The effectiveness has also been recognised by the achievement of national, regional and local awards. I am aware that the benefits that can come from the scheme can help our children to get their foot on the educational ladder.

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

Mr Beggs: It is vital that we bring in the scheme and allow all our children to benefit so that no one will slip through the gaps in our system.

Mr Wells: I thank the Member for East Antrim Mr Beggs for raising the issue. The fact that this is the first that time many of us have become aware of the service indicates that it has been a considerable success rather than a failure. I have been an MLA or in local government politics for about 31 years, and I often say that any service about which no complaints have crossed my desk after 31 years must be doing a good job.

The fact is that the multiagency, multidisciplinary teams have been working together since 2007 with little complaint. Indeed, from what Mr Beggs has told us, the glowing references that they have received seem to indicate that we have actually got something right. The teams have worked quietly behind the scenes to deliver a first-class service to our young children, and it is an excellent example of co-operation between two Departments. The accusation

is always thrown at the Assembly that we work in silos and are blinkered to the needs of particular Departments. However, here we have the two huge Departments — Health and Education — working extremely effectively together to produce first-class outcomes.

1.45 pm

We all know that, in the early development of our children, it is absolutely crucial that we identify any particular needs. Early intervention works and produces outstanding results. I have to declare an interest, as my daughter had a speech and language problem. You may be surprised that any Wells would have a speech and language problem, but she had an early difficulty, and we greatly valued the early intervention that gave her help and speech therapy. She has never looked back, and, some day, she may be as quiet and retiring as her father. We appreciated the speed and expertise with which the Department intervened. Time and again, it has been shown that early interventions work.

If I have one criticism about the present service it is that the presence of five different services with five different names that deliver almost the same provision is extremely confusing for parents. That is particularly so for parents who live on the borders of trust areas. It might be worth those who are involved in that essential service getting together and forming a more coherent image so that parents can identify what is delivered. That is by no means to demean the work that is carried out; however, it is strange that we have managed to come up with five totally different names for the same service in Northern Ireland.

I want to raise one concern. This time last year, the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists pointed out to me that the funding for a service that operated in County Down and allowed for early intervention to be provided to young children through a qualified speech and language therapist had been withdrawn. That was despite the outcomes from that service being amazing, with children who came to school with extreme difficulties in speaking moving on enormously by the end of that special one-on-one provision. That shows the stresses and strains that the Department is under.

Mr Beggs pointed out that not all schools avail themselves of the service and that 46% of schools are not covered. I understand that to extend the service to all schools would require resources in the region of £1 million, which in normal times may not have been a difficulty. However, much of that money would have to come from the Health Department, which is under incredible stress in providing a huge range of services from home help to brain surgery. It is becoming more and more difficult to find money to maintain the present provision, never mind expanding a service beyond its present boundaries, and we need to bear that in mind. We have a constant Wailing Wall in the Assembly, with MLAs coming forward to demand additional provision. That money has to come from somewhere, and it will cause considerable difficulties.

There is an opportunity coming up in the form of the autism strategy included in the private Member's Bill that was sponsored by Mr Bradley and passed by the Assembly in March last year. That will cause all Departments — not just Health and Education — to focus on children with specific needs, and it might provide an opportunity to expand the

service. That having been said, a lot has been achieved with minimal funding. I know that the Minister is supportive of the need to expand provision further in Northern Ireland, and I urge him to do so.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. As parents, we want our children to have the best start in life, and as parents and guardians we do what we can to ensure that our children have emotional stability and guidance. Setting the right foundation for our children is of the utmost importance, as it improves long-term prospects and life chances for our children that they can, in turn, pass on to their children. Unfortunately, not all children get the best start in life, and that is down to many reasons.

The work that the multiagency support teams do is vital to schools and families in helping to address the problems that some children experience early in life. The work of Sure Start, which has been mentioned, in engaging with parents to help their child to develop through play and learning and the contribution that Sure Start makes in many communities must be recognised and supported. Such is the demand for the services of Sure Start in the areas of emotional, behaviour and communication difficulties that there are long waiting lists. It is key that children get access to services at the point of need so that support is given to the individual. Early detection and intervention are key to long-term outcomes.

The referral criteria for support also need to be looked at. Many children lose out on support not due to the process of referral or any fault of the service providers but because many children have such complex needs that responsibility falls across Departments. I support the motion in that the current model of service provision needs to be reviewed so that those who need expert help have quicker access to services.

Partnerships and services are widely available across all boards. The western education support team in my board area provides support to schools and families, ensuring that every child gets the help that they need. It provides outreach programmes to schools and homes for children aged from three to eight years, for those experiencing difficulties in speech and language and for those with sensory, motor skill or emotional behaviour problems. The support given is time-limited intervention up to a maximum of eight weeks, depending on a child's needs. There is evidence that children benefit from that service.

The Western Trust also provides a valuable range of services for disabled children and young people with a learning and physical disability to help them to live life to the fullest. There are also many crèches and after-school clubs in our communities, and we need to recognise that there are always ways to develop and expand the models of service provision. The sharing of information across Departments is key to that.

New strategies between Health and Education need to be further explored so that those at the front line can provide the expertise and knowledge to those in need. Greater co-operation between Departments and agencies to deliver more effective and integrated services also needs to be looked at, adding to the good services already provided by the majority of providers. Key to the debate is making sure that parents are aware that there is help and support out there and available to all families. Sinn Féin will support

the review of the model of service provision to expand the service to schools and nurseries not in the scheme.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, A Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I also support the motion, which aims to review and expand service provision for children and young people who may experience difficulties in their early years of education.

Over the past number of years, we have witnessed a much-needed increase in cross-departmental and interagency co-operation. However, every day in our constituencies we see not only the benefits of that co-ordination but areas where it is sadly lacking.

Council services and youth workers are proven winners in the health and education sectors. Programmes such as Sure Start, which Mr Beggs spoke of, and respite services are plausible and work to facilitate a young person's development and health while making provision for the associated problems that parents may experience, particularly if looking after a child with complex needs.

Whilst recognising that great work is being done, the SDLP supports the motion's sentiment that much more must be done. The success of the multiagency support team for schools, since its inception in 2007, has been remarkable. It has proven to be an effective way of supporting children and families with additional and often unique needs. The benefit of MASTS is that it can secure real outcomes to benefit those children and their families. Finding common ground, especially on children's welfare and education, is vital for their protection and development. MASTS has succeeded in bringing together numerous agencies to deliver improved outcomes for our children.

Successful outcomes achieved by MASTS have taken many forms. Children's schoolwork has improved. That view is shared — Mr Beggs gave the statistics — by 78% of principals and 69% of teachers. However, the positive impact of collaborative work between health and education staff has brought that about by giving enhanced support to parents, which results not only in academic improvement but, more importantly, in an increase in children's confidence and self-esteem. The most telling approvals and endorsements of the approach come not from the professionals, the teachers and the principals but from 95% of parents and 92% of children. Since 2007, 137 schools have received services from the scheme, with many more indicating an interest in adopting the model. The motion will assist the Departments in reviewing what work has been done and determining where else the model can be rolled out to give the most vulnerable children and those with the most specialised needs the support to grow and develop, without the additional problems caused by a fragmented approach to addressing their complex needs.

In my constituency, the western education support team, which Ms Boyle referred to, comprising nurses, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and family support workers, works tirelessly to support families and children with complex needs. The trust aims to provide services to children to make their life as full as possible. Many organisations from the statutory, community and voluntary, and private sectors work together to deliver high-quality, localised support. I know families in Foyle who are in receipt of that care, but I know many others who are dying for access to that support.

All this work is carried out in the face of dwindling resources and burgeoning demand. We need to support the support teams, which we must explore fully in the future. In addition, that co-ordinated approach, which is obviously such a success, should be extended to young people with special needs beyond the age of eight, particularly young people with special needs reaching school-leaving age. That is a perennial issue in the Assembly and is in dire need of being addressed.

I am grateful to the Members who brought the motion to the House. We in the SDLP endorse its aim to provide the best care for our young people and support for their families.

Mr McCarthy: I thank John McCallister and Roy Beggs for bringing this important subject to the Floor of the Assembly this afternoon.

In my speech to the Assembly last week, I said that our children were our greatest asset. This afternoon, exactly the same applies to the motion that we have before us. Indeed, earlier today, we had another debate on children, which shows that the Assembly takes seriously the welfare and well-being of all our children.

The motion acknowledges the success that we already enjoy with our existing multiagency support teams. So common sense would say that we should stick at it to improve, extend, expand those teams and explore other avenues to reach an even better result.

2.00 pm

Opportunities are there. The work done so far has proved its worth. Therefore, a call goes out to our Ministers from whatever Department to come together, and let us see further advancement and even more success.

As I understand it, in 2006, children and young people in Northern Ireland received some £61 million over a two-year period to bring services at an early stage to many children who were falling behind for one reason or another. That investment was to promote a wide range of services, including preschool activities, therapy, support for children in care and child protection. Some £10 million a year was to provide breakfast in schools, homework clubs, after-school music and arts clubs and sporting opportunities, all of which has to be very much welcomed. It should also provide counselling and youth services and enhanced facilities for children with learning difficulties, very young children and their parents.

Through Sure Start, the focus will be on learning, creativity and healthy lifestyles, including addressing obesity in children and young people. Sure Start, Home-Start and Life Start have all proved to be very successful when they are properly funded. The Sure Start services are provided through a holistic approach that brings health, education and parenting support services together in a co-ordinated way. Sure Start has been designed to deliver for children and young people at a local level through a network of local statutory agencies and community-based voluntary organisations working in the field of health, early education and family support. The core services for Sure Start are outreach and home visiting, family support, primary and community healthcare, good quality play, learning and childcare experiences for children, and support for all our children in the community that recognises their differing

needs. Sure Start, Home-Start and Life Start have all done excellent work with children and young people.

All our health trusts provide excellent services. They perhaps do this at different levels and certainly under very different names, but, nevertheless, they give good multiagency support where it is required. Multiagency working is about different services joining forces to prevent problems occurring in the first place. In other words, prevention is better than cure. The Children's Workforce Development Council, through its Every Child Matters strategy, covers a wide range of issues to get the best possible outcomes for children and young people; that has to be fully supported.

In conclusion, we wish to see every school and children's nursery in Northern Ireland benefit from the joined-up approach that has proved so successful, so that all youngsters can develop into better, healthier and well-educated citizens. The Alliance Party fully supports the motion.

Ms Brown: I also support the motion. Health is central to our future well-being. Therefore, it is vital that any problems are identified early, at whatever stage in life. That is particularly important for young children in order to enable them to achieve their full potential and improve their life chances.

Early detection is central to children who, at an early stage, show signs of difficulties, such as speech or behavioural problems, or physical signs that something is not quite right. These problems may often not be readily identifiable by parents or carers in the home but can be identified in an educational environment by a teacher, for example, who will have the experience and knowledge of these problems and symptoms. Such issues can hinder a child's development and impact on their ability to progress in an educational environment in line with their peers. If undetected, it can also lead to bullying, if they are seen as being different from their peers, and to a wealth of problems later in life.

Multiagency support teams or multidisciplinary teams play a central role in the detection and treatment of problems that children may begin to show when in school. They offer an excellent model for tackling need by bringing together professionals from both the educational and health sectors and placing the child at the centre of care.

A multiagency support team was established in the Northern Trust in order to meet the recommendations laid out in various reports, namely Every Child Matters. Similar multidisciplinary teams have been established across the other health and social care trusts in Northern Ireland.

The support teams are transdisciplinary and seek to enhance inclusion and performance and, subsequently, reduce educational underachievement. That is very important, especially for children from deprived backgrounds who are at a particular disadvantage. Therefore, it is vital that children with particular problems are identified early and assisted with the support of their school and local health trust. I am pleased that, to date, the multiagency support team in Northern Ireland has received the confidence and support of those involved in it.

The Health Minister recently revealed that 78% of school principals and 69% of teachers believed that recipients benefited from intervention, as did 95% of parents and carers. That is most promising and is a sign of success.

I am pleased that most schools in Antrim have signed up to support the programme and am keen to see other schools signing up as well. That will ensure that all children can benefit from early detection and care. In order for that to happen, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety — not being responsible for schools or education, but being responsible for health and well-being — needs the support of the Minister of Education. Given that changes to the education and library board system are under way, with the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority, I worry that that could delay the expansion of multiagency support teams across the Province and, hence, impact negatively on schoolchildren who not currently enrolled in the scheme.

I support the motion and thank the Members who tabled it.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Like others, I support the motion and thank the Members who have brought it forward for discussion. I listened carefully to other Members' contributions and picked up on a point that Mr Roy Beggs made when he talked about children who are missed at an earlier stage and how there had to be a multidisciplinary approach between education and health. However, the debate probably needs to go back further in a child's development. If a child has been missed out in the important formative years between nought and three, or prior to that, we are missing the point. A child who has had the right support and help —

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Ms Gildernew: I will give way in a minute. I want to make a number of key points.

A child obviously needs the right support and care in their early years so that they are better able to avail themselves of their education when they get to that stage. Somebody made that point. We recognise that a child has to learn how to play and to learn how to do a number of things, such as developing motor skills and other things, before they are ready for a formal education setting. If a child has not learned how to play, it makes it very difficult for that child to learn how to read and write. If we leave it until a child is in the formal education system, I believe that it is too late. We cannot wait until they get to school.

Other Members have talked about the cost of putting in proper support, and I think that Mr Wells raised the figure of £1 million. However, it is a well-known fact that every pound spent in early years saves in the region of £20 in later life in respect of the value that you get for that intervention. It is incumbent on all of us to want to invest in our children's future. Therefore, if we get things right in those early years, it can have a financial implication. Equally, if we get it wrong, it affects not just the Department of Education but the Department for Social Development, the Department for Employment and Learning — such as it is, or the Department that responsibility for young people who are not in education, employment or training goes to — and the justice system. Getting it wrong in those early years can have dire consequences later in a child's life.

Last November, I was very pleased to be at a conference in Armagh that was attended by the Education Minister. We heard from Suzanne Zeedyk, who is an academic from Scotland. I have mentioned her before in the Employment and Learning Committee and the Health Committee. Her

study on the development of a child from before birth is absolutely fascinating in terms of how a baby's brain develops and the kind of receptors and information and messages they are able to receive and process and how that leads to a more solid foundation and building blocks on which to proceed.

I am hoping that we can get Ms Zeedyk here to talk to the Assembly, because it is enlightening and mind-blowing to hear that what we do and, equally, what we do not do, how we talk to babies and very small children, and how we talk and engage with even an unborn child can have developmental consequences for that child later on in life.

Many Members mentioned Sure Start, and I agree with what was said, but we have seen difficulties in funding for Sure Start and Home-Start. We know how important those kinds of agencies are in supporting parents, particularly first-time parents or parents who, for whatever reason, do not have family support around them — someone to advise them. In terms of Home-Start and the primary carers, the people that they can bring to a child's life make such a difference to their emotional well-being and learning. It is hugely important that we do not take our eye off the ball and that we invest properly in services like that. I suppose that parents need a lot of help and support. Sometimes, we do not know what advice is available out there, and the more interventions there are, the greater the chance of those parents being picked up.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member accept that the primary school, nursery school or, for that matter, group setting, is the first occasion on which every child will have an opportunity to be seen, because of the compulsory nature? Although I agree that earlier intervention in the early years would be better, if it could be done, there is a difficulty in getting access to every child at that early age, because not every mother wants to engage when her child is at the early age.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh míle maith agat. I take the Member's point, but, again, I reiterate my point: waiting until a child is five is, for a lot of children, too late. The one other area of intervention that every child has is through health visitors. We all know how important the health visitor coming around is and the kind of wisdom that that person can impart to new parents in what is a very scary and, sometimes, vulnerable time in their life. I still pick up the phone to talk to my health visitor, because I feel that their help, advice and signposting can be critical in those early stages.

I want to look at speech and language therapy as an example. One of the worst areas for waiting lists for speech and language therapy is Twinbrook and Poleglass. If a child is not able to communicate fully, they are not getting the best out of their education system. We need to address that and ensure that the children have that best start in life.

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

Ms Gildernew: I want to make one final point. Sure Start is not linked to deprivation, but I know that I was concerned when I found out that the most money was spent in North Down. We need to see more support in areas of high deprivation.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion as a member of the Health Committee. Addressing the needs of our children and young people must remain a top priority for us all, and the joined-up work of multidiscipline teams is crucial and must be encouraged and developed.

The 2006 funding announcement by Peter Hain of the setting aside of £61 million for children and young people was a very welcome development in helping them to get the best possible start in life. That project has many commendable ideas, including the extension of the opening hours of our schools, offering themselves as venues for an integrated package of education, health and care. The benefits, which extend well beyond the school gate in providing counselling, youth services, youth workers and working with very young people through the Sure Start scheme, are commendable projects that are well worthy of continued support.

A multiagency approach on the ground between professionals from such areas as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and social work is vital to deliver on the key objectives that were set out in 2006. The multiagency approach must be reflected not only on the ground, but at ministerial level. I commend the joined-up work to date, and I trust that it will continue. There is a lot of good work ongoing, and that is to be recognised, commended and encouraged. However, great needs still exist in Northern Ireland.

2.15 pm

As with many healthcare issues, early identification is crucial to rectifying problems. I know that autism continues to be a big concern because I was recently contacted by parents across my constituency of North Down who expressed concerns about the support — or lack of it — for children with autism in schools.

Mr Wells: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member is about to make the usual request for more resources for North Down. How does he react to the comments made by the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone Mrs Gildernew that the highest expenditure in this service is indeed in his own constituency?

Mr Dunne: I thank Mr Wells for that intervention from South Down.

[Laughter.]

It is important to put it in context. We have singled out one issue. An area of North Down may be getting substantial support in relation to Sure Start, but I am sure that many others are deficient. It is wrong to isolate one source of funding in relation to North Down.

Given the complex nature of many problems from which our children and young people suffer, it is crucial that the right infrastructure be put in place to deal with the wide range of social and health difficulties that exist. I would like to see greater uptake from schools to ensure that the right structure is in place for vulnerable children, young people and parents. In the South Eastern Trust area, there are 115 schools out of the 133 signed up. We need to ensure that every school is open to working with multiagency support teams.

I commend both the work to date and the Minister for his continued support in this matter, and I look forward to further progress in future. I support the motion.

Mr Swann: I thank my colleague Mr Roy Beggs for bringing this motion forward. It has been an interesting debate so far, with cross-party support until this point. I await the contribution of the Green Party, which I am sure will continue that.

Multiagency support teams have been operational, as has already been said, since November 2007. They represent a clear demonstration of what can be achieved when Departments, health trusts and education boards all work successfully together. I cannot emphasise that enough. This is a positive example of what can happen when public bodies and Departments break out of their respective silos and work cohesively.

Mr Wells said earlier that these groups and functions work well behind the scenes. By raising their successes and profile today, I sincerely hope that we do not put them in jeopardy. The Assembly has an awful habit of taking things that work well and turning them into things that work badly, jeopardising the good work that they do. That is the basis of our motion. It takes a good example of something that works well, both cross-departmentally and across Northern Ireland, and calls for a review of it, a review of service provision and an expansion of the service to the schools and nurseries that are a part of that scheme.

The multidisciplinary approach has meant that the needs of young people can be taken into account from both health and educational perspectives; that is meant to double the reward in prevention further down the line, as Mrs Gildernew said. One pound invested now saves £20 later. Children, parents and staff from the approximately 140 schools involved are vocal about the tangible benefits that they have seen from the MASTS schemes. By taking only a few preliminary measures, parents and school staff have been able to benefit from a wealth of additional training and knowledge. The scheme is also important because of its ability to refer children to other services as required.

We must realise the importance of working together. We can bring together health, education and social services into one focal point from which we can really deliver for pupils and young children. That is something to which we can also look forward when the Minister of Education brings forward his area plans. We can adopt the delivery methods behind MASTS and include them. Ballee Community High School has put forward a proposal especially in regard to that. It is the delivery of an all-service model at a secondary-level school. There is also more evidence to show that there is improvement in the performance of children and family units that have been referred to one of the MASTS.

I think that the following statistics have been quoted: 78% of principals and 69% of teachers say that there is benefit from MASTS, and, more importantly, 95% of parents and 92% of pupils agree. That is a measure of success and acceptance from the target audience. Therefore, given that the end users — the pupils and the parents — gave the scheme such high acknowledgement, we have to be successful in extending it.

The scheme has worked well throughout the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area thus far, but there is also a significant problem with the long waiting lists of those

schools. That was the rationale behind the motion — to ask for its expansion. A large number of schools have applied to join the scheme since the closing date passed. In my constituency of North Antrim, 16 out of 30 primary schools in the Ballymena Borough Council area are not part of the scheme, nor are 12 out of 23 in the Ballymoney Borough Council area, nor seven out of 15 in the Moyle District Council area. A number of those applied to be part of the scheme but have been unable to access it because of the closing date.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member acknowledge that some schools may not have applied to join because of a lack of information, or because they feel they are already burdened by the amount of bureaucracy in the schools system, do not fully appreciate the benefits and do not want the additional paperwork that they perceive may come with the scheme? That is not to say that every school would not benefit from it.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Swann: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Member for his intervention. I fully agree: a large amount of paperwork crosses a principal's desk due to area plans, interventions, inspections and all the rest, and when there is something as critical and beneficial as a MAST scheme, everything should be done and everyone should be encouraged so that every school applies for it. It is disappointing that, due to a limited budget and scope, not all schools that have applied have been able to be part of this scheme. Quite often, schools in deprived areas are overcome by the burden of the cumbersome amount of paperwork involved and are not able to take it up.

We do not see enough of these success stories. I hope that the Minister will review the scheme and look to identify other areas of the Department's work that could be bolstered in a similar way so that we can bring in the delivery of primary education needs and look at taking a holistic approach to the development of our children and young people.

Mr Agnew: I hope to reassure the Member who spoke previously by saying that I support the motion. I do not want to break up this cosy consensus. The principle of interdisciplinary or interagency working is a good one. Members will be aware that I am working on a private Member's Bill to help progress the work between Departments and agencies in delivering services to children, so I welcome and am happy to get behind the motion.

As has been highlighted, it is important that we work with children from the earliest possible opportunity. That may be in primary school, but some Members mentioned that it may precede that, whether at preschool, Sure Start or playgroups. We need to do so to identify problems that some children might have that could be detected in the early years if they have access to the proper services, and indeed professionals, who have the ability to detect such problems early on. I echo what Ms Gildernew said in that we have to try to reach them even earlier than when they are aged four. Ultimately, the earlier we act, the more benefit the children will feel in the future, but we can also ensure the most efficient use of resources. As has been pointed out, money spent in the early years yields greater benefit further down the line.

I thank those who tabled the motion, and I echo what Mr Beggs said about the roll-out to those schools where

the multiagency support teams are not currently working. However, I do so with a note of caution. What we have, as has been highlighted, is one principle with different models across different health trusts.

In my area, from what I hear, people's experience is that ASCET provided an exemplary service when first established. However, as take-up has increased, resources have not. In fact, resources have become increasingly stretched, to the extent that some feel that the service has been diluted. If that is the case — I can speak only for my area — and it is being reflected across the board, we need to be mindful of that. It should serve as a warning.

Although the tone of today's debate is about promoting the service, and rightly so, if we are to have a review, let us look at any mistakes made. I support the motion and its call for the service to be universal. However, we do not want to increase the quantity, just to be seen to be serving all children, if that means risking the quality. If we expand the service, we must also expand the resources.

Mr Wells touched on the issue of the different names given to health trust teams, which causes some confusion. As we know, the education and library boards do not work within the same boundaries as the health trusts. So there are issues for children and, equally, professionals who move between health trusts. It is not just the names that differ but the models: some differ slightly; others quite significantly.

If we are to review the service, let us draw out best practice. Let us try to get a model of best practice that we can promote across the board to ensure that the service is regional, regardless of the health trust area in which children grow up. I, again, welcome today's motion. We can see the benefits of good practice in interdisciplinary and interagency working, such as those for children and society as a whole.

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

Mr Agnew: Any review must seek to improve the service and build on the success to date.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: As Question Time starts at 2.30 pm, the debate will continue afterwards with the Minister's response. I ask Members to take their ease until 2.30 pm.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Oral Answers to Questions

Education

Schools: Mid Ulster

1. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Education what capital build plans are being considered for schools in the Mid Ulster constituency. (AQO 1749/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Builds at Magherafelt Primary School and Nursery School, St Columba's Primary School and Magherafelt High School are currently on site and due to be completed this year.

As you will know, I have commissioned the education and library boards, working with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and the other sectors, to undertake area planning. That will result in a planned network of viable and sustainable schools to meet the needs of children and young people in an area. Future capital investment will be targeted at supporting approved area plans. At this time, I am not in a position to comment on any specific school or potential project or on which capital builds may be considered. There is, however, a need to ensure that we continue to invest strategically in the schools estate. When it is appropriate, I will announce future plans for capital investment.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister will be more than aware that I have raised the need for a newbuild for Rainey Endowed School in Magherafelt. I will continue to do so. I understand what he has said about being unable to make any decisions. However, I ask that he and his officials keep the matter on their agenda in order to ensure that the school gets its much-needed newbuild.

Mr O'Dowd: The Member is perfectly entitled and quite correct to lobby on behalf of schools in his constituency. After all, that is why we have a local Assembly and elected representatives to represent the views of constituencies, etc.

With regard to the area planning project that we have in place, we are looking at a sustainable schools estate for the future. We want to ensure that we use the limited resources that are available to us to the best of our ability and that schools that we build in this term will operate and provide much-needed education to local communities for at least a generation to come.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Mr McCrea raised an issue that I was going to raise. I would appreciate it if the Minister gave the House a bit more detail on the Rainey Endowed School, because it has been in the system for quite a considerable period. It is about time that we heard about further progress other than what could be seen as procrastination.

Can the Minister also give the House some sort of assessment of the current situation with regard to the capital newbuild for Holy Trinity College in Cookstown?

Mr Speaker: I must say that the Member is trying my patience. There should be one inquiry only to the Minister.

Mr O'Dowd: My answer to the Member's questions will reflect that which I gave to Mr McCrea. That is not because I am avoiding answering a question: the process that would give me the information with which to answer the question is not yet complete. We are talking about spending significant amounts of public money. We need to ensure that that money is invested in such a way that it provides an education service in a community for a generation to come.

As I am on record as saying previously — and this is no reflection of or hint in any way about any projects to which Members have referred or will refer during Question Time — we will not plan the future schools estate on the needs of individual schools. We have to be satisfied that the provision of a new school will provide education to a sector or sectors in the future.

Ms Gildernew: The Minister may have covered part of my question in his previous answer. Can he assure me that the area planning process will address the capital and education need of any given area across all sectors? Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for the question. Yes; that is why we have put area planning in place. We want to be assured that plans meet the needs of all sectors in a specific geographical area. Indeed, some of that planning will cross area boundaries.

Area planning will not be the big bang theory. It will not happen overnight. It will be progressive investment in the schools estate through newbuilds, amalgamation of schools and strategic use of our minor works programme, etc. Area planning will be the template upon which all of those issues will be decided.

Educational Welfare Officers

2. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Education what importance he places on the role of educational welfare officers. (AQO 1750/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As Minister of Education, I place great importance on the role of educational welfare officers (EWOs) and the vital support services that they provide to schools, young people and their families.

The education welfare service's role is to promote regular school attendance by supporting schools and by engaging with children and their families in a structured and purposeful way so that attendance at school can be improved. Regular attendance is essential if children and young people are to obtain the best outcomes from their time in education. In recognition of the important role that education welfare officers provide, my Department invested £2.7 million in the education welfare service in 2011-12 in addition to the funding that the boards provided from their block grant.

Although their primary role relates to school attendance, education welfare officers also provide support for vulnerable groups of children who are known to face additional challenges, including school-age mothers, looked-after children and Travellers. In providing support, they deploy valuable social work skills and use a range

of strategies such as mediation, group counselling and one-to-one support sessions between schools, pupils and their families where there are difficulties with regular school attendance, school suspensions or expulsions, or behavioural problems. Education welfare officers also assist my Department by providing professional advice to inform policymaking decisions.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he acknowledge that education welfare officers now require the same social work qualifications as other social workers? What is he doing to address the anomaly in the wage structure that results in many unnecessary vacancies in education welfare officer positions as people move elsewhere for better paid jobs?

Mr O'Dowd: Wage negotiations in the Department are conducted through structured negotiation bodies. It would not be useful to interfere with them in the Assembly today. When it comes to the qualifications that are required for education welfare officers, we clearly want the best qualified and most highly motivated people working in that field. It is a challenging office, but it is also a very rewarding one, in the sense that education welfare officers make real and positive changes in young people's lives as they have the ability to liaise between schools and young people, especially where that relationship has broken down, and can encourage families and help young people to be regular attenders at school.

Mr Campbell: If work that education welfare officers carry out, particularly on the primary sector in working-class areas, shows emerging trends, is that analysis taken account of so that those areas can benefit from the trends?

Mr O'Dowd: As I said in my original answer to Mr Beggs, the education welfare officers' work plays a part in policy development. If the Member writes to me about the specific areas that he referred to, I will investigate them further, but I am also assured that our education and library boards will be working closely with our education welfare officers to ensure that they drill down into the trends that the Member mentioned to see what additional work needs to be carried out, and, in some circumstances, to see whether additional resources are required. If the boards cannot provide them, the Department will have a duty to consider requests that are made to it for specific caseloads, bearing in mind the difficult financial constraints within which we have to work.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Will he elaborate on the engagement with disadvantaged groups such as Traveller children?

Mr O'Dowd: The attendance of many Traveller pupils is known to be problematic. Education welfare officers play a vital role in obtaining an understanding of the cultural values of the Traveller community and in developing its trust so that families can be encouraged to improve school attendance. Education welfare officers also play a valuable role in ensuring equal access to education for children and young people from the Travelling community.

Mr D Bradley: An féidir leis an Aire a dheimhniú nach mbeidh aon chiorrú sa bhuiséad atá ann d'oifigh leasa oideachais? Will the Minister give us an absolute assurance that there will be no reduction in the budgets for the work of education welfare officers?

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith as an cheist sin. I have no plans to reduce the budget line for education welfare officers in the Department. All our education and library boards invest a substantial amount of money in the work of education welfare officers, and I am continually reviewing my budgets to see whether we can find a surplus. That is very difficult in the current circumstances, but if we come across surplus or unspent funds we will redirect them to where they are most needed.

Ms Lo: I used to be a social worker, and I worked with a number of EWOs in my time in the trusts. It is not just about money. Will the Minister consider extending the role of the EWOs to give them more involvement with families, rather than their just being seen as truancy officers?

Mr O'Dowd: I think that that role currently exists for educational welfare officers. The days of the truancy officer are, I hope, long gone. Educational welfare officers engage with families and schools. They engage with families on poor attendance, but they want to examine the reasons behind poor attendance rather than simply knocking on a parent's door and saying that their son or daughter has not been to school for x number of days and that they need to send them to school. Educational welfare officers will engage with those families, drill down into the circumstances and attempt to assist the families in any way they can. They also carry out work between schools and young people where relationships have broken down, which involves suspensions or expulsions, so the remit is much more complex than working simply as truancy officers.

I am always reluctant to make announcements on the way forward in response to an Assembly question, but we are always open to suggestions on the role of anyone in the Department of Education or in the broader education family, but they have to fit into the broader framework of where education is going.

Schools: Budgets

3. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education what steps are being taken to devolve more of the central departmental budget to the control of schools. (AQO 1751/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The delegation of financial and managerial responsibilities to boards of governors is a key element in the Department's overall policy to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Within the finite resources available for education services, I am committed to ensuring that as much funding as possible is delegated directly to schools. However, it is important to recognise that it is not always practical or economically beneficial to delegate all moneys to schools. To reduce the administrative burden on schools and maximise economies of scale, a number of budgets are held and managed centrally by the education and library boards on behalf of schools in their area, such as those for school transport and meals. Furthermore, schools should recognise that greater delegation will mean greater accountability, responsibility and time management.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his response. Why do we in Northern Ireland have the lowest percentage of delegated schools budget compared with anywhere else in the UK?

Mr O'Dowd: This is one of those arguments where you use the statistics that suit your argument the best. On this

occasion, you are choosing the statistics that give that answer. I could quote statistics back to you that suggest that the delegation of funding in this jurisdiction is as good as that in other jurisdictions, if not higher. I assume that the Member was referring to the simple delegation of the common funding formula that is broken down to schools, but, on top of that, we also provide schools with many different services. If those were taken into account, as they are in England, they would bring us up to match what is happening in England and may well go above other jurisdictions.

Mrs Dobson: Does the Minister accept that, for too long, his Department has not capitalised on the skills and expertise that exist in school boards of governors, particularly in relation to allowing them to use resources more effectively on the ground?

Mr O'Dowd: No, I do not accept that. Our schools estate simply would not operate if it were not for the excellent work of our schools' boards of governors. At the end of the day, they are the people who manage and hold our schools to account. When I am out and about talking to school leaders and practitioners, I get a mixed picture on that argument. Quite rightly, many schools' teams of management tell me that they are under significant pressure and that dealing with bureaucracy, budgets and so on takes up an extraordinary amount of their time. If we follow that argument to its conclusion and I give schools further funds, resources and responsibilities to deal with, schools' teams of management will be put under further pressure. I do not believe that that is the way forward. The relationship that we have now works, but, in saying that, I will also announce in the time ahead the review of the common funding formula. If schools or Members wish to make their views on the further delegation of funds known to that review body, it is a matter for schools and MLAs to do so. It will be a matter for the review body whether it wishes to comment on that in the report.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his answers. To help to illuminate the debate, could the Minister indicate what percentage of his total budget is directed towards schools?

2.45 pm

Mr O'Dowd: The aggregated schools budget represents about 59.4% of the Department's total resource budget. Well over £1 billion goes directly to schools, and, on top of that, other services such as transport, free school meals and professional development are provided to schools, and a wide range of other funds are available to schools.

DE: Budget

4. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the Department's effectiveness in utilising its full budget allocation. (AQO 1752/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has consistently sought to fully and effectively utilise its entire budget allocation for the provision of education services. All Departments are in the process of finalising their 2011-12 provisional out-turn, which will not be reported to the Department of Finance and Personnel until May. For that reason, I do not have specific figures to provide you at this time. I expect the final position

for 2011-12 to be consistent with what has been achieved in the past two years, when the Department's unutilised total budget was less than 1% in 2010-11 and 2009-2010.

Mr Douglas: The Minister today announced an additional £1.4 million for the preschool sector, which is very encouraging. However, in today's economic downturn and with a set budget, how was the Minister able to do such a wonderful job?

Mr O'Dowd: Thank you for the compliment; I will take note of that. Since coming into office, I have been reviewing my budget and looking at all the budget lines in the Department of Education. We have seen where expenditure is taking place and where further expenditure is required. I believe firmly that the early years sector requires further investment, and I will outline the complete budget package in the weeks ahead. I will outline where those savings were made, how those funds came about and how we will redistribute them in the Department of Education.

I am, quite rightly, under an onus from the Programme for Government to meet certain targets, one of which is on the provision of preschool education, which we debated earlier. I wish to meet those targets. I also think — I think that the House is united in this point of view — that the earlier we make an intervention with young people, the better their educational outcomes will be, hence I am prepared to make funding available there as well. As I said, I will make an announcement at a later date that will show the complete picture of our review and where that funding has come from.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Can the Minister perhaps reiterate the extent of the impact of the initial British Government cuts on his budget? Could he outline how he liaises with the Finance Minister on those budgetary difficulties?

Mr O'Dowd: The outworkings of the British Government's cuts have been devastating to education. We are able to make announcements, as I did today, of several million pounds investment over a number of years, which is very welcome. It has to be remembered that, even though you are dealing with hundreds of millions or billions of pounds, a small investment of a number of millions of pounds makes a major difference to a school or to community life, and we have to keep focused on that. However, the impact of the Budget has been devastating. As I said, I have been reviewing my budget since I came into post, and we are seeking to make savings where we can and reinvest those savings back into education. All my policies and direction of travel are dictated by the budgetary constraints, and I hope to ensure that those policies can operate in a very difficult budgetary climate.

Mr Cree: The Minister referred to devastating cuts. Could he, therefore, explain how he can justify the charade of issuing 50,000 circulars, in concert with his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland, to ask for people's view on cross-border education? Can he detail how much that will cost?

Mr O'Dowd: With respect to the Member, I do not believe that his objections are budgetary rather than political. If he sets his political objections aside, he will see that planning cross-border educational services makes economic sense, because many of the border communities, regardless of their political views, operate across the border as if it does not exist. So, if we can provide education to the benefit of

those local communities, Minister Quinn and I will move forward and plan on that basis. I believe that if we plan on the basis of economies of scale, we will save money for both jurisdictions in the long run. It ticks all those boxes.

The final costs have not been worked out yet, but they will be minimal because I am not bringing in outside consultants to carry out the work. Statisticians in my Department will analyse the costs related to my Department's responsibilities in the project. I am not aware of the cost implications for Minister Quinn's Department; that is a matter for him. However, I can assure you that, in any decision that I make, I will want to ensure that I get best value for money.

Mr McDevitt: The Minister has reminded the House on several occasions in recent months that one of the objectives of a new Education and Skills Authority (ESA) would be to bring greater efficiency to the system and reduce budgets. Will he tell the House exactly when we will see a Bill to give effect to ESA?

Mr O'Dowd: My ministerial colleagues have a draft ESA Bill. The Executive will decide when that ESA Bill is to come before the Assembly. Members will then have a full opportunity to debate it, and they, too, will see the benefits of moving towards an Education and Skills Authority.

Education: Chief Executive Posts

5. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Education why the posts of chief executive designate of the Education and Skills Authority, interim chief executive of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment and interim chief executive of Belfast Education and Library Board are all held by the same person.

(AQO 1753/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) appointed Mr Gavin Boyd as interim chief executive only after it had gone through an unsuccessful recruitment exercise. This is an interim measure, pending the board exploring other options for appointing a temporary chief executive, and it will ensure that it has an accounting officer in place in the meantime.

Mr Boyd is also currently interim chief executive of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). This arrangement has been in place since June 2010 and is subject to review. Mr Boyd is undertaking his CCEA and BELB interim roles as part of his ESA chief executive designate responsibility under his current terms of employment and receives no additional remuneration.

Mr Allister: What does it say about these three key jobs if we are expected to believe that they can all be done at the same time, by the same person — even one paid £150,000? Is the Minister not embarrassed that Mr Boyd sat on the interview panel for the appointment of a chief executive to the Belfast Education and Library Board, was party to not appointing a chief executive and then took the job himself? Is the Minister not embarrassed by the empire building of this favoured son of the Department?

Mr O'Dowd: I would have thought that the Member who was on the airwaves expressing concern about the cost of a cup of tea or coffee in the Building would congratulate me on

having one person doing three jobs for one wage. I think that I deserve a pat on the back for that, surely, from a Member who tells us that he is so concerned about public finances that he spends his time counting up the money spent on tea and coffee by Departments across the Executive.

Mr Boyd has been appointed to those posts as a temporary measure and will stay in a number of them until ESA is established. If the Belfast Education and Library Board wishes to go further with the recruitment process, that is a matter for it. However, I believe that what we have in place now provides effective value for money for the public, ensures that all accountability measures are in place and ensures smooth transitions from the departure of Mr Carville from the Belfast board and to whatever the permanent position may be for the Belfast board in the future.

Remember that the Programme for Government dictates that ESA will be in place by 2013, so all of these matters will be measured by that.

Mr Storey: Minister, I am trying to unravel all the mystery and the mist surrounding why the Department seems so keen to retain the services of Mr Boyd? According to the terms and conditions of his first appointment — that of interim chief executive of ESA — there would be a review. What review of his work took place prior to his reappointment with a new contract?

Mr O'Dowd: Without personalising any of these matters, I can assure the Member that all proper procedures were followed before I, as is my duty as Education Minister, appointed the designate chief executive of ESA. All procedures were followed. I received legal advice and had lengthy discussions with my permanent secretary on the matter. So, all processes have been followed. Mr Boyd is in place, and we now have to concentrate on ensuring that we put in place the effective management controls and the board to hold any chief executive to account under ESA.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response so far. Will he give us an update on his Department's steps to appoint a new chief executive of the Belfast Education and Library Board?

Mr O'Dowd: As I said, the Belfast Education and Library Board is its own master in regard to those matters. It is a matter for the board to appoint its chief executive. I believe that the board has acted responsibly in that matter. It has gone through the recruitment procedure, but did not receive any successful candidates, so it appointed an interim chief executive. Given the timescales for the boards to be in place, it is a responsible and well-thought-out policy of the board to have Mr Boyd in place as an interim. If the Belfast Board decides to move further in the recruitment process, that is a matter for the Belfast Board.

Teacher Education

6. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the review of teacher education. (AQO 1754/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My officials briefed the Education Committee on 21 March on the direction of travel for teacher education, arising from the joint Department of Education/Department for Employment and Learning consultation on the teacher

education review. On foot of the comments received from Committee members, together with the responses to the consultation exercise, I am finalising, in liaison with Minister Farry, a draft strategy for the way forward for teacher education. I intend to publish the strategy once both the Education and Employment and Learning Committees have had an opportunity to comment on it.

Mr Dallat: Can the Minister assure the House that the future position of St Mary's is safeguarded?

Mr O'Dowd: That is a question that would be best directed towards the Minister for Employment and Learning.

Mr Speaker: I continually say to the whole House that supplementary questions must relate to the original question.

Education: Area Planning

7. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Education for an update, including timelines, on area-based planning. (AQO 1755/11-15)

15. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Education when the area plans will be published. (AQO 1763/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Mr Speaker, with your permission I will answer questions 7 and 15 together.

The terms of reference for area planning issued last December. They clearly highlight the scope and timescales involved in the first part of that process. Area planning is a complex and multifaceted process, and this is the first time that it has been undertaken on this scale. It is therefore crucial that the approach developed for all aspects of the process is common and consistent across all board areas.

An area planning co-ordination group has been established. It is chaired by a senior departmental official and supported by other officials responsible for area planning. It comprises representatives from the five education and library boards and CCMS, as all of those organisations have statutory responsibility for planning. It is an operational group that provides a forum for the boards to engage directly with the Department to agree matters of process and to obtain clarification on issues as they emerge.

To date I have received from all boards draft area plans for stand-alone special schools and draft area plans for post-primary provision. Primary area plans will be submitted by the end of June. My officials are considering those plans against departmental policies and are engaged in dialogue through the area planning co-ordination group. The time frame and processes for consultation will be agreed and the plans will be published for consultation. I am hopeful of having the final plans agreed by the autumn.

Mr Frew: Can the Minister give an assurance to the House that, when the area plans take place, the scenario that has faced Castle Tower School in Ballymena — which he will be aware of — whereby schools are forced to merge and take action, yet there is not enough facility or money for newbuilds, will not take place throughout the Province, with regard to schools being forced to move, although they might need the facilities for a newbuild, and that money will not be forthcoming?

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware of Castle Tower Special School. One of the reasons that I brought forward the special schools area plan so early was because, after visiting a number of our special schools, I am of the view that they are not in proper condition and that their facilities are not modern and fit for purpose. That is why I have asked for the special schools area plan to be brought forward. The area plan is about what it says on the tin. It is about planning for the future to ensure that policy and money follow each other, and that schools and communities have an action plan in front of them and know the direction of travel for the schools estate and the provision of education going into the future.

3.00 pm

Employment and Learning

Mr Speaker: Question 2 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer. Question 3 has been transferred to the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Tourism and Hospitality

1. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department is taking to ensure that there is an adequate supply of people qualified to work in the tourism and hospitality sector. (AQO 1764/11-15)

5. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action he is taking to support the tourism and hospitality sector. (AQO 1768/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 1 and 5 together.

Over the next two years, Northern Ireland will continue to host an impressive series of events and celebrations and continue to launch 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 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 are fundamental to success. Consequently, I have designated tourism and hospitality as a priority skills 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 the financial year just ended, I allocated almost £315,000 to assist over 1,850 hospitality and tourism staff to achieve this level 2 qualification, and I have committed to finance the 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, my officials have developed a further short training programme with the Northern Regional College to assist the hospitality and tourism sector in that area to upskill its staff. This programme will also be rolled out to other areas of Northern Ireland in this financial year, through the FE college network.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister assure the House that all relevant age groups can avail themselves of any appropriate courses to further their qualifications in the tourism and hospitality sector?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Robinson for his question, and the answer is that it is up to companies to put forward the personnel to be trained. However, the course is open to all, irrespective of age or background. With regard to the area from which the Member comes, I was recently in Derry to look at some of the WorldHost training in action. At that stage, I can confirm, those being trained were from a diverse range of backgrounds, including age.

Mr Dickson: What is the Minister's rationale for investing in the hospitality industry?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Dickson for his question. The ultimate answer has to be about creating a legacy. The Executive are making a wonderful investment in infrastructure. We are attracting events. We have a good programme over the next number of years, but we want to see the Northern Ireland tourism industry grow and flourish and be the future of our economy for many years to come. All the international evidence shows that the way that we build the legacy and get return and other visits is through word of mouth and recommendations made by families and friends. The key determinant of those recommendations is the quality of the customer care, so it is important that we complement what is happening in investment with the training of staff to make sure that we have an all-round package and that the tourist industry in Northern Ireland continues to be a great success.

Mr B McCrea: Minister, will you comment on what you feel is the value of investment in tourist centres such as the Titanic centre and the Saint Patrick Centre in Downpatrick and on their ability to create the right environment for young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to learn about tourism?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr McCrea for his question, and I understand the point that he makes. My colleague the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister is better placed to comment on the actual facilities. However, as well as being buildings, the facilities are where people interact with the workers. The training that we are doing around WorldHost applies in respect of what the Member suggested as much as it does to anything else.

Ms Ruane: What role does our further education sector play in ensuring that the needs of our tourism and hospitality sector are met?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for her question. In general, the FE sector is a good means by which we address the specific training needs of businesses. In my main answer, I referred to the Northern Regional College's development of particular programmes. So, we are very much using the FE sector as a partner in rolling out our investment in tourism and hospitality training.

Mr McClarty: The Minister will agree that 2012 has the potential to attract record numbers of visitors to Northern Ireland. What steps is he taking to ensure that all those who currently work in the tourism and hospitality sectors promote and represent Northern Ireland to its very best?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. Given his constituency interest, he will, hopefully, take good heart from the particular recognition that we are giving to the Irish Open, which is on the north coast. In response to the specifics of his question, I stress that the training is not only open to new people who want to go into the tourism and hospitality sector but is targeted at those who currently work in it. We are looking to companies to bring forward their current staff, as well as new recruits, for training.

Essential Skills

4. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline any plans to encourage more adults to join essential skills classes in further education colleges.

(AQO 1767/11-15)

Dr Farry: Raising the essential skills of adults continues to be one of my top priorities. Since the launch of the Essential Skills for Living strategy in 2002, the further education colleges have played a vital role in ensuring that adults are fully equipped with the literacy, numeracy and ICT skills that they need to get a job, progress in work and play a full part in society. Colleges have continued to increase their capacity to offer free high-quality essential skills programmes. They are the main providers, delivering 68% of all essential skills provision, with courses embedded across mainstream and DEL-funded programmes from entry level to level 2. With 45 campuses and around 600 outreach centres, colleges deliver essential skills in a variety of settings, including local communities, schools and the workplace. Colleges have developed partnerships with employers, statutory agencies, such as health trusts, and a number of voluntary and community organisations to provide flexible and innovative programmes at a time, place and pace suitable to their individual needs. They have established strong links with the trade unions, which are funded through my Department's union learning fund to deliver essential skills in the workplace.

Essential skills across all provision is continuing to increase. In the 2010-11 year, there were almost 60,000 enrolments, which accounts for nearly 22,000 individuals. That is the highest number recorded since the strategy began. However, I am not complacent. Through the annual college development planning process, my Department sets rigorous essential skills targets for individual colleges. They include separate targets for younger people aged between 16 and 19 and for those over 19. Therefore, I am confident that the current plans set by the colleges will continue to encourage more adults, particularly those who are most marginalised, to gain essential skills qualifications.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister will be more than aware of the educational underachievement issue that plagues working-class areas. Indeed, most of those young people become adults, and, therefore, the problem is not solved. Many of them become parents —

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

Mr I McCrea: — and are tasked with having to deal with their children's education. Will the Minister give the House an assurance that those people will continue to be targeted and will be given as much activity as possible to ensure that they have the level of education that is required?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr McCrea for his supplementary question, and I am happy to give him that assurance. I want to ensure that every person in this society has the potential to develop fully and to take whatever opportunities they are capable of availing themselves of. I stress that a range of programmes is available to help people. Essential skills is clearly one of those. The Member will also be aware that my Department leads on behalf of the wider Executive on the formulation of a strategy around NEETs. Other aspects fall to other Departments, such as the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. They are key partners in that strategy. So, this is certainly a priority for my Department, as, I believe, it is for the entire Executive.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. How could the partnerships between regional colleges and the voluntary and community sector be increased with a view to improving literacy and numeracy skills among young adults?

Dr Farry: The Member will be aware of the learner access and engagement pilot (LEAP) programme, which looks at such partnership working. The pilot concluded on 31 March. It was directed at providing support for hard-to-reach adults who are economically inactive with few or no qualifications and encouraging them to enrol and complete further education courses, including essential skills. PricewaterhouseCoopers recently submitted a longitudinal evaluation of the programme; that evaluation will be considered carefully and used to inform future policy decisions.

Mr Beggs: Is the Minister aware of the concern in the community and voluntary sector about accessing essential skills courses? That sector can play a vital role in encouraging people to take up those courses. At present, many of the courses are inaccessible for local communities.

Dr Farry: I understand the Member's point. However, essential skills are offered across a wide range of facilities across Northern Ireland. In the FE sector there are 45 campuses across Northern Ireland, and, beyond that, there are about 600 outreach centres in different locations, including communities. We should not be complacent, but outreach is clearly understood and practised.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí den Aire an bhfuil aon rún aige níos mó airgead a chur ar fáil le haghaidh printísiúgh fhásta. Does the Minister have any plans to increase funding for adult apprenticeships before the demise of his Department?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. Some interesting comments were made on that topic over the weekend. I inherited a situation in my Department in which the budget would not allow any funding of adult apprenticeships, and I am not sure whether the person who made those comments was aware of the party affiliation of the Minister who was in office at the time that decision was taken. I have been able to restore 50% of the funding that would otherwise have been cut. Since that decision was taken last September we have conducted a review of adult training, and a report is due in the next few weeks.

Youth Unemployment: Rural Areas

6. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department is taking to tackle youth unemployment in rural areas. (AQO 1769/11-15)

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. I am aware that the economic downturn has hit young people particularly hard, regardless of whether they are from urban or rural areas. In addition to the suite of programmes and initiatives aimed at tackling youth unemployment already available across Northern Ireland, the Executive recently agreed a policy to add to the provision, the core elements of which are as follows: early, intensive diagnosis of employability skills; opportunities for taster work experience for clients while on benefits; individual skills- and careers-focused assessments; sector-based work experience and training in areas of skills shortage; a new employer subsidy for up to one year; a new emphasis on continuing skills development and growth; earlier opportunities to begin skills development than is currently available; and a range of new measures to help young people not in education, employment or training. The policy framework will be finalised when the finance is agreed by the Executive, on the recommendation of the Finance Minister. There is also a range of specialist provision for people with disabilities offered by the Disability Employment Service. The Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) operates in areas of particular deprivation, and it has recently been extended to Moyle, Cookstown and Newry and Mourne.

Although Training for Success and, in particular, the skills for your life strand are available to young people who do not remain in school, attend further education or participate in an apprenticeship programme, the Member will be aware that I will shortly bring forward a strategy to help young people who are not in education, employment or training. That will be complementary to the proposals to tackle youth unemployment that I have just outlined.

It is my intention that all measures be informed by local needs and circumstances. I will seek to ensure that no young person is left behind, regardless of their circumstances or location.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for those action points. He might agree that they appear to be common to the youth unemployed in urban and rural settings. Has the Minister undertaken any research specific to the needs of the rural youth unemployed?

3.15 pm

Dr Farry: It is worth stressing to the Member that the new measures we are setting out will apply across Northern Ireland irrespective of people's backgrounds. They will be open to people who live in urban and rural settings. In addition, we have a number of existing programmes, and rural factors are taken into account. I referred in my main answer to LEMIS, and already that has been extended to Cookstown, Moyle and Newry and Mourne, which are predominantly rural parts of Northern Ireland. That shows sensitivity towards rural interests.

While I am on my feet, it is worth reminding Mr Nesbitt with reference to the figures for youth unemployment that they have stabilised in Northern Ireland over the past year in contrast to the other three countries in the UK. Although we have a long way to go, the situation here is not as serious as in some other parts. That is a tribute to the work of my Department and a lot of the community sectors that work closely with us in helping young people.

Mr Campbell: The Minister alluded to youth unemployment in rural areas. He will be aware of the rising crime rate in rural areas as well. What liaison is being undertaken between his Department and the Department of Justice to ensure that opportunities are available to young people in rural areas but, as well, to ensure that the criminal activity that is going on at the moment is reduced?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Campbell for his question. The main vehicle for addressing the joined-up working that he suggests lies in the forthcoming NEETs strategy. That is very much intended to be a cross-departmental, Executive-wide document. My Department may well lead on it, but other Departments are making significant contributions towards that. Certainly, the Department of Justice and the PSNI will be key partners in a much more holistic approach to addressing the needs of young people.

Mr Hazzard: Given that South Down is statistically one of the most rural constituencies in the North and has an increasing number of young people out of work, will the Minister outline what he is doing specifically to tackle that problem in South Down?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question and welcome him to the House. Obviously, the LEMIS programme in the Newry and Mourne area will capture parts of the current South Down constituency. I am also aware of the particular issues that affect the constituency, particularly with regard to fishing and the lack of opportunities that may pertain in that sector. There are also potential new opportunities with renewable energy on which my Department is working with local communities. A dialogue is going on around specific interventions that we can make to address some of the particular needs in the South Down area.

Mr Rogers: Has the Minister's Department earmarked funds to complement the rural transport fund in encouraging more access to a wider range of employment and training opportunities for the service users?

Dr Farry: Again, I thank the Member for the question and welcome him to the Assembly. There are no specific additional funds in the manner that the Member suggests. However, depending on the nature of the intervention that my Department supports, there can be circumstances in which assistance with transport is available.

College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise: Tuition Fees

7. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what discussions he has had with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in relation to her decision to increase tuition fees for students from Great Britain wishing to study at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise. (AQO 1770/11-15)

Dr Farry: I understand that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has not yet taken a final decision on this issue. Minister O'Neill and I met in November 2011 to discuss the future arrangements for higher education fees and funding. At that meeting, she indicated her intention to consult on a proposal to increase fees at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) for new students from other parts of the United Kingdom who commence higher education courses on or after 1

September 2012. The public consultation was launched on 15 February 2012 and will close on 10 May. The Minister and I have had no further discussions on this matter.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he accept that it is fundamentally unfair and unjustifiable that fellow residents of the United Kingdom will face fees of up to £9,000 while students from the Republic will pay as little as just over £1,000?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question in so far as it gives me an opportunity to make this point: I cannot comment on the specifics and the rationale for what the Minister of Agriculture may do. That is her decision. I can comment on what I have done as Minister for Employment and Learning. Once we took the decision to freeze the fees for local students in local institutions, we had an inescapable obligation to address and manage the distortions that would arise from different fee regimes in different parts of the UK. To do otherwise would have risked a situation in which we had an influx of applications from elsewhere, resulting in our local students being either displaced and having to pay higher fees elsewhere in the UK and perhaps being lost to the Northern Ireland economy or deterred totally from going to university. If we had not acted in the way we did, we would have been looking at a very serious situation today, with Members' postbags flooded with letters from concerned parents protesting at the situation. Through the decisions we have taken, we have avoided that.

I understand — I thought I did — that the Ulster Unionists agreed with the freezing of fees in Northern Ireland, but they seem strangely unwilling to accept the logical consequences of that decision, unless they are now going to suggest otherwise and favour higher fees here and the same level of fees throughout the UK. That is very much at odds with the views of the electorate in this part of the UK.

Mrs D Kelly: The Minister well knows that the SDLP was very much in favour of freezing tuition fees and, if possible, abolishing them at some stage in the future.

Minister, given that the agrifood industry is the industry that, it is hoped, will lift the economy out of recession, have you had any discussions with the Agriculture Minister about increasing the number of places at CAFRE or the universities to meet the employment opportunities that will hopefully arise in a niche market?

Dr Farry: As regards support for the agrifood sector, we have recognised that it is one of the priority skill areas for the future evolution of the Northern Ireland economy. We have a future skills action group that is working in that area, so we recognise the absolute importance of all of that.

I also remind Mrs Kelly that, in so far as the SDLP supported the freezing of fees in Northern Ireland, it proposed to do that by taking the money out of the universities. So, we would have had the bizarre situation where we were subsidising low fees but, at the same time, funding a poorer form of education, which would have been utterly counterproductive.

Apprenticeships: High-tech Industries

8. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he has plans any to introduce a scheme along the lines of the former supported graduate apprenticeships to help leading-edge high-tech industries. (AQO 1771/11-15)

Dr Farry: The supported graduate apprenticeship scheme was an indigenous training programme for undergraduates in Bombardier Shorts. I have been advised by the company that the scheme ended in 1994.

In terms of publicly funded higher-level apprenticeships, my Department is working with a number of sector skills councils, leading companies and training suppliers to develop and pilot an apprenticeship programme at level 4, which is at sub-degree or higher national level, in the information and communication technology and engineering sectors. The aim of that pilot programme is to support the skill requirements of our leading-edge companies in Northern Ireland and to establish progression routes for apprentices that could lead to an honours degree. Preparatory work is well under way, and it is expected that recruitment to the pilot programme in both sectors will take place later this year.

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for his reply. I declare an interest as an achiever from that scheme. What the Minister has outlined will lead to the skills gap being filled in high-tech industry companies, such as Bombardier, as there are major shortfalls in their recruitment areas, such as engineering and electronics. Will the Minister roll the programme out to companies other than just Bombardier?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his supplementary. There are two things to stress in response. First, this programme will be broader than just Bombardier. I pay tribute to Bombardier, because it is very proactive in its apprenticeship programme and works very closely with us on Apprenticeships Northern Ireland. However, this scheme will be much wider. We are piloting it in two areas, and, if it is successful, we hope to roll it out on a much wider basis.

We have a requirement for a much greater level of higher-level qualifications in Northern Ireland. That was a clear theme in the skills strategy that we launched last year. However, that does not always necessarily mean the classic degree route: there are other paths open to people that are of equal value. It is really the case that whatever fits best should be pursued.

Mrs Dobson: What steps is the Minister taking to inspire and enthuse our people at a much younger age about the opportunities and remuneration available from STEM subjects? I was very inspired by a recent visit to Bombardier, on which we were told how it had increased its uptake of female apprentices. Minister, what measures are you taking to encourage more females onto that career path?

Dr Farry: The Member raises a very valid point. It is important to highlight that we still have a long way to go. However, some important steps are being taken. We have a STEM strategy, which is a cross-departmental strategy based on a review of STEM subjects and conducted by Joanne Stuart. Bombardier was represented on the group by Gavin Campbell. We are keen to highlight the importance of people from a wide range of backgrounds and of both genders taking part in apprenticeships. Indeed, Stephanie Wilson, who was a production engineer from Bombardier, spoke at a recent event as a STEM ambassador. When I was on the Bombardier floor recently, I was pleased to see the beginnings of much greater diversity in that company's apprentices. I know that that is also the case in many other companies across Northern Ireland.

Mr A Maginness: The Minister referred to a pilot scheme, which is very encouraging. However, does the Minister not agree that a more aggressive approach has to be taken to the development of such skills, particularly among graduates? At this point, we should take that approach rather than simply wait for a pilot scheme to produce results.

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question and understand the sentiments behind it. In Northern Ireland, there is, on the one hand, a desire to be radical and innovative in public policy but equally there is a strong accountability culture and a desire to see things properly rolled out and assessed before even greater amounts of money are invested. I am not sure that this affects my Department any more than others. The House has to grapple with the wider culture in public policy in Northern Ireland. I will, however, give the assurance that I will move aggressively to follow up on the results of any pilot. Those results will also be reinforced by work that I am doing with an ICT working group involving business leaders, the colleges and universities and other Departments to see how we can better cater for the ICT sector. My skills adviser, Bill McGinnis, is conducting a scoping exercise with engineering companies on their particular skills needs to see what actions we need to take. Apprenticeships are only one part of a much wider engagement in support of those sectors.

Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College: Merger

9. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the proposed merger between Stranmillis University College and Queen's University Belfast.
(AQO 1772/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have already updated Members on the proposed merger in writing on four occasions and once orally on 12 September. In addition, I made a statement on teacher education issues to the Assembly on 28 November 2011. I have commissioned a two-stage study of the teacher education infrastructure in Northern Ireland. The first stage of that will be completed in the summer and the second stage in the autumn.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for his reply. He stated the number of occasions on which he has provided updates. Does he accept that confusion reigns supreme around this subject? When will he take the opportunity to clarify the matter and be precise and exact about what is happening? Quite frankly, there is a lot of uncertainty, and, with no disrespect to the Minister, I think he seems to be the author of it.

Dr Farry: I thank Lord Morrow for the opportunity to clarify the situation once again. I inherited a situation in which there was a consultation on the merger of Stranmillis and Queen's University. Indeed, the party that was the author of that consultation strategy changed its mind on what it wanted to do. Lord Morrow's party also indicated that it was not supportive of that merger going ahead.

I have stated that I am willing to move the legislation on that when there is sufficient support in the Assembly to carry that legislation. However, the issue is much broader than the potential merger of Queen's and Stranmillis. For that reason, I have announced a two-stage review of the teacher education infrastructure. The first stage is looking at the

financial model behind the two teacher training colleges. The second stage will explore options for sharing that will flow from the outcome of the first stage. We expect that first stage to conclude towards the end of June.

3.30 pm

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

Private Members' Business

Multiagency Support Teams

Debate resumed on motion:

*That this Assembly notes the success of the multiagency support teams and equivalent bodies in detecting and addressing problems which children may experience in the early stages of their education; recognises the effective partnerships that are in place between the health service, schools and parents to address the needs of children; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to work closely with the Minister of Education to review the model of service provision and expand the service to the schools and nurseries which are not currently part of the scheme. —
[Mr Beggs.]*

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I am grateful for the opportunity to hear the views of Members on this issue. I fully support the principle of multiagency teams working together in the interests of children. I emphasise that I continue to be committed to providing the best possible services to those in our communities who are most in need.

The use of multiagency and multidisciplinary approaches is in line with policy across all Departments, and I am fully supportive of that principle where it can deliver better outcomes and where appropriate resources are available. The work of multiagency support teams, or multidisciplinary teams as they are commonly known, is exceptionally important in the early identification of difficulties that children are encountering with their development or problems that may prevent them achieving their full potential. If not addressed, such problems may inhibit their making a full and constructive contribution to their communities and society as a whole.

Multidisciplinary working and close co-operation between the various agencies allow us to help improve the life chances of children and young people through enhancing educational development and fostering their health, well-being and social inclusion. They also allow us to make sure that the limited resources available are used in the most effective manner and deliver the best outcomes for our children.

The multidisciplinary teams to which the motion refers are an example of health and social care and education sectors working together for the benefit of children. The teams, which have been funded by my Department since 2007, are run by health and social care trusts, in close collaboration with their respective education and library boards. They work in nursery preschool settings, primary and special schools. Access to services provided by the scheme has largely been through expressions of interest by individual schools.

I am advised that the teams are operating in schools across all trust areas, although not all schools have signed up to the process. Trusts determine the composition of the teams

in their areas according to need. In trusts where not all schools are yet participating, plans are in place to ensure that access is optimised through the issuing of further invitations or a review of particular service models to ensure that the resources are used effectively. However, there are costs associated with expanding and extending the service. Information provided by the trusts indicates that potential additional annual costs would be in the region of £900,000. It will be of interest to the Member who proposed the motion that around £500,000 of that money applies to the Northern Trust area, with the other four trusts responsible for the remainder.

The pace of inclusion of all schools, other than post-primary schools, will be largely dependent on available resources. I recognise and applaud the significant work already being carried out by health and education professionals, together with parents, in addressing the needs of children, and that will continue. I am happy to give my commitment to working in close collaboration with the Minister of Education, where his special educational needs review or other initiatives address that area.

Indeed, I met him last week to discuss a range of common interest issues and the potential for further joint working between our Departments and their various agencies. I believe that such co-operation is essential for the benefit of children who are most in need and for the best use of the limited resources that we have.

However, as I have said, rolling out the work of the multidisciplinary teams to all relevant schools will require significant investment and service reform, particularly given the fact that the commissioning direction targets in other parts of paediatric allied health professional services remain very challenging. With that in mind, the Health and Social Care Board is carrying out a review of the work that multidisciplinary teams already undertake. An initial scoping of current provision has been completed and is being analysed. It is intended that that will provide the review with a baseline of services in each team and assist in the exploration of any service improvement to allow a regional model to be developed.

In addition to the work of the multidisciplinary teams, my Department is leading on the development of an autism strategy and working closely with all Departments, including the Department of Education, to find ways to identify and assess those who may have autism, and to improve the service and support. The input of the education sector is, of course, essential in developing better services for young people who have autism, as, quite often, the nursery or school setting is where it may be identified initially.

On 29 February, I launched the allied health professions strategy. A key theme of that strategy is the promotion of person-centred practices and care, which put the service user — in this case, the child and their parent or carer — at the centre of decision-making about their treatment. The strategy notes that positive partnerships are essential for allied health professionals to play their role as leaders and members of multidisciplinary and multiagency teams. A good example is the excellent partnership working between speech and language therapists and schools to achieve positive outcomes for primary 1 children, to give them the best start in life. Such co-operation has even enabled teachers to provide ongoing support to children

with communication difficulties by using techniques demonstrated by therapists.

Co-operation also extends to the special educational needs review that is being taken forward by the Department of Education. My officials are working closely with the Department of Education in taking that forward. Putting the child at the centre and ensuring that their needs are identified and addressed should be the focus of all of their efforts. That should apply equally in high-level policy development and in specific co-operation between disciplines, to ensure that there is the earliest intervention and support possible to help an individual child achieve their full potential.

I thank Members for their contributions in support of multidisciplinary working. All Members who spoke outlined the significant benefits, for children and wider society, of Departments and agencies sharing this task. I believe that we can do much more by working in a co-operative way across the Departments than we can individually. Therefore, I am totally committed to ensuring that that is the case. I can confirm that my officials and I will continue to work closely with the Department of Education on all of those issues, where appropriate.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to colleagues for taking part in the debate and for the remarks made. I begin by paying tribute to my colleague Mr Beggs. He is no stranger to campaigning or to getting better outcomes for children and young people. He has led on issues like this for many years and, no doubt, will continue to campaign tirelessly on these issues and, where he sees good practice, try to roll it out. That is the basis of today's debate and why we have been passionate about putting it on the agenda. We want to make the case for rolling out in all areas the good practice that we see being carried out in some areas, and see where we can pick up and make sure that no children fall between the gaps in our services and are left behind.

I agree with Mr Beggs that it would be great for that to be rolled out to all schools. The school is the one place that we know catches all children. Notwithstanding that, I will come later to Ms Gildernew's remarks about wanting to have this happen upstream to allow intervention at an earlier stage, which my party supports. We have always been keen on interventions being made at as early a stage as possible across the board.

Ms Gildernew: Does the Member not agree that, if we leave intervention until a child is four or five, there will be children going to school who are not suitable for an educational environment? That was pointed out, in this Building, by a renowned economist a number of years ago.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to Ms Gildernew for that. I agree that it is vital that intervention is made as early as possible. The difficulty, as Mr Beggs highlighted, is that school is the one place where we are guaranteed to catch all the children, because of the compulsory nature of education. That is the one time that we know that we can get all the pupils by using the school system to identify them. If we can come up with a better way, we will adopt it, and we are looking at other programmes that would allow us to make earlier interventions. In your contribution, Ms Gildernew, you talked about health visitors. We would, of course, be very receptive to that option. It is about making sure that no child falls through the system, or, as you quite

rightly pointed out, is left behind or left struggling when he or she reaches school. Other Members, such as Mr McCarthy, mentioned that people not in education, employment or training have been left behind. At that stage, way down the track, there is much more pressure on our criminal justice system. We must make sure that no pupil falls through the system. Of course, we would support that happening at a much earlier stage.

The one theme that comes through from all the contributions today is the support for early intervention and for the co-operation and collaborative approach between the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Education. Everyone who spoke agreed on that. Mr Wells talked about the co-operation between the two Departments and early intervention. He said that, if we were to roll out this model to all schools, it would, somehow, cost about £1 million. However, I recall the same Mr Wells saying, as recently as a year ago, that we had plenty of money in the health budget.

Look at the savings that Ms Gildernew and others talked about. If one pound spent on early intervention saves £20 down the line, it suggests that we may be a little penny wise and pound foolish. We have to look at that and change the mindset of Departments so that they start to engage and think like that.

Michaela Boyle talked about improving life chances, which is key to the difference that this will make to the lives of our children and young people down the line and right across the board. It is about improving life chances and providing opportunities that might not be afforded if we do not identify early the issues and complex needs of children. Their issues and needs are being picked up by these programmes throughout Northern Ireland, which is important. Ms Boyle talked about the referral criteria and suggested that they might need to be reviewed. She called for even greater co-operation between the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Services, and she strongly supported expanding the existing scheme.

Mark Durkan talked about the benefits to schools and the enhanced support for parents, as well as children. He wanted to extend the age to which we support children.

Mr McCarthy talked about children being our greatest asset. I am sure that every Member of the House agrees with that. He talked about other ways in which we could help, such as providing breakfast in schools and tackling obesity in young people. Mr McCarthy and other Members talked about the valuable work that Sure Start and Home-Start do across the board with young people.

Of course, Sure Start is not available in every area, because it is targeted at areas of deprivation. We have good Home-Start projects, particularly across my constituency of South Down, but, again, funding is a huge issue. Without funding, we do not know for how long some of the groups can stay together and stay active.

3.45 pm

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member will know that we visited a Home-Start establishment not that long ago. The main complaint that we heard there concerned the lack of funding and how delay can prevent it from being able to plan the provision of good

facilities for Home-Start. The important point is to get the funding in place quickly.

Mr McCallister: That is a key point for a lot of community-based projects. Too much time is spent looking into funding, but if projects are doing good work and have a proven track record, we should let them get on with it and encourage them.

Pam Brown spoke about the early identification of problems. The key value of early intervention, whether it is done upstream or at the stage under discussion, is the identification of problems and getting support in place. As the Minister agreed in his contribution, the difference that that can make is enormous. That is the main advantage of such programmes, and that is why we appeal for it to be rolled out.

I referred to Ms Gildernew's remarks earlier, but the figure is worth reiterating. She said that £1 spent early can save us £20 later on. That is a huge sum of money and a huge payback for the Government, but it is also a huge payback for the young people and families involved through there being vastly improved outcomes for all concerned.

Mr Gordon Dunne spoke about the multiagency approach at ministerial level. He made a point about co-operation in dealing with autism, and such co-operation across Departments is something that I would like to see happening. One stalling block seems to be the continuing wrangle over whether we support the Middletown Centre for Autism. The costs associated with running the centre have to be addressed, and resources must be delivered where they are needed and where they can be of best use.

My colleague Mr Swann gave many positive examples of good practice being rolled out. He emphasised the difference that could be made if we rolled the scheme out to every school. He mentioned the percentage of parents and teachers who said that the scheme had made a vast difference to their life. Some 92% of parents and pupils believed that the scheme had made a huge improvement, and that is a pretty impressive statistic for any scheme to achieve.

Mr Agnew reminded us that he intends to bring a private Member's Bill to the House. We look forward to that when it arrives. He supported early intervention and a collaborative approach across Departments. The Minister agrees with that collaborative approach and wants to see it continue.

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

Mr McCallister: He spoke about allied health professionals and the excellent work done between speech and language therapists and schools. That must continue. Of course, we are all greatly concerned about how the special educational needs review will develop.

I thank colleagues for their contributions in support of the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the success of the multiagency support teams and equivalent bodies in detecting and addressing problems which children may experience in the early stages of their education; recognises the effective partnerships that are in place between the

health service, schools and parents to address the needs of children; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to work closely with the Minister of Education to review the model of service provision and expand the service to the schools and nurseries which are not currently part of the scheme.

Adjourned at 3.49 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 24 April 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statement

Higher Education Strategy

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a statement about the future of higher education in Northern Ireland. Higher education transforms, enriches and inspires individuals and society. It equips people with the skills and attributes needed to succeed in employment. The research and development capabilities of the sector help to create an innovative and prosperous economy. The sector also plays a key role in helping to shape a culturally diverse Northern Ireland.

The higher education sector's achievements are already far-reaching. The sector has made a positive impact on the local economy by leveraging significant external investment. As such, it is critical to Northern Ireland's development as a knowledge-based economy, capable of attracting foreign investment in high-quality jobs. Internationally, we have an excellent reputation for teaching and learning and for research and development.

Our higher education providers also have a high level of student satisfaction, as reflected in the annual national student survey. Our participation rates are also the highest in the UK. Representation of students from lower socio-economic groups is higher than the UK average, with 39.1% of young full-time first degree entrants to Northern Ireland higher education providers in 2009-2010 coming from age-adjusted socio-economic classification groups 4 to 7. That is well above the UK average of 30%.

I, therefore, recognise the importance of ensuring that we continue to provide all our people with the opportunity to avail themselves of the benefits of higher education. As you are all aware, the Executive and I addressed that issue last year, with the decision to freeze tuition fees for local students at local institutions and sustain the level of funding to the higher education sector.

Funding, nevertheless, remains a major issue. The public funding base on which the sector depends is likely to be constrained for the foreseeable future. With tuition fees essentially frozen, we as an Executive must ensure that our institutions are not left behind in terms of investment growth.

There are other challenges. Demographics are changing, and the core 18 to 21-year-old cohort on which funding for teaching and learning has traditionally been based will reduce by 9% by 2020. Students' expectations are increasing and their profile changing. However, with challenge comes opportunity. In seeking to harness the fundamental

role that higher education plays in helping to secure our future prosperity and ensuring that we benefit from the challenges that we face, my Department has developed 'Graduating to Success: A Higher Education Strategy for Northern Ireland'. The document shapes the sector's strategic direction to 2020 and seeks to build on past and present successes. It looks to the future with a shared vision of how higher education can best be used to achieve the Executive's aim of:

"a shared and better future for all"

that is supported by a rebuilt and rebalanced economy.

The document is the first higher education strategy for Northern Ireland. It spans all levels of higher education from levels four to eight: in other words, from a higher national certificate (HNC) to a PhD. A steering group chaired by Sir Graeme Davies, a project group and five expert groups were established to support the strategy's development. The groups comprised a wide range of stakeholders from higher education, the community and voluntary sector, further education, schools, business and student representatives.

The expert groups considered and made recommendations on five key themes: learning, economy, international, society and people, and finance and governance. The chairs of the expert groups presented their findings and recommendations to the steering group in summer 2010. Their reports informed the consultation document on the strategy's development, which was published in January 2011. A total of 40 responses were submitted to the Department, and stakeholder engagement events were held throughout Northern Ireland.

I thank the Committee for Employment and Learning, both past and present, for its contribution to the strategy's development. I wish to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their commitment, support and expertise throughout the process. In finalising the strategy, I reflected deeply on the comments made and made my own assessment of the sector's future needs. It can, therefore, be seen that my Department ensured an inclusive approach to the strategy's development. Through that, I believe that we have achieved a document that truly captures what we all believe higher education should be like by 2020.

My Department's vision is of higher education that is vibrant and of international calibre; pursues excellence in teaching and research; plays a pivotal role in the development of a modern, sustainable, knowledge-based economy; supports a confident, shared society; and recognises and values diversity.

In particular, the sector will be recognised for its ability to equip individuals with the high quality, distinctive range of skills and attributes needed for an increasingly competitive international workplace; excellence in research and development and willingness to work in partnership with industry and business to secure knowledge transfer and drive innovation; professionalism of teaching and learning and commitment to quality, support to students and fairness in maximising opportunities for all who can benefit; flexibility in responding to the needs of learners and other stakeholders, including business; willingness to engage globally; and the rigour of its governance.

The vision is supported by four key principles, which are to be responsive, of high quality, accessible and flexible. Our institutions play a critical role in addressing future skills needs and developing the knowledge economy through research and development and knowledge transfer. Accordingly, the strategy focuses on the need to better align higher education provision to the needs of the local economy, with greater emphasis on science, technology, engineering and mathematics — STEM — and economically relevant subjects. The universities will bring forward proposals by March 2013 for rebalancing the profile of the learner offering so that the qualifications offered more closely reflect the economy's needs.

In support of my Department's skills strategy, the higher education strategy outlines the need to upskill and reskill the current and future workforce, providing it with the right skill sets to meet employer needs. Indeed, a major focus is on ensuring that learners who undertake a higher education course are provided with the opportunity to avail themselves of a work-related placement while completing their studies. I want to ensure that our graduates possess the employability skills that they need to succeed in the job market and ultimately benefit our economy. Therefore, by 2020, all higher education students will have the opportunity to avail themselves of a work placement. The additional skills will be recorded by all higher education providers on the higher education achievement report. All students who finish a higher education course in 2018 will have a higher education achievement report in addition to their degree so that employers can clearly identify the additional skills and experiences that the students possess.

The importance of higher level skills is further reflected in my commitment to increase postgraduate places by doubling the number of PhD places to 1,000 by 2020. The strategy also focuses on the important role that intermediate qualifications play in strengthening our knowledge base. As supported by my Department's further education strategy — FE Means Business — higher education in further education, or "HE in FE" as it is often referred to, is the key driver of intermediate higher level study in Northern Ireland. I want that to continue, and I will seek to increase the provision. I have already secured additional funding for the expansion of part-time provision of HE in FE, and I will increase the number of intermediate qualifications — for example, foundation degrees — from a baseline of 1,132 in 2012 to 2,500 by 2015. The work that the sector undertakes with local business and industry is also important, and I seek continued collaboration between not only HE and FE and business but the universities.

Research and development is also a key driver of economic success. Our institutions already make a significant

contribution to our economy through those activities, and I wish to ensure that that continues. My Department will, therefore, encourage the higher education institutions to improve their performance post-2014. From the start of the next academic year, I will seek to promote world-leading and internationally excellent research in my Department's funding model, while ensuring that it takes into account the local economy's current and future needs.

The commercialisation of the research base in Northern Ireland has been identified as a critical factor in the stimulation of economic growth and job creation. Knowledge transfer activity will be increased and better links with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) will be developed. By 2013, the universities will have undertaken 1,140 business engagements and secured £6.94 million in consultancy fees and £863,000 in income from intellectual property. In 2014, the universities and further education colleges will have established 14 major sectoral projects with local companies and undertaken 155 projects on behalf of local companies.

Although the economy is an important strand of higher education, we cannot overlook its foundation as a seat of learning. I want to ensure that higher education in Northern Ireland remains a world-class, high-quality provision. To secure that, the strategy seeks to improve on the quality of the sector to date. Teaching excellence will be further rewarded and recognised, and the sector will be quality-assured in a manner that reflects its needs. By 2016, there will be a single quality assurance framework for all higher education providers in Northern Ireland. Lifelong learning will be facilitated and supported with clear progression routes into and through higher education, aided by a single recognised qualifications framework.

By 2018, modular learning will be commonplace across the sector, and the higher education funding model will be enhanced to ensure that it supports a flexible, lifelong learning environment. All learners will be kept fully informed and supported as they enter and progress through higher education through a standard sector-wide process. Student information will be improved and will assist prospective learners in making the decision as to whether to enter higher education and what and how to study.

10.45 am

I will also ensure that access to higher education is maintained. I recognise that differing fees regimes across the UK may increase pressure on local higher education places. So far, the level of applications from Northern Ireland students to local institutions has remained steady, while it has dropped to institutions elsewhere. I have, however, secured the resources to facilitate an additional 700 places locally through to 2015. These will all be in STEM subjects.

My Department will also undertake a review of the current control on full-time undergraduate places, the maximum student number (MaSN). This review of MaSN will be published in 2016 and will feed into the creation of a revised funding model that will support a flexible, lifelong learning environment, including how we facilitate the expected increase in the number of part-time students. I strongly advocate the view that students should enter higher education based on their ability to learn rather than their ability to pay. I am finalising a parallel strategy for widening

participation. My commitment is that all qualified individuals should be able to gain access to higher education that is right for them irrespective of their personal or social background.

However, I also want the sector to be accessible in the widest sense. As you may be aware, the issue of widening participation will be addressed separately in a supporting document. I aim to publish that document in the early summer. 'Graduating to Success' also recognises the need for the sector to widen and deepen its engagement with the community on a local, national and international level. Rural access to higher education will be improved, with a pilot scheme for the creation of university bases at further education colleges undertaken by 2014. Engagement with communities will be increased with a view to such activity becoming deeply embedded within the sector. Higher education providers will also be encouraged to engage with government on a wide range of policy issues. Northern Ireland's market share of international activity will increase, with inward and outward mobility nearly doubling by 2020. Cross-border linkages will be further enhanced and developed, and the sector will have set and met challenging targets by 2020.

Above all, I wish to ensure that while maintaining stability and sustainability within the sector, the significance of the contribution made by the taxpayer to the provision of higher education is fully recognised. There will, therefore, be a clear governance and accountability framework that maintains a balance between government accountability and institutional autonomy at the universities and university colleges. I believe that higher education in Northern Ireland is a multifaceted being. I want to ensure that although it cannot be all things to all people, it does everything in its power to help secure the future prosperity of Northern Ireland.

I recognise that the vision for the future of higher education in Northern Ireland is challenging. I believe, however, that the vision can become a reality if all stakeholders work together in creating a responsive, accessible and flexible high-quality sector. The first stage of implementation will be supported by 16 projects, which are outlined in the document. Although the majority of the strategy's aims will be realised in the long term, the projects provide the first steps that need to be taken in achieving my Department's vision for the future of higher education in Northern Ireland. Implementation will be overseen by an implementation committee, which will be chaired by a senior official in the Department. A project steering group will be established and headed by the senior responsible officer for the implementation of the strategy. The project steering group will be responsible for ensuring delivery of the projects outlined and will be accountable to the implementation committee. Each project will be assigned a project manager. The project managers will be accountable to the project steering committee.

The projects focus on a variety of key policy areas and include the importance of building the economy through upskilling and reskilling, research and development, knowledge transfer activities and engagement with business; and ensuring a high-quality learning experience for students through timely, relevant information on higher education, high-quality provision, and increasing employability prospects through work placements and experience, as well as international opportunities. They

also include increasing the sector's engagement on a local level through involvement with communities, on a national level through engagement with government and business, and on an international level through increased institutional partnerships and collaboration with the Republic of Ireland, Europe and the rest of the world, as well as increasing Northern Ireland's market share of inward and outward mobility. The projects will also involve supporting a lifelong learning environment through a modular-based learning approach that is facilitated by an enhanced funding model for higher education in Northern Ireland; and ensuring that efficiencies are identified and acted upon in the sector and that the governance and accountability structure reflects the importance of sustainability in higher education, striking a balance between institutional autonomy and public moneys.

Outlining a vision of what higher education in Northern Ireland will be like in 2020 is somewhat straightforward, but actually delivering on that vision is challenging. I believe that, through the delivery of the projects by not only my Department but the sector, the vision for the future of higher education in Northern Ireland will be achieved.

In conclusion, I trust that you will welcome the steps that I have taken, and that I will take, in creating a strategic vision for the future of higher education. I believe that the steps that are taken now will no doubt bring substantial benefit to the future economic prosperity of Northern Ireland and will help us all to achieve our vision of a shared future. 'Graduating to Success' is now available to download from my Department's website.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make the statement to the Assembly today, and I am, of course, happy to take any questions.

Mr B McCrea (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): Mr Speaker, you will appreciate that that was a very comprehensive statement by the Minister, and I am sure that the Committee will look forward to looking at it in more detail at its meeting next week.

You made some very succinct points, Minister, and you may wish to expand on them. First, how sure are you that increasing the number of PhDs is the right place to put our investment? In other areas, people have looked at bringing in more highly qualified professors and such like. Secondly, it is fair to say that the Republic of Ireland does significantly better in the drawdown of funds from programmes such as FP7 and Horizon 2020. What steps will your Department take to address that imbalance? Finally, you said in your concluding remarks that the vision is easy but that the implementation is perhaps the more challenging bit. You might decide to chair the implementation committee yourself rather than give it to an official in your Department, because I think that this is a really important issue that needs ministerial leadership.

Dr Farry: I thank the Chair of the Committee for his comments, and I know that the officials are looking forward to engaging with the Committee on the matter next week.

The Member referred to the increase in PhDs. We need a balanced approach to investing in higher education. We have, quite rightly, had a lot of focus recently on support for undergraduates, and I have also been very clear in saying that an increase in higher-level qualifications does not always mean the classic degree route. However, equally, we

need to focus on our strength at postgraduate level. Our postgraduate profile is weaker than that in other UK regions, and we need to be very conscious of that. It is also clear that the Executive have identified the development of a knowledge-based economy as critical to our future economic prosperity, so, again, we need to further invest in this sector. At present, we have a baseline of about 500 funded PhDs from my Department. Under the previous Programme for Government, we had 300 PhDs, which were not renewed on the back of the Budget last year, but I think that we are in a position now to roll out an increase of 50 on a year-by-year basis. It is important that we do that and that we reach the target of doubling through to 2020.

The Member asked about FP7 and Horizon 2020. Again, the Executive have set their own challenging targets for drawdown of those moneys, and we are on target to meet those. However, as the Chair said, it is worth comparing our drawdown to that of other regions, and there is no doubt that there is significant room for growth. At present, the profile of spend in FP7 is heavily skewed towards universities; a parallel issue is that we need more SMEs bidding. We need to see how we can develop that further.

I have spoken to the European Commission regarding how we can better access resources. Of course, FP7 and Horizon 2020 are competitive European programmes. Countries are not allocated their proportionate share, so it has to be based on the quality of bids. I am very mindful, in conjunction with my colleague, the Minister of Enterprise, to see what we can do to improve the bidding infrastructure in Northern Ireland. I know that the Commission is very happy to take a hands-on approach in dealing with the universities and colleges and with business to try to facilitate more bids from Northern Ireland.

Finally, it is probably an issue for officials, but, as my officials and, no doubt, most Members know, I tend to take a very hands-on approach as Minister, so I will certainly not be washing my hands of it one bit. I will be keeping a close eye on officials and holding them accountable to ensure that they deliver, and closely monitoring progress on all the targets that we have set.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his statement and his focus on the higher education strategy. I note that in his statement — fairly lengthy as it is — there are a number of targets, projects and aspirations. He said in his closing remarks that outlining a vision for higher education in Northern Ireland was somewhat straightforward, but that delivery of that vision is where the difficulty lies.

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

Mr Buchanan: I will do that. How can the Minister assure the House that the aspirations, visions and targets are achievable and will be delivered and implemented in full by 2020?

Dr Farry: I thank the Deputy Chairperson for his question. I will answer it this way: at my most recent meeting with the vice chancellors of the two main universities in Northern Ireland — and also with reference to the Open University, which is the third university — the message from the senior people was that although they are autonomous bodies that are largely supported by public funds, they fully recognise that they are part of the community in Northern Ireland.

Moreover, they were very clear that they understand the importance of their contribution to realising the Programme for Government objectives and the objectives of the economic strategy. They know that they are critical factors. They know that they are not operating in a bubble and that public finance is particularly tight; so there is a understanding across all stakeholders of the need to deliver on a clear strategy around specific outcomes.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister tell us a little bit more about the rural access to higher education, which will be improved with a pilot scheme for the creation of university bases at further education colleges? Furthermore, is it of concern to the Minister that there is no representation from university colleges on the 17-member higher education strategy group? I stand to be corrected on that.

Dr Farry: I will come back to the Member with the details of the representation. On the specific issue of the pilot of rural access through the further education colleges, that is something that we are conscious of, particularly as we move to a more part-time modular approach to higher education. It may be the case that people in urban areas can more readily access higher education than those in remote rural areas. We are looking to start the pilot in 2014 at one of the further education colleges, so it is something that we hope to address in the very near future. It is not on the long finger; it is a priority.

Mr A Maginness: I congratulate the Minister on a very thorough document and presentation this morning. It is to be warmly welcomed.

On page 4 of his document, he refers to research and development as a key driver of economic success. I agree with that. The Minister has also referred to challenges. Does he agree that a major challenge is translating research into commercial projects? How will he achieve that? That seems to be vital.

11.00 am

Dr Farry: I fully agree with Mr Maginness's comments. We will work closely with the institutions around the base funding that they have. They need a solid platform on which to build. We have projects such as the higher education innovation fund (HEIF) and Connected, which are two of the main knowledge transfer processes. We are committed to maintaining the funding around all of that. We are looking to see whether we can increase some funding to provide a stronger infrastructure in the universities to bid for the FP7 and Horizon 2020 moneys as well. So, we are seeing whether we can increase further the foundation stone. It is then really a case of business working closely with the universities around their very particular needs and trying to encourage this.

It is also important — I referred to this yesterday — that we recognise that not every investment in research will produce commercialised results. It is not because people are not trying; it is because the very nature of the process of innovation has successes and failures. We need to have a culture in which we accept that, sometimes, we will have occasional projects that come to nothing, but, equally, we will have projects that become stellar successes and really can transform our economy.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the wide-ranging framework for the delivery of high-quality higher education for the benefit of individuals and the wider economy. Surveys frequently demonstrate that our graduates would benefit from improved employability skills. How will the strategy go towards achieving that aim?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Lyttle for his comments. It is important that we appreciate that we have to invest in employability skills. At present, we turn out a lot of graduates who are capable of taking up jobs. Others suffer difficulties in accessing employment. One of the difficulties is the lack of proper experience. Placements are an integral part of a number of degree courses. At present, the number is higher at the University of Ulster than Queen's. We need to look a lot more at offering placements as a formal part of a course or, alternatively, as a free-standing opportunity for people. Everyone should have the opportunity to develop their employment skills alongside what they are doing.

I made reference to the higher education achievement report — HEAR. That should be developed from 2014 and fully in place by 2018. It will sit alongside the degree and show employers what the student has done alongside the formal degree, so that employers can take balanced employment decisions. It is a very competitive job market out there, and I want to make sure that our students are as well prepared for the world of work as they can be.

Mr Ross: I thank the Minister for his statement. There are many positive things in it, particularly the recognition that we need to align higher education more closely with the needs of the economy. To follow on from his previous response about the placement that will be available to students, is he aware that a number of local companies will open themselves up for placements? Indeed, is he working with local companies to deliver that? Would he envisage those placements being paid placements?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Ross for his comments. We will have a wide range of placements, and their nature will depend on the particular circumstance. We should not necessarily start from the assumption that they will all be paid; that is not the nature of what we are trying to achieve through them. That said, I see a real understanding emerging from the business community of the importance of investing in employability skills. That, in part, is about the interests of the businesses, but it is also an appreciation that they are part of a wider economy and that our economy will succeed only if we have a skilled workforce. That means people having specific skills in their subject area, but it also means having skills in a wider sense, such as the things that they learn in university about how to think and carry out critical analysis and their knowledge of how the workplace functions and their ability to engage in it.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas a thug sé dúinn inniu. I thank the Minister for his comprehensive statement. Contained in the statement is an assertion that the sector has a key role to play in helping to shape cultural diversity in society. Given that importance, will the Minister please outline the role he sees for the Irish language in the strategy and the sector?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his comments. I will deal with cultural issues in general before I come to the specific

point about the Irish language. It is important that we understand that, although there has to be a heavy focus on economically relevant subjects in universities and a closer alignment between universities and the needs of the economy, universities also serve a wider range of purposes and learning itself remains important. Indeed, not everyone will be suited to a career in a STEM subject, and we need people with the good skills in critical analysis, management and leadership that come from a range of activities.

As is the case in many other societies, universities in Northern Ireland have been a strong source of cultural development. We certainly do not want to lose that, and we will encourage that to be maintained and further developed. There is a project that deals with how universities engage with wider society and the community, and universities have a wealth of knowledge and thinking that government can draw on when dealing with difficult issues.

The approach to Irish language is for each of the providers to determine, and it is not my business as Minister to micromanage at that level. However, it goes without saying that I am more than happy for the providers to engage at that level as part of cultural development. It is not my call, but I am happy for the providers to proceed along the lines that the Member suggested.

Mr D McIlveen: I also thank the Minister for his statement. Given that a lot of the higher education strategy focuses on the needs of the economy, is that a clear indication from the Minister — perhaps it is the first — of where he sees the functions of his Department lying following its dissolution?

Dr Farry: I pay tribute to Mr McIlveen's creativity, and I want to say a number of things on that. I have been clear on the record about where I think the debate needs to go, and the single, overarching narrative in my Department is based on the importance of skills to the economy. Whether it is through our work with further and higher education or what we do with business or through the employment service, all the levers are directed towards the upskilling and reskilling of the workforce in a very competitive international situation. Regardless of whether that work continues through a single Department for Employment and Learning or a Department of the economy, it is critical that we keep that economic driver together and retain its coherence. If we split it up, there is a real danger that we will blunt our cutting edge at a time when the future of the economy is most critical.

I urge Members not to see any plots, subplots or hidden subliminal messages in anything that we have sent out today. This has been a deep and long-standing piece of work in my Department, and what is before us is based entirely on the merits of the case and our best analysis of the future direction of the sector. As is the case in many other societies, there needs to be a stronger economic focus in the sector. It is not that that does not already exist; we are simply building on it and reinforcing it further.

Mrs Dobson: I also thank the Minister for his statement. Minister, yesterday I asked you how you would redress the imbalance in females taking up STEM subjects, and I acknowledge that your strategy refers to that as a challenge. How do you feel that the Executive should rise to that challenge?

Dr Farry: I thank Mrs Dobson for her comments. We can take action at a number of levels. First of all, a message

of leadership needs to be sent out from the very top. That includes what is said by the Executive and the Assembly. The fact that we are even talking about this today sends out a strong message.

If we look at the current enrolment figures, however, we can see that a good story is emerging on the gender balance, particularly at entry level, where the figures are very strong. Where we are falling down and where more needs to happen is with progression. As Members well know, whether in the university sector or other walks of life, due to the nature of things, women tend to fall out of the system more than men. We, as a society, need to address that, whether through better investment in childcare or more sensitive operating hours in how we run public bodies, assemblies or businesses. We need to do a lot to address that issue not just in universities but elsewhere.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the Minister's detailed statement. I also thank and place on record our appreciation of Sir Graeme Davies and his team for such an excellent piece of work. We are also grateful for and proud of the participation rates that the Minister referred to in his statement. However, I am disappointed, as my constituency will be, that the Minister has outlined to the House that the next review of MaSN will not be concluded until 2016. Given the Minister's support for the One Plan in my constituency for 3,000 additional students, how does he see that going forward? Is there any comfort that he can give to so many who have been arguing that the One Plan was the economic driver of university places?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Ramsey for his comments. Once again, I am happy to join him in further congratulating Sir Graeme Davies and his team on all their work and support in the development of a strategy.

It is important that Members understand exactly what a review of MaSN means. This is not about a reconsideration of the current numbers within MaSN. I have made a commitment, on the back of the 700 places that we have secured through to 2015, that, if we have a strong evidence base for increased demand around local places, I will go back to the Executive for additional resources to expand MaSN. I am supportive of the expansion of the Magee campus in Derry, but, unfortunately, I had an obligation to ensure that the existing increase in MaSN was allocated across the system. It is there to manage demand, not just to make an investment in one site for redevelopment purposes.

The review of MaSN contained in the strategy is about whether MaSN itself is the correct tool to manage the system. MaSN is, essentially, a blunt instrument for managing and controlling costs within the system. As we move to a greater emphasis on part-time and modular learning and once we factor in problems around retention rates, MaSN particularly loses a lot of its focus. So, it is not a very effective tool for managing costs. Comments have been passed about how effective it is, so it is appropriate that we have a review to see whether MaSN, as a tool for managing costs, is itself fit for purpose.

Lord Morrow: I, too, congratulate the Minister on not only his comprehensive statement but his defence of the argument that he should be retained as Minister and the best way forward is for him to keep his job. However, I

suspect that he will have to wait and see the outcome of that and whether he has been persuasive.

The Minister states on page 4 that it is his intention to increase the number of PhD places. When he was delivering this statement, he said that the number would increase by 1,000. I do not know what we should take from that, but I ask him to clarify that.

Since the Minister has said clearly that the economy is around the whole thing, I take it that he agrees that, when the division and reorganisation come, that is the route that his Department should take.

Minister, you say in your statement:

"Teaching excellence will be further rewarded and recognised and the sector will be quality assured".

How does that sit beside the fact that we have many teachers who are qualifying and cannot get a post? I suspect that the statement is built on the premise that the economy will be in a different position in a year or two.

Mr Speaker: I encourage Lord Morrow —

Lord Morrow: Yes, I think I am finished. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

11.15 am

Dr Farry: Thanks very much, Mr Speaker. Lord Morrow packed a lot in there. I go back to his first comment: I am not making any pitch for myself. At present, my interest is in doing the best that I can in my Department to deliver and to ensure that, whatever the Executive and Assembly decide is the way forward, the best interests of the economy and society rather than politics are at the forefront.

I will address two points in particular, the first of which is to clarify the issue of PhDs. My Department currently funds about 495 PhDs. Other PhDs are funded through other financial sources as well. Members know that an additional 300 places were put in place on the back of the 2007 Programme for Government. Those places fell away at the end of that PFG period. By steps of about 50 a year, starting this financial year, we seek to increase that 500 to 1,000 by 2020.

Secondly, on the teaching issue, it is important to say that this is not about the training of teachers; it is about the quality of teaching that students are entitled to and should expect in a higher education setting. Members will be aware that many people who have traditionally worked in the higher education field take up their post on the basis of the quality of their research, with teaching being a secondary consideration. We want to further consolidate the good work done in recent years to ensure that we have a common standard and framework around the quality of teaching that students have a right to expect.

Mr Allister: What does the Minister anticipate will be the likely impact on the duration of the average primary degree of the introduction of a work-related placement? At present, most degrees are three years. If, for example, it is anticipated that a one-year placement will be introduced, surely he is not going to reduce the study period to two years. Are we heading back to the average being a four-year degree?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Allister for his comment. He raises an interesting point. There will certainly be no dumbing down or reduction of standards on the back of placements. This is to be an enhancement of what is currently offered. It is more likely than not that it will mean that someone will be a student for longer than was previously the case. Equally, there may be different means of accommodating placements over the course of a degree programme. I stress to Mr Allister and the House that we are placing an emphasis on part-time and modular learning, which will provide a much more flexible approach to degrees than at present, and work placements should be considered around that mix.

Mr McNarry: The Minister stated that all higher education students would be able to avail themselves of a work placement. How does he see that opportunity being available to former members of our armed forces, particularly men and women retiring with a disability?

Dr Farry: We are talking about placements for students, and I am happy that we think of the student cohort as being as broad as possible. We are moving away from the traditional focus on the 18- to 21-year-old cohort, which is a demographically declining sector. So we are seeking to expand, and I am happy for any person in Northern Ireland, including former members of the armed services, to avail themselves of higher education.

Mr McClarty: The Minister stated that he is in favour of the expansion of the University of Ulster's Magee campus. Would that be at the expense of other campuses of the University of Ulster, particularly that in Coleraine?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr McClarty for his question, and I understand why he voiced his concerns. The University of Ulster has always supported expansion at Magee, as part of a general expansion of the university. Within that, there will always be movement of courses between campuses, but the university is trying to strike a balance that enables an expansion of higher education provision. If we have a situation in which there is even greater demand from local students for local places owing to the differing fees regimes in different parts of the UK, as an Executive and an Assembly, we will need to respond to that pressure by recognising an expansion of the sector.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his lengthy and detailed statement. I am interested in hearing more detail on the improvement plans to increase accessibility to higher education courses, especially as I come from the rural constituency of Mid Ulster. Have you identified the campuses where your pilot will be rolled out? If not, how will they be identified? Furthermore, you referred to modular learning, which will enhance a lifelong learning environment. Will that also be accessible through further education colleges?

Dr Farry: I thank Mrs Overend for her questions. It is worth stressing that much of the strategy — indeed, all of it — needs to be seen as being interlinked. Therefore, going for a more modular approach sits very well with a pilot scheme and potential further roll-out, using the further education colleges as a base of access to higher education. It is too early to say precisely where we will run the pilot. We will want to enter into discussions with the sector on that. However, I will say here today that it will not be at BMC.

Mr Speaker: That ends questions to the Minister on his statement. I ask the House to take its ease before we move on to the next item of business.

Executive Committee Business

Pensions Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland, to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Pensions Bill.

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

Mr Speaker: Members will have a copy of the Marshalled List of amendments detailing the order for consideration. The amendments have been grouped for debate in my provisional grouping of amendments selected list.

There will be one debate on the single group of two amendments. The first amendment is a new clause putting a duty on the Department for Social Development to lay before the Assembly a report on the impact of socio-economic background, including health indicators, relating to a retirement pension. The second amendment requires the Department to undertake an annual review of indexation and revaluation.

Once the debate is completed, the second amendment in the group will be moved formally and the Question will be put without further debate. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

New Clause

Mr Speaker: We now come to the single group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 1, it will be convenient to debate amendment No 2.

Mr Brady: I beg to move amendment No 1: After clause 1, insert the following new clause:

“Duty to report on the impact of socio-economic background (including health indicators) in relation to retirement pension

1A. *The Department for Social Development shall, within two years of the date on which this Act receives Royal Assent, lay a report before the Assembly on the impact of socio-economic background (including health indicators) in relation to retirement pension.”*

The following amendment stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: In clause 19, page 14, line 37, at end insert

“(12) The Department for Social Development shall undertake an annual review of the indexation of defined benefit pensions in payment and the revaluation of the deferred pensions of early leavers from occupational pension schemes.” — [Mr Durkan.]

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I speak as a private Member rather than as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development. I first thank the Minister for accepting the amendment after our discussions.

I will explain why we tabled the amendment. The Bill is built on the notion that increasing the pension age is reasonable because an average rise in life expectancy means that we all live longer. As I have said previously, that is a blatant misrepresentation of the reality that lies behind the statistics. It ignores the fact that conditions in the North differ significantly from those in Britain. In Britain, all top 10 regions enjoying the greatest life expectancy are to be found in the wealthy areas of London and the south of England. In comparison, Belfast is ranked among the 10 worst areas enduring some of the lowest life expectancy rates. Other areas in the Six Counties fare only marginally better. Dungannon, Cookstown, Derry, Fermanagh, Newry and Mourne, Larne and Lisburn all have significantly lower life expectancy rates. Out of a total of 404 areas, of which London's Kensington and Chelsea is ranked number one, Belfast is ranked 398, just six places above the worst male life expectancy in all areas currently under British jurisdiction. I use the term “British jurisdiction” advisedly because, despite significant progress in returning powers to the people here in the form of devolution, the British Government continue to dominate particular areas of social policy, often to the detriment of people here. That is particularly true in the area of welfare and pensions.

Today, we are considering the Pensions Bill, and shortly we will deal with the Welfare Reform Bill. The North of Ireland is nothing like the south of England. As some of my colleagues, including Sammy Douglas who sits on the Social Development Committee, can bear testimony to, the situation is as true of east Belfast as it is of west Belfast. In the North, shocking levels of health inequality endure within relatively small areas, exposing with even greater clarity the British Government's detrimental decision to use an overall average rise in life expectancy to determine policy here.

In this consideration, the devil is certainly in the detail. Conducting a study and laying the findings of that study before the Assembly is a small but not insignificant undertaking. If conducted with due diligence, it will reveal the reality of life expectancy and patterns of health inequality in the North and, in doing so, provide vital information on which the Assembly can seek to craft appropriate interventions to improve life expectancy here. I urge the Assembly to support the amendment.

Ms P Bradley: Sorry, I have to get my papers ready. I rise as a member of the Social Development Committee to speak on the amendments tabled to the Pensions Bill. The necessary changes to the pension ages are an unfortunate reality that the whole of the UK has to adapt to and accept. We must face that reality but in a way that ensures that the

impact of the changes is addressed as early as possible and kept to a minimum for our citizens.

I am happy to support amendment No 1, which allows a check on the system to be put in place to ensure that we, as a legislative Assembly, know as early as possible the impact of socio-economic background and health indicators on the retirement pension. That will allow our system to evolve and ensure that as few people as possible are affected negatively when the changes come into force.

The evidence received shows that certain vulnerable groups in our society are likely to be most affected by the changes. We must also be aware that many women are unaware of the changes and how they will be affected. We must ensure that the changes do not impact negatively on that group. We must continue to support and encourage the over-50s to enter the workforce and remain there. There is a plethora of support for young people on a low income to remain in the workforce, and we must ensure that that also happens at the other end of the age scale. We must ensure that we are always aware of the socio-economic backgrounds of that group, and this report allows us to do so. The report will also allow us to identify what work needs to be done to improve conditions for those affected most by the changes.

We have to face the fact that we are part of the UK and acknowledge that that is where the changes are being driven. We do not have the ability or option to break parity with the rest of the UK. However, amendment No 1 allows us to monitor the impact of the changes and gives us the information that will help us to address the many fears about the impact that the changes will have.

I oppose amendment No 2, tabled by Mr Durkan. We, as an Assembly, do not have the powers to change the rate, so it would, therefore, be fruitless. I do not believe that we should commit our Departments to reviews to publish reports that are no more than self-serving exercises. We must be frugal and conscious of what we spend in the current climate. Producing reports, conducting research etc all costs money that, I believe, the public would want us to spend in priority areas. If we, as an Assembly, had any real prospect of changing the rate on which pensions are based, amendment No 2 might have some merit. However, to support it would be to waste valuable resources for very little discernible outcome.

I support amendment No 1 and oppose amendment No 2.

11.30 am

Mr Cree: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the two amendments. I am standing in for my colleague Michael Copeland who is unavoidably absent from today's debate. Amendment No 1 appears to be well intended, and the House may recall that the Ulster Unionist Party was minded to accept it at Consideration Stage last month. However, after listening to the arguments of the Minister that a period of one year was too short a time frame to collate the necessary data, we agreed with the proposal for a new amendment to be tabled at Further Consideration Stage with a slightly adjusted time frame.

During the debate last month, the Minister queried whether his Department even had access to the necessary information. I hope that he has been able to clarify the situation over recent weeks and look forward to hearing him explain it today.

I do not doubt that collating the data will take some time. However, I do not accept the argument that we should not pursue such data just because new ways of allowing access to information held by Departments are necessary.

A cross-departmental approach is often a buzzword in this Chamber. However, it is rarely followed through. If amendment No 1 is successful today and becomes part of the Bill, which later receives Royal Assent, I will be pleased to see the Department for Social Development having to break out of its silo and work with other Departments here and in Great Britain in order to deliver the proposal of producing a report on socio-economic factors in relation to retirement pension.

The rationale for the amendment was widely discussed at Consideration Stage, but I will take a moment to make a few comments from my own perspective. Northern Ireland has gone through some great hurdles over its relatively short history, none more so than during the latter half of the 20th century. Although many international and domestic commentators frequently point to this Building and note the existence of a seemingly functioning Government, we still live in a society in which there is much inequality.

Reports from the Department of Health reveal that apart from age, gender and limited long-term illness, social deprivation across Northern Ireland has a bigger effect on mortality and life expectancy than all the other section 75 characteristics. I do not think anyone will disagree about the need to narrow the gap in life expectancy and other socio-economic indicators in the most socially deprived and most affluent areas. Therefore, I hope that the report proposed in the amendment will go some way to identifying solutions.

I will now make a few brief comments in relation to amendment No 2. The Ulster Unionist Party will be opposing the amendment. Given that pensions are now to be based on the consumer price index (CPI) rather than on the normal higher retail price index (RPI), there is little doubt that, alongside the proposed increases and equalisation of the state pension age, indexation will be one of the more controversial issues. Some sort of basis for that decision can be seen in the June 2010 Budget when the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that, with some exceptions, the Government proposed to use CPI rather than RPI as the basis for increasing most benefits and public sector pensions.

As CPI is typically 0.7% lower than RPI, pensions will inevitably grow more slowly. The courts in England have also come down on the side of the Government in the subsequent judicial review on the change. Nevertheless, we must be realistic and look at the rationale behind the decision. The Department will probably deny that the move to CPI was to save money, and I am inclined to believe that. I can understand why the consumer price index can be seen to better reflect pensioners, as only very few of them will have mortgages, and given that RPI includes mortgage interest payments, it may not necessarily have been the most reflective. Although we can try to understand the basis of the amendment, reading it as it is on the Marshalled List, I struggle to see what the purpose of a review would be. Reviews are all fine and well, but a review for the sake of a review would only waste officials' time and government resources.

Mr Durkan: I will move amendment No 2 in support of amendment No 1. The amendment that I have tabled

seeks to put an obligation on the Department for Social Development and on this House to review indexation of defined benefit pensions and payment and the revaluation of the deferred pensions of early leavers from occupational schemes.

The rationale behind the amendment is to mitigate the harsh impact that a permanent change to the consumer price index would have on many pensioners. The Bill will not make the changes from retail to consumer price indexation, but, through clause 19, it will give effect to the recent Westminster announcement that CPI will now be used in the revaluation and indexation of private sector occupational pension schemes, increases to financial assistance scheme payouts and the revaluation and indexation of pension compensation. We fear that it will do that in perpetuity.

The proposed move to CPI rather than RPI will, ultimately, devalue defined benefit schemes and result in losses to individuals that may amount to up to 15% reductions in their pensions, which is what public sector workers are being subjected to. A permanent move will result in permanent disadvantage to those individuals. When the order was made to change from RPI to CPI, opposition manifested itself in industrial action from across the public sector, resulting in a judicial review being taken against the Westminster Government. That review was subsequently lost, but the determination of the public sector to protect its pensions is not, and that is a fight that the Assembly will continue to face.

Given that the majority of pensioners affected by this clause do not have a union to voice their views, we must speak for them. I tabled amendment No 2 with the intention of creating a mechanism for their voices to be heard and listened to, following the changes that the Bill will impose. Given that the confines of the scope of the Bill and that the change to CPI was made via an order and not the clauses that we are examining today, I hope to go further than this in the future by, through private Members' legislation, calling for a review of indexation and revaluation in totality.

Passing the Bill without agreeing to this amendment will enshrine in law the use of CPI as the legal requirement for pension increases for these defined schemes. That means that, even when, or if, our economy is rebalanced, the deficit is gone and earnings growth has returned, our hardworking public sector workers, those who leave occupational pension schemes early and, ultimately, the poorest, will be hit year after year. The draconian shift to CPI has been made in response to the wider economic situation. We need to ensure that we retain the ability to be equally responsive when things are going well.

As discussed at Consideration Stage, the Assembly needs to start exercising its power and to think of creative solutions to protect its citizens — our citizens — in this region while recognising, but testing, the constraints of parity. It is my belief that the amendment demonstrates cognisance of those constraints. However, more importantly, we can show that this is a working Government that can look for and exploit flexibilities of parity to the advantage of our citizens.

We are not content to merely accept and rubber-stamp punitive legislation from Westminster. We are realistic enough to accept why the change has been introduced, but we cannot ignore the detriment that it will have for many. We

do not accept that it is a good or fair measure of inflation for raiding social security benefits, but we accept that we must confine ourselves to the scope of the Bill. We can attempt only to adjust the clause therein. Ultimately, given the unpredictability of the economic climate, the aim of the amendment is to ensure that the Department continually and year after year reviews and examines the measures that we are using to calculate inflation in regard to the main pension schemes.

I reiterate the severity of the Bill without the amendment, but even with it. It will give CPI a permanent place, written in black and white in legislation, allowing it to permanently disadvantage hardworking members of society and prevent them from receiving what is rightfully theirs. The instruction to review will open the door to allowing a change to a more appropriate and fairer indexation measure, such as RPI, when the time is right and when we can economically sustain such a measure. I call on the Assembly to support the instruction to review placing a duty to report and a responsibility on the Assembly to account for the impact of its policies.

Turning my attention to amendment No 1, I see that it is a tweaked version of an amendment tabled at a previous stage. Again, we will be supporting the amendment. I fully accept the points made by Mr Brady and subsequent Members who spoke about the inequalities that prevail, in particular, among the elderly population in disadvantaged areas across the North. As I alluded to at the previous stage, the fact that life expectancy is increasing simply does not mean that the quality of life is improving for people in advanced years.

All Members agree, I am sure, that fuel poverty is a huge burden on our older, more vulnerable generation. Shifting the boundaries for pension claimants means that those who are already struggling will continue to do so. With the imposition of this Bill, they will do so for longer. They will be tasked to work for longer or tasked to find work when it is increasingly difficult to do so and when they had envisaged living on an expectant pension. The amendment will, I believe, provide evidence to substantiate what we have been saying. We have not been scaremongering.

Northern Ireland is plagued economically, as well as socially, by its past. As a result, the lives of our senior citizens are filled with fewer opportunities and more hardship than those of their counterparts in parts of Britain. We welcome the Minister's acceptance — the Assembly's acceptance, it would seem — of amendment No 1. I urge the Minister and the House to consider the fact that amendment No 2, which I proposed, is complementary to it. Although amendment No 1 may demonstrate the hardship caused by the Bill to people, amendment No 2 may provide the tool with which that hardship can be tackled.

Mrs Cochrane: I welcome the opportunity to speak briefly on the proposed amendments to the Bill. The Alliance Party has made its position on the Bill clear so far. We recognise that the state pension age must be equalised for men and women. Due to an ageing population, we must then raise the age from 65, as people are generally living a lot longer and we simply cannot afford to maintain the status quo. Although we recognise that the Bill will raise the state pension age at a faster rate than was originally planned and, therefore, put some at a disadvantage, some changes were

made at Westminster to ameliorate the situation for the many men and women who were going to find themselves in a much worse situation.

However, not everyone is living longer, and the Bill fails to take that into account. Amendment No 1 means that the Department would have to produce a report on the impact of socio-economic background, including health indicators, in relation to retirement pension. I understand the importance with which that amendment was tabled. As Mr Brady stated, such a report could reveal the reality of life expectancy in certain geographical areas and look at the patterns of health inequality here. Therefore, we will be supporting amendment No 1.

We will also lend our support to amendment No 2, relating to the annual review of the indexation of defined benefit pensions in payment and the revaluation of the deferred pensions of early leavers from occupational pensions. Such a review will better inform us of any actual issues and impacts that may need to be addressed in the future.

We support the Bill and the proposed amendments.

Ms Brown: I will speak on the tabled amendments as a member of the Social Development Committee. I am happy to support amendment No 1, which impels the Department for Social Development to lay a report before this Assembly, two years after the Bill becomes law, on the impact of socio-economic background, including health factors, in relation to retirement pension. The amendment allows for two years rather than one, in comparison with the amendment that was tabled during Consideration Stage. That allows adequate time for the Department to be able to produce this report. This is a worthy project. I know that many different people from various socio-economic backgrounds have different experiences as pensioners. I believe that all pensioners struggle to make ends meet in a world where costs are increasing at a faster rate than their pension.

Things were recently made harder for pensioners by the Westminster Government, when they scrapped the winter fuel payment scheme. Fortunately, we saw our Executive maintain a scheme here in Northern Ireland, hence, helping to protect pensioners and other vulnerable groups from fuel poverty.

Many pensioners today grew up during the introduction of a welfare state that promised an adequate safety net from birth until death. I am not so sure that this is universal. However, such a report as is described in the new clause will shed light on the experiences and impact of social background in relation to retirement pensions, especially as to how life expectancy and health factors vary between Northern Ireland and other parts of the United Kingdom.

11.45 am

I oppose amendment No 2, as tabled by the SDLP Member for Foyle, as passing it would be pointless. We, in the Assembly, do not decide whether pensions are based on the consumer price index or the retail price index. That is a matter for Westminster.

In summary, I support amendment No 1 and oppose amendment No 2.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support amendment No 1, and I am very pleased that Members are supporting it. I am particularly thankful to the Minister for his willingness to embrace the amendment, and I have no doubt that, as his party colleagues said this morning, it will be accepted.

This exercise is to allow us all, in the fullness of time, proper access to and informed discussion of the socio-economic circumstances that many will face; it will allow us time to reflect before the pension age increase comes into effect. That is important. Moreover, it allows us — particularly the Executive — to look at whether there needs to be any other mitigating measures taken to offset any possible difficulties that may arise from that information. The report allows us to make a more informed decision on all those matters.

It is important to stress that, so far — obviously, this comes from Westminster — one of the key planks of the rationale for the increase in the age for retirement is the fact that the population is ageing. Life expectancy is continually being extended, and that is very welcome; however, it takes no account of the health profile of the population.

Therefore, it is important that the report be completed. My party is pleased that we will have that report as a result of the amendment. All parties have been willing to embrace that. We all share the need to make sure that we protect those who have paid an awful lot into the system and who have made a very important contribution throughout their lives. We are all wedded to the fact that we need to support our ageing population in the time ahead.

I have no difficulty with the principle behind amendment No 2 and its objective. I think that the arguments over the use of the consumer price index as opposed to the retail price index are more fundamental than even this Pensions Bill. So we have no difficulty supporting it. However, I do not believe that it will be passed, as we heard this morning; that is why my party did not table such an amendment.

It is important to draw attention to the issue, and many of us believe that the switchover from RPI to CPI will have a negative impact on many pension recipients. However, it is a more fundamental argument than the Pensions Bill; it probably needs to be made elsewhere or in a different format. In principle, we have no difficulty in supporting amendment No 2. We do not think that it will be made, but it is something that we would all like to return to in the fullness of time.

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):

The House is aware that Mr Maskey and Mr Brady tabled an amendment to the Bill at Consideration Stage, requiring my Department to lay a report before the Assembly on pension outcomes in relation to health inequalities and life expectancy. That was withdrawn, following my agreement to consider the matter further, and on the understanding that the original or a revised version would be tabled at Further Consideration Stage.

I subsequently had a very useful meeting with Mr Maskey and Mr Brady to clarify expectations and the feasibility of meeting those expectations and consider what data are available, what additional data may be required, and the time frame for the report. I am now content for my Department to compile the report and to support the revised amendment tabled by Mr Brady. I propose that the new

clause will be brought into operation by commencement order, shortly after Royal Assent.

Mr Durkan tabled amendment No 2. Clause 19 makes consequential amendments to several pieces of existing pensions legislation following the Westminster Government's decision to use the consumer price index rather than the retail price index as the measure of inflation for benefits and pension purposes. In case there has been any misunderstanding, I should make it clear that this Bill is not the vehicle that implements the Government's decision to use the CPI as the measure of inflation: that decision has already been implemented as far back as 2010. Clause 19 makes consequential amendments to some important but relatively minor provisions to ensure that the decision to use the CPI is applied consistently across occupational pension schemes: for example, it amends some largely peripheral references in existing legislation and ensures that those who wish to continue operating schemes using the RPI can do so.

I have listened carefully to what Mr Durkan had to say in support of his proposed amendment, but I am not sure what benefit there would be in my Department carrying out a review of the indexation of defined benefit pensions and payments and the revaluation of the deferred pensions of early leavers. My Department has no power to set different percentages for Northern Ireland. It merely has power to prescribe the percentages determined by Great Britain's Secretary of State. Even if my Department had the power to set different percentages, it would be very unlikely that we would wish to do so. Many pension schemes operate on a UK-wide basis —

Mr Durkan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr McCausland: I want to pursue this and follow it through so that Members listen carefully to what is said, because there is logic behind the position that we are setting out. It clarifies what I think are misunderstandings as to where we are.

Many pension schemes operate on a UK-wide basis. Different percentage increases for Northern Ireland could result in those schemes having to operate two different regimes; one for Northern Ireland and one for Great Britain. Defined benefit pension schemes are, in many ways, the gold standard of pension schemes, as members have a high degree of certainty as to what their pension will be when they reach retirement. The scheme is also underpinned by the employer.

However, the harsh reality is that many employers have been withdrawing from offering such schemes. Sponsoring employers bear considerable risks in that they are liable to make good any shortfalls in scheme funding. Increasing life expectancies, stock market volatility and economic challenges have exacerbated the trend for employers either to close their defined benefit schemes or to close them to new members.

Regulating pension schemes is always a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, we want to ensure that members' rights are protected, but on the other hand, we need to ensure that we do not make the regulatory burdens on schemes and employers so onerous that we precipitate scheme closures. If we were to have different percentage increases applying in Northern Ireland, we could see schemes ceasing to operate here due to increased benefit and administrative costs. That would not be in anyone's

interests. That is why, even if my Department had the power to set different percentage increases for Northern Ireland, it would be very unlikely that we would wish to do so.

As to what would be achieved by a Department carrying out the proposed annual review, I have already made clear that my Department has no power to set different percentage increases for Northern Ireland. I think I have demonstrated that I do not approach these issues with a closed mind. As I have shown in relation to amendment No 1, I am open to persuasion, and I am happy for my Department to carry out research where the work will better inform our understanding. However, we must be realistic. All Departments are facing, and will continue to face, ever tightening budgets, and I cannot support my Department's resources being diverted to largely nugatory work, which in reality would serve no useful purpose.

I will pick up on a number of points made by Members during the debate. Mickey Brady commented on life expectancy, an issue on which he has commented on a number of occasions. I am glad that the bus to Finaghy did not set off today; it stayed in the depot. Looking at life expectancy in Northern Ireland as a whole, we see that, at age 65, it is on a par with that in Wales, marginally lower than in England and higher than in Scotland. We are not unique in the United Kingdom, as many areas of Great Britain have lower life expectancy than Northern Ireland. It is right that we should consider the issue, and we will do so. However, the situation needs to be put in context, and the differential across the various countries of the United Kingdom is set out there.

Leslie Cree made a number of points. As I said at Consideration Stage, I wanted time to explore exactly what the amendment wanted to achieve, what information would be needed and how much work would be involved. That is precisely what we did, and we are content that we will be able to access the necessary information and deliver the report within the time frame set out in the amendment.

Mark Durkan mentioned a couple of points that I want to pick up on. One was about CPI and RPI. I fully accept that the law in this area is extremely complex, but I should make it clear that indexation and revaluation provide only a degree of protection against the effects of inflation on pensions. Schemes are required to index pensions in payment on rights accrued from 1997 onwards. However, the percentage increase is capped at 5% for a pension based on service between April 1997 and April 2005, reducing to 2.5% for a pension based on service from April 2005 onwards.

Similarly, revaluation is capped at 5% for service up to April 2009 and 2.5% for service after that date. So the fact that the CPI was 0.4% lower than the RPI this year is immaterial, as both exceeded the statutory caps that apply to indexation and revaluation. However, it is true that, over the longer term, linking to the CPI will probably result in lower increases. Again, we are statutorily tied to the rate of increase in Great Britain.

The Westminster Government argue that the CPI is a more suitable measure of inflation for the indexation of benefits, tax credits and pensions. It is a complex issue, but the CPI is also the internationally recognised measure of prices and the Bank of England's preferred measure of inflation.

Turning to another point that Mark Durkan raised, I should explain that both the CPI and the RPI are calculated by collecting a sample of prices for a selection of representative goods and services in a range of UK retail locations. Currently, around 180,000 separate price quotations are used every month in compiling the indices. They cover almost 700 representative consumer goods and services for which prices are collected in around 150 areas throughout the United Kingdom, including five sample sites in Northern Ireland.

At present, the Office for National Statistics does not calculate regional inflation figures, because the information available is not suitable for the compilation of reliable figures. The production of reliable estimates would require increasing dramatically the sample size for the locally collected prices, perhaps by a factor of five or more for some parts of the country. In Northern Ireland, sampling takes place across only five sites, which would not allow a statistically valid analysis to be carried out.

In addition, many of the centrally compiled indices, for example, housing, cars and personal computers, are designed as national indices. It would be a difficult exercise to decompose such data into appropriate regions. I hope that that point makes clear the complexity of the sort of thing that the Member spoke about. In any case, as I have made clear, the Department does not have the power to prescribe percentages for the indexation and revaluation of occupational pensions that differ from those set by the Secretary of State in Great Britain.

12.00 noon

I have already said that I want to be as helpful and as open as possible in dealing with the issues, and I think that we have clearly demonstrated that in relation to amendment No 1. I am open to persuasion, and I was persuaded. As a result, I am happy for my Department to carry out the research. We will do that as quickly as possible, even though the time frame is two years. Officials will have to do a considerable amount of work. If we are to compile such a report, it is important that we get it right. However, I anticipate that we will have that done well before the two-year deadline.

We are open to approaches and persuasion. However, I have to say that, although I am happy to accept amendment No 1, I cannot accept amendment No 2, for all the reasons that I set out. It is ill conceived, ill considered and ill founded. I trust that the Member who tabled it and any others who may be tempted to go down that road will reflect on that. It would not help the situation in Northern Ireland at all. In fact, the work would be largely nugatory. I, therefore, urge the House to reject amendment No 2.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. First, thank the Members who supported amendment No 1. Paula Bradley, in speaking to the amendment, said that such a report would be beneficial to the people affected. Leslie Cree said that amendment No 1 was well intended and that his party accepted the timescale. He thought that collating such data was necessary and that cross-departmental co-operation was needed to deal with socio-economic issues. He also rightly talked about the inequalities in society, despite all that has happened in recent years.

Mark Durkan spoke in support of amendment No 1 and said he felt that it complemented amendment No 2. Judith Cochrane spoke in support of amendment Nos 1 and 2. She

talked about the fact that we are not able to maintain the status quo because people are living longer etc. Obviously, that issue is part of the debate.

Pam Brown supported amendment No 1. She talked about health factors and the impact on people's socio-economic background. She thought that it was a worthy project and felt that the scheme would protect people here. She also talked about the introduction of the welfare state, which has been beneficial to many people who are now reaching pension age or have already done so.

My colleague Alex Maskey obviously supported amendment No 1. He talked, again, about the socio-economic issues involved and about reflecting the change in pension age. He said that there possibly are other mitigating factors and that a more informed decision on these matters could be made before the change in pension age. I thank the Minister for his indulgence in accepting amendment No 1.

Like my colleague Alex Maskey, I support the principle behind amendment No 2 and can understand why it was tabled. The whole issue of the move from RPI to CPI needs to be addressed in a wider debate further down the road, as it is a fundamental part of the changes. It can only be seen as a cut; it is not beneficial to people of pension age and should not be seen as such.

The Minister went into some detail about the legislation. He said that, in many ways, it is enabling legislation, because it contains technical provisions that relate to many of the issues involved in the pension legislation that has already gone through the British Parliament. In saying that, I think that the principle behind amendment No 2 needs to be addressed. All the amendment seeks is a review. The amendment refers to an annual review, but perhaps a longer timescale, such as the one set out in amendment No 1, would be better. The economic situation may change, as Mark Durkan sensibly pointed out. If there is a review relating to RPI and CPI, the issue could be addressed when the economic situation improves and people's pensions are reviewed. The Government used the recession as an excuse for the change from RPI to CPI. They were going to make the cut anyway, but the recession gave them a smokescreen, if you like. Mark Durkan's point that the economic situation may well change is correct. He said that amendment No 2 is complementary to amendment No 1, and I support the principle behind it.

Question, That amendment No 1 be made, put and agreed to.

New clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 19 (Indexation and revaluation)

Amendment No 2 proposed: In page 14, line 37, at end insert

"(12) The Department for Social Development shall undertake an annual review of the indexation of defined benefit pensions in payment and the revaluation of the deferred pensions of early leavers from occupational pension schemes." — [Mr Durkan.]

Question put and negatived.

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

Private Members' Business

Fuel Duty

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

Mr McKay: I beg to move

That this Assembly condemns the forthcoming 3p rise in the cost of fuel; notes that our people pay some of the highest fuel costs in Europe; and calls on the Executive to start negotiations with the British Government regarding the devolution of powers on fuel duty.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome not only the fact that we are debating the motion but that three other parties tabled amendments, a number of which I do not agree with. However, given the huge effect that fuel costs will have on the amount of money that families have to spend from day to day and week to week, it is important that we have a worthwhile debate. The North of Ireland has some of the highest fuel costs in Europe. Of course, taxation is the largest component of pump prices at present. It is a shocking fact that some families spend more on fuel than they do on food.

Businesses, particularly hauliers, also struggle as a result of high fuel costs. My constituency, like that of many other Members, has a number of haulage businesses. At present, if the British Government go ahead with it, the 3p rise will place an extra £1,200 cost on each unit and trailer each year. That puts huge overheads on those businesses' bills. Of course, the knock-on effect will be increased costs for products such as food, and that will hit the pockets of all families, regardless of their income.

According to the British Government, the 3p rise will go ahead in August. That will increase the difficulties that people face. It is to be welcomed that all parties in the House oppose it. The 3p rise will cost local people more jobs, as it will increase overheads and push more businesses to the brink.

Five years ago, the price of petrol was just 89p a litre, but it is now more than 140p, which is a huge increase of 51.2p or 60%. Of course, it has to be remembered that there are two price ranges on this island. In the South, the price of petrol and diesel is lower, and it distorts the economy here. When I last checked, there was a 16p differential in excise duty, even though the rest of the island is in a much more difficult economic situation. Businesses in Tyrone, Derry and County Armagh are obviously affected, because trade is going to the likes of Donegal, Louth and elsewhere. The economy in those border areas is distorted, and it is unfair that those businesses are placed in that position.

It is clear that British Government policy on the matter is not set with the interests of people and businesses in the North as a priority. It is more about businesses in places such as the south of England than petrol station owners in Newry and Derry, and that will always be the way. Places such as

the south of England, for example, have higher average incomes, and, in Britain in particular, more supermarket forecourts have deliberately low prices. We do not have that here, and, in fact, it results in the detrimental effect of the costs being multiplied. Rural communities are hit hardest, because, although families are hit in places such as Belfast, people in rural areas need a car to take their children to school, go to work or get their groceries. The price of petrol in rural areas such as Ballymena, for example, stands at 149.9p a litre.

The DUP amendment recognises that we need to be treated differently from the island of Britain, but I do not think that the scheme that it outlines addresses that problem. Certainly, any reduction in duty would be welcome, but people here would still be at risk of suffering from a future fuel duty policy that is set in the interests of Britain rather than here. Instead, why could we not negotiate a 5p reduction in fuel duty for here and have the power to review that position according to local needs? We could have a 5p reduction tomorrow, but then the British Treasury would put 3p on top of that in August and, perhaps, another 2p in the following year, leaving us back where we started. The relief scheme in Scotland, in parts of the Highlands and islands, has been criticised because it applies only to service station pumps and not to fuel delivered in bulk for hauliers. That has been a bone of contention. The DUP amendment deals only with petrol pump prices and not the effect on hauliers and transport costs that, in turn, affect commodity prices.

Research shows that in 2008-09, £921 million was generated through fuel duty here. I will put that in context: corporation tax that year garnered £711 million. If we can see the economic benefits of negotiating corporation tax powers, why can we not see the benefits of a parallel situation in which other economic powers, such as the power to set the amount of fuel duty, are devolved? At the moment, fuel duty revenue is apportioned here to the North according to its proportion of consumption. There is room to enter into negotiations to secure that further power.

A cut in fuel duty could generate higher tax revenues from across the economy. That has been debated at length across the water by a number of non-government groups. The increased economic growth and the business and consumer confidence that would result from fuel duty being lowered would compensate for the reduction and boost gross domestic product.

12.15 pm

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Executive have already carried out work on devolving economic powers, and I agree wholeheartedly with that ongoing work. It is absolutely the same when it comes to fuel duty. The ministerial working group has worked on costs and benefits, administrative charges, the block grant adjustment and the economic impact of devolving corporation tax. The First Minister said that we are a unique case in respect of corporation tax because of the border and because the rest of the island has a better rate. That is quite a sound argument for the issue of fuel duty: we have a border here and two separate rates, and there is a better rate throughout the rest of the island. There is a duty on us to try to ensure that there is competitiveness throughout the island so that the businesses affected in places such as

Tyrone and Derry have an opportunity to secure trade that is equal to that of people in Donegal, Louth and so on.

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for giving way. I have listened attentively to him for almost eight minutes, and, although he has mentioned that a cost may be associated, he has not gone into any detail about the cost to the block grant of getting this power devolved and, indeed, the additional cost per pence of a reduction, which, I suggest, he is looking to achieve. Before he finishes, will he go into some detail on what it will cost the Executive to do this? How much will it cost us for even a reduction of one penny?

Mr McKay: I thank the Member for raising that point. I come back to the ongoing work on corporation tax. There are costs there, and it changes regularly. We cannot put the cart before the horse. We have to secure the powers by having them devolved. There may then be an option, should other Members wish to retain the present rate. The principle of having those powers is that we can respond accordingly to the needs of the local economy. It is clear that, if we are to reduce the rate, we should make calculations, just as the Executive and the First Minister and deputy First Minister are working on calculations for the devolution of air passenger duty and corporation tax. That work is ongoing, and we should mirror that on fuel duty and work with the Department of Finance and Personnel to reduce it accordingly.

In my opinion, if we reduce it, we will see greater consumer confidence and fewer businesses going to the wall. The benefits are there for all to see. There is a duty on the Department of Finance and Personnel to do all those calculations and to move the issue forward. We need a locally tailored fuel duty rate, because it has to reflect the fact that we have different economic needs. We should take the same progressive approach that we have done on corporation tax and air passenger duty. A local approach can work better, and the Executive and the Minister of Finance and Personnel —

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

Mr McKay: — have at least a duty to look at the issue and to provide us with all the statistics, so that the House can approach this in a mature way and come to an agreed way forward.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Mr Hamilton: I beg to move amendment No 1: Leave out all after "Europe;" and insert

"and calls on Her Majesty's Government to halt their planned fuel duty increase and, due to Northern Ireland's peripherality within the United Kingdom, to devise and implement a scheme for Northern Ireland similar to the rural fuel duty relief scheme which was recently introduced for the Inner and Outer Hebrides, the Northern Isles, the Islands of the Clyde and the Isles of Scilly."

If I sound breathless, it is because I am. Business in the House seems to have motored along much more quickly than any of us thought. I am glad to be here to propose the amendment that stands in my name and the name of Mr Ross.

First things first: there will be harmony across the Chamber on the argument that we pay far too high a rate for fuel in

Northern Ireland. That is indisputable. There are varying figures that suggest that we are the highest in the UK or the second highest in the UK, depending on how you look at it and when you measure it. It is undeniable that we pay some of the highest prices per litre for petrol and diesel not only in the United Kingdom but in the whole of Europe. Clearly, that is having a stultifying effect on our economy.

Traditionally, we have had an added problem here in Northern Ireland because of the land border with another jurisdiction, although there seems to be a coming together in the price of fuel between ourselves and the Republic of Ireland. Especially in border counties, people have gone from here to buy their fuel across the border legally, which has deprived Northern Ireland and, indeed, the Exchequer of large amounts of revenue from fuel duty. I see the Speaker nodding; he understands what I am saying. We have also seen, sadly, a growth industry in illegal fuel trading, smuggling and fuel laundering. I think that the Treasury will need to bear those issues in mind when we make these arguments to it. I will come to that later.

To use the old phrase that you hear in many phone-in programmes, something must be done. We have a very high rate and are a very peripheral part of the United Kingdom, and the Treasury also needs to bear those points in mind. Something needs to be done. It is too easy to come into the Chamber as we have in the past and say things such as, "The Treasury needs to cut this rate". We can certainly argue that point, but it does not hold a terrible lot of water. Indeed, in recent times, the Finance Minister has made those very points. I am sure that, along with his Executive colleagues, he has made the very point that the rate is too high and, indeed, that the planned increase scheduled for August will exacerbate all the existing problems. That argument has not carried any weight, because the Treasury has not listened and is proceeding, as we heard in the recent Budget, with the planned increase in fuel duty. So, this is a reality that is bad now and will get worse. Something has to be done, and it is a matter now of debating and discussing what ought to be done.

I had thought that, up to this point, we had got used to some of the ill-thought-out and ill-informed economic policy suggestions of the Sinn Féin Members on the opposite Benches. However, this has taken it to another level altogether. If we come from the basic starting point that we all agree that we pay too much for petrol and diesel in Northern Ireland, I can understand that people would want to explore options. However, the option that those Members put forward will have a detrimental impact. It might help motorists if they reduce the duty, but it will have a negative impact on everybody in Northern Ireland, because it will reduce public spending levels. The Member who proposed the motion and, indeed, his party will have ample opportunity later in the debate to say where they would take the money.

I assume that the argument from Sinn Féin is that we want to take the power to reduce fuel duty. We are not talking about increasing it, and we are not talking about keeping it where it is. There is no point in taking it if we do not reduce it. However, reducing it comes at a cost. We take in around £1 billion a year in fuel duty in Northern Ireland. That is our contribution to the £27.5 billion that the Treasury raises overall from fuel duty across the United Kingdom. Our contribution is £1 billion, and it is one of the few taxes

where we pay more than our population share in the United Kingdom. That is probably a reason why, even if we discuss it with Treasury, it would not want to give it up. We more than pay our way in a UK context through this tax. However, if we took the power and reduced it, every penny that we reduced it by would cost our Executive and our budget £17.5 million. So, if you want to make some sort of meaningful dent in fuel duty and in what people pay at the pumps, you will have to reduce the duty by around 5p. If you add on administration costs, that is a £100 bill — sorry, if it was £100, I would pay it myself — it is a £100 million bill for Northern Ireland and our Budget.

Mr McKay: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he not agree that that principle also applies to devolving corporation tax and air passenger duty? Those also have to have an impact on the block grant. Will he not also agree that, if we can reduce the rate so that it is closer to that in the South, more people will buy fuel in the North, meaning that that will increase revenue for us?

Mr Hamilton: The Member has had another opportunity to outline how he would pay for it. I will give way again if he wants to come forward with how he would pay for the £100 million reduction in our block grant.

Mr McKay: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hamilton: I will give way on the basis that you promise that you will explain where you will take the money from. If he does that, I will give way.

Mr McKay: I will not promise anything. I am saying that the same applies to corporation tax and air passenger duty, because, before we spell those out or come to any rushed decisions, they will have to be considered in the round in the same way as we are looking at corporation tax and air passenger duty.

Mr Hamilton: I was going to address that point. The record will show and people will notice that he did not answer the question that was asked of him. That question is fundamental when we debate this issue. I suggest that the difference between this and the other matters is that, with air passenger duty, the bill for the Northern Ireland Executive is about £3 million to maintain a strategically important air route that is bringing more investment than it will cost us. Clearly, corporation tax will be much more significant than that, but there is agreement across all the major parties in the Assembly that the economic multiplier effect that that would have will, potentially, be much greater for Northern Ireland in the longer term than what we will pay out. However, it does have an impact. We are all agreed in the Chamber about reducing corporation tax, and, yes, it has an effect on —

Mr Allister: Speak for yourself.

Mr Hamilton: I said all major parties. Of course, the Member could never be considered to be a member of a major party.

Mr Allister: I made that mistake once.

Mr Hamilton: We made it twice, I think.

There is clearly a major cost involved in that. It will hit our Budget, but there is broad agreement — let me say that — that it is in the best interests of Northern Ireland in rebalancing our economy and we are going to have to do

that. However, taking on another £100 million shortfall, on top of whatever the price of the devolution of corporation tax is, would simply be unaffordable, never mind unachievable.

I also want to make the point that the shortfall may get worse in the longer term. If we take the power, the Executive and Assembly would come under continued pressure. I do not think there is anybody here who believes that the price of oil will fall in the long term. It will continue to rise, so the pressure then comes on the Executive, the Finance Minister or whoever to reduce the rate that we take on fuel duty more and more. So, the cost will go up, and the shortfall to us will be significant. It will not just be £100 million; it could be £120 million, £130 million or £140 million and could continue to rise if we come under that pressure to keep reducing it to maintain the cost of a litre of petrol or diesel at an affordable rate.

The point is worth making that it is a fluctuating tax take. Over recent years, no doubt because of the downturn, there were some years when we took less than we did the year before. If we take less, that is a shortfall that we would have to make up in reductions elsewhere in our expenditure as an Executive and an Assembly. There may be years when you take more than you anticipate and budget for. It might seem like a bumper year, a bumper harvest, and we can spend the money, but the Member should know — he was a former Chair of the Finance Committee — that we are restricted in what we can carry forward from one year to another. If we do not spend it in-year on programmes, it goes back to the Treasury. They would be laughing —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hamilton: Yes I will, very briefly.

Mr Allister: Does the Member agree that there is another cost, which could be very substantial? The more we open the door to diversifying our tax base in Northern Ireland, the more we leave ourselves without an answer to arguments like those that would be mounted for regional pay. Once you regionalise taxation, you have little opportunity to resist such folly as regional pay.

Mr Hamilton: I do not disagree with the Member. He is right, and I think it hampers that argument. Imperfect as the funding arrangements that we have through the Barnett formula have sometimes proven to be — they do not reflect the need that there is in Northern Ireland — we are much better with the certainty of the situation that we have at the moment than with the gambling that the Members opposite propose.

There is a potential solution that is more realistic and more viable, and that is the scheme that has been introduced for the Inner and Outer Hebrides and the Northern Isles, which is included in our amendment. It is a 5p reduction that goes directly to the motorist who is using it at the pumps. That happens in Scotland and in the Isles of Scilly and is not coming with a reduction to the Scottish Executive's Budget. If it was introduced here, as I think the Treasury should, recognising the peripherality of Northern Ireland and the revenue that we lose in smuggling, it would not hit our Budget.

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

Mr Hamilton: It is therefore much more sensible and much more achievable, because the Treasury has already accepted the principle elsewhere.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.28 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 2 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Social Investment Fund

1. **Mr B McCrea** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the reasons why there is still no timescale for the commencement of the social investment fund.

(AQO 1778/11-15)

4. **Lord Morrow** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the social investment fund.

(AQO 1781/11-15)

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 1 and 4 together. I appreciate the ongoing interest in the social investment fund (SIF), and I assure Members that we have been working hard to advance to the delivery stage. We have been making steady progress. The issues that the fund intends to tackle are complex and far-reaching. We need to be sure that the final proposals for operation and delivery are right if there is to be a lasting impact on communities.

The views emerging from the consultation have been extremely useful in helping to inform our consideration of the final operational arrangements. We take seriously, and wish to respond positively to, many of the views that were expressed to us in the consultation, so it has been necessary to reshape some parts of the programme. In addition, we have been working to progress the necessary business case and procedural requirements while establishing the delivery framework and team.

The key issues that we have been considering focus on the geographical spread of the social investment zones, the process for establishing the steering groups and the basis on which areas may be eligible for an intervention. The latter point is particularly challenging, given the very different patterns of need: rural and urban; city and village; and large and small estates. However, they are fundamental building blocks to the successful delivery of the programme. As such, decisions cannot be taken lightly. Therefore, we have reflected fully on the consultation recommendations and considered all the options available. We are now preparing an Executive paper on our preferred way forward for the operation of SIF. We intend to place it before our ministerial colleagues for formal sign-off. We are not therefore in a position to disclose final details at this stage, but we remain determined to ensuring that the funds allocated make a real difference on the ground.

In preparation, our officials are carrying out a process of engagement with key partnership structures to explore

issues on the ground and to determine how SIF might link, integrate and enhance existing or proposed interventions. Once the Executive have formally signed off on the operation of the fund, officials will roll it out further. The intention is to hold information seminars to outline the operation of SIF. We hope that that will encourage communities to engage in the process to ensure that area plans are robust and fully reflective of the priority needs of deprived communities here.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the First Minister for his answer. Does he accept that many people are watching closely what is going on with the fund, that expectations are high and that the delay is disappointing? What reassurance will he give to such people that the money previously allocated will not be lost? What steps are being taken to reprofile the allocation?

Mr P Robinson: I give an absolute guarantee about the latter point: the Executive have agreed to ring-fence the funding.

The engagement has begun. Unfortunately, Governments cannot win in this respect. We are dealing with public funding, so we are required to have in place robust structures to ensure the accountability of public funds. That requires us to go through a lengthy consultation process, which the Member's party was a party to setting up, that takes many months and adds to the duration before the fund can become operational. We have the requirement for business cases to be approved, and, of course, Executive approval is required.

If we are to be genuine about a consultation process, it is not simply a case of saying, "Here are our proposals. Let's hear what you have to say, but we are going to do it anyway." We have taken the responses received and are making changes as a result, because we welcome the engagement that there has been with the community. The final proposals will be all the better for that consultation.

Lord Morrow: I thank the First Minister for his fairly comprehensive reply. The next stage will be the establishment of the steering groups. How does he envisage that proceeding in each of the zones?

Mr P Robinson: As our proposals have to go to our Executive colleagues, I will be slightly careful in answering that question. It is envisaged that the steering groups will comprise four key elements. Perhaps the key element will be the voluntary and community sector, but the political and business sectors and statutory organisations will also be involved. We will agree with the Executive the final numbers for each group and the method by which they will be appointed. The steering group will be expected to be in touch with its constituent organisations, so that it can bring forward proposals that will have the support of the wider zone and are seen to be fair. Obviously, the proposals will come to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and we will have to approve the final plans.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí a thug sé dúinn. I thank the First Minister for his answers. What consideration has been given to reviewing the composition of the zones following the consultation?

Mr P Robinson: That was one of the issues that came up again and again during the consultation process. Although we were not prescriptive in setting zones that would have excluded areas outside them, there was a feeling in areas

outside the zones that zones should be drawn in such way that those areas were included. That would mean that a criterion of need would be applied to the funding. Although Executive colleagues will want to look at it, we have taken that issue into account in the final proposals that are being prepared.

Mr Allister: Important as the social investment fund is, has the First Minister had an opportunity today to reflect on the news from the Smithwick Tribunal that his deputy has been named as someone who authorised the murder of two senior police officers?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. That question is not relevant to the original question. We will move on. Question 2 has been withdrawn.

Child Poverty: Benefit Cap

3. **Mr Hilditch** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the impact that the proposed benefit cap of £26,000 might have on child poverty.

(AQO 1780/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will ask junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer that question.

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Minister for Social Development has indicated that work is ongoing to develop a more accurate estimate of the combined impact of all the proposed welfare reforms, including the benefit cap. The early estimates by the Department for Social Development (DSD) are based on the application of the Department for Work and Pensions' calculations to the situation. The Executive recently established a subcommittee to consider the implications of welfare reform. It continues to consider all the relevant issues within the financial and legislative constraints under which we operate.

Mr Hilditch: Will the junior Minister indicate when the statement on child poverty will be laid in the Assembly?

Mr Bell: We hope to lay it imminently; it is at the very final stages of preparation. We envisage having it with the Executive as soon as possible and, thereafter, it will be presented to the Assembly.

The Child Poverty Act 2010 provides the statutory basis for the United Kingdom Government's commitment to eradicate child poverty, and it is used to drive actions across UK Departments and the devolved Administrations. It should be noted that the Conservative/Liberal coalition Government amended the legislation that was enacted by the previous Labour Government, and those amendments have produced changes. One example of the changes is that, originally, a report was to be made to a UK commission. However, the commission was never set up and it was impossible to fulfil the provision. As a result of the changes, England and Wales have been removed from that obligation.

We are ready to produce the document and to bring it to the Assembly imminently. On all things to do with child poverty, we are assessed against the United Kingdom median figure. A consideration is then made, and children who live in households with incomes less than 60% of that median figure are classified as being in child poverty. The Northern

Ireland median figure shows that we have a success story to tell, as our child poverty figures are somewhere around 19%.

That is a good story to tell, but it is cold comfort for that 19%. We are determined to do all that we can to fulfil our obligations to eradicate child poverty.

Mrs Overend: I thank the junior Minister for his response thus far. He will be aware that child poverty levels in Northern Ireland are nowhere near to reaching the targets in the Child Poverty Act. Aside from the social investment fund, what specific action is he taking to address that issue, and will he consider introducing Northern Ireland-specific targets?

Mr Bell: The Northern Ireland-specific target would come if we were to look at the figure of the Northern Ireland median income, through which we can show a significant reduction. In fact, at 19%, that is a reduction that many other parts of our United Kingdom would be envious of.

We are looking at how we can assist families. Figures and research are showing us that educational outcomes are better for children in Northern Ireland. The latest research shows that the number of young people who are linked with the abuse of alcohol and drugs is reducing, as is the number of children who are smoking. All those figures show that.

The Delivering Social Change programme, for which we have responsibility, will be the programme by which we seek to deliver real social change on child poverty. However, we are also looking at ways in which parents who are on low incomes, particularly people who could work part time, could be encouraged into work, as well as at ways of making the work that they are doing pay properly.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the First Minister or a junior Minister comment on the recent Save the Children report that states that any positive impact from the introduction of universal credit will be well outweighed by the negative aspects of the British Government's welfare reform programme?

Mr Bell: It is very difficult to look at what the particular impact of universal credit will be. The legislation went through the House of Commons only on, I think, 12 March, so it is very difficult to extrapolate based on legislation that is so fresh. The Department for Social Development is considering its own bespoke legislation for this House. Therefore, it is impossible to comment in advance of that legislation.

Some figures are showing that significant numbers of children — up to 10,000 — could be removed from the child poverty statistics with universal credit. However, it is very early for that, and I would put a cautionary note on those figures.

Trade: Dubai and India

5. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the key meetings which they attended in Dubai and India to encourage stronger trade links with Northern Ireland. (AQO 1782/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: Over the course of last week, the deputy First Minister and I undertook a week-long trade mission to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and India. The purpose of the visit was to promote export growth and to stimulate further investment from the Middle East and India.

The UAE and India are important trading partners for Northern Ireland businesses, and the visit provided an opportunity to build on our growing reputation as a provider of quality products and services. We used the opportunity not only to market Northern Ireland as a place to do business but to assist local companies in building an international reputation. Our visit also coincided with the Middle Eastern and Indian launches of NI 2012 by Tourism Ireland, providing a further platform for promoting Northern Ireland as a must-visit tourist destination in both those fast-developing markets.

All the meetings that we participated in focused on building trade links and further establishing our presence in both regions. In Abu Dhabi, we met His Highness Crown Prince Sheikh Mohamed and a wide range of business leaders. In Dubai, we met other political leaders and business executives, including local firms based in Dubai, such as FG Wilson and Ulster Carpets, which recently secured a prestigious international contract to supply more than 11,000 square metres of carpet to the world famous Burj Al Arab hotel in Dubai.

We also led a highly successful trade mission made up of some 20 Northern Ireland businesses as part of Invest Northern Ireland's Opportunity India programme. The mission's aim was to assist those local businesses in developing an international presence and to grow their businesses through exports.

2.15 pm

During our time in India, we held discussions with both the Chief Minister of Mumbai and the Chief Minister of New Delhi. We also met a number of potential investors and reaffirmed our links with current Indian investors, including L&T Infotech, one of the world's largest providers of IT services, and Firstsource, a leading global business process outsourcing service provider. While it would be inappropriate at this stage to divulge any further details of our meetings, I have no doubt that many of the contacts we have made will lead to the creation of further jobs, exports and investment.

Miss M McIlveen: I thank the First Minister for his answer. Further to that, against what criteria will the effectiveness of the trip be judged?

Mr P Robinson: I assume that people will judge it by different criteria. For our part, the first thing we have to recognise is that there were a number of different elements to the trip.

First, there was the role of promoting tourism in Northern Ireland. The benefit of that will be seen in the number of visitors over the next few years. We also worked very closely with Invest Northern Ireland. I congratulate the Invest Northern Ireland teams in the Middle East and India. They are doing a tremendous job out there. They have to learn the culture and the way of doing business, which is very much based on building up friendships and networks in the area. I congratulate them on the job that they are doing. I also congratulate my colleague Arlene Foster. We were there to give her support on what was her second visit to the region.

As far as investment is concerned, we spoke to a number of investors, and we have high hopes that jobs that will flow from that. Also, there was the very important aspect of the trade mission, where local businesses in Northern Ireland were looking to supply the Indian market. A number of those businesses have very publicly indicated their support for

the trade mission. While modesty alone forbids me from reading the comments that they have made, I will say that each one of them has indicated how helpful it was that the First Minister and deputy First Minister were there because it gave them introductions at a much higher level than they would otherwise have had. As a result, we saw much higher numbers attending the various receptions that we held.

So, we have already seen the basis upon which we would expect to regard the trip as being successful, but we look forward in more tangible terms to the weeks and months ahead.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the First Minister for his answers. Let us hope things go the way he wants them to.

Given that there is a low absolute volume of sales to Brazil, Russia, India and China — £123 million in 2010 — and that the economic strategy's commitment is to raise exports by 60% by 2014 or 2015, which would represent only about £80 million, does the First Minister think that that is an ambitious enough target?

Mr P Robinson: The First Minister and deputy First Minister will have no objections if the target is exceeded. We have to be realistic. All of the exports will, we would hope, build up year-on-year. From what we saw with some of the major companies that we had out there, which are the ones that will make the big financial impact on those markets, it seems that they are recognising that there is an emerging market in the UAE and India and, indeed, in China, which the deputy First Minister and I will hopefully visit later this year. That is a signal that Northern Ireland is taking its place in the world. We are reaching out, and there is a new confidence and a new hope and expectation, which shows that business is very much in tune with the goal in the Executive's Programme for Government to reach out and extend our export basis. We have a market here of only 1.7 million or 1.8 million people. For business to be really successful and for us to drive up our GVA, we need to be building up our exports. It is upon exports that growth will be built.

Mr A Maginness: I wish the First Minister and deputy First Minister well and hope that the visit will prove to have been successful. Certainly, the indications are that it was very good. How does the First Minister assess the potential of tourists coming to Northern Ireland from the two areas visited? What more can be done to assist in attracting tourists to Northern Ireland, for example, by making it easier to visit through visa waivers?

Mr P Robinson: Very often, people from that region will want to go to various parts of Great Britain and places in the South, which makes Northern Ireland the ideal place to come into. Under visa regulations, they can go from here in either direction on the one visa, whereas if they come into the Republic, they will require two visas. That makes Northern Ireland a very good launching pad for seeing the British Isles — if you will forgive that term — as a whole.

At the receptions, we spoke to the travel press and tour operators. There is a massive interest in Northern Ireland, particularly this year and next year because of the many events happening. We also spoke and gave detailed interviews to golf magazines. We should not underestimate the massive power of golf tourism. It is good to hear about the sell-out numbers for the Irish Open. That gives encouragement to the element of the Programme for

Government that indicates that we need to look to bring another major tournament to Northern Ireland.

Ms Gildernew: Will the First Minister elaborate on the potential investment and trade benefits of the visit, especially for the agrifood sector?

Mr P Robinson: We met a full range of companies from architecture to heavy engineering, and the agrifood sector was in there, too. We probably spoke to every one of the delegations that was there from Northern Ireland, and all reported having made good contacts. It will be some time before they can firm up on those proposals. We have a lot to offer in the agrifood sector, which is probably the one sector of business that has given year-on-year growth in Northern Ireland in the region of 8%. It has to look for new and developing markets, and India and China will be chief among those. There will be massive opportunities for the agrifood sector when we go to China later this year.

Government: Quangos and Arm's-length Bodies

6. **Mr Givan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans are in place to review the number of quangos and arm's-length bodies to ensure efficient and accountable government. (AQO 1783/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: The Executive's Budget review group has been taking forward a review of arm's-length bodies across all Departments. The objective is to assess, on the basis of criteria agreed by the Executive, whether individual bodies might be abolished, absorbed into their parent Department or merged with another body with resultant efficiencies and savings. In many cases, though, efficient and accountable government would be best served by retaining the current arm's-length status of a body. The scope of the review covers over 100 bodies ranging from advisory committees to major public utilities.

The process will help to ensure the delivery of high quality and efficient public services, which is a Programme for Government priority. The review exemplifies the collaborative working envisaged in the Programme for Government to produce the building blocks consistent with the Executive's priorities. An analysis of information supplied by Departments has been completed centrally by OFMDFM and the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). At the Budget review group's last meeting, it considered a progress report. All Ministers were invited to examine the implications of the central analysis for their own arm's-length bodies. We are convening a meeting of the Budget review group in early May to consider the responses from this latest stage of the review.

Mr Givan: I thank the First Minister for that response. We can understand why the number of quangos may have been necessary during direct rule. However, in light of devolution having settled in, does the First Minister agree that it is important that we retain only those arm's-length bodies that are absolutely necessary, because the Assembly can hold Departments to much greater account than quangos can?

Mr P Robinson: There are two elements to that. First, if we can reduce the number of bodies, we obviously make the functions more accountable to the Assembly through our Committees. Secondly, there can be considerable savings if we reduce the number of arm's-length bodies, which the Finance Minister and the deputy First Minister and I see as

being important. However, we recognise that a number of those arm's-length bodies are necessary and can probably do the job in a way that could not be done in Departments — I am thinking particularly of tribunals. Therefore, we will not wipe away all arm's-length bodies. However, an assessment will be made as to whether the Department could better carry out those functions under our new circumstances.

In many cases, arm's-length bodies were felt to be an essential part of direct rule. There was a lack of local democracy under direct rule, and the involvement of local people gave it some degree of authority and accountability. However, we are in very different circumstances. That is why the Executive feel that it is necessary to seriously consider this matter.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. An dtiocfadh liom an cheist seo a chur ar an Chéad Aire: arbh fhéidir leis blas de na torthaí a bhí leis an athbhreithniú go dtí seo a thabhairt dúinn? Can the First Minister give us a flavour of the main findings of the review to date?

Mr P Robinson: That might be unfair of me, as the review was carried out with the previous Executive team before the election. We have asked each of the new Ministers to assess whether they agree with the findings of their predecessors and whether there have been any changes in the way their Department operates that might cause them to alter those findings in any way. We have also asked them to look at any legislative vehicle that might allow them to make any changes that are felt to be necessary. We are awaiting responses from two Departments on this element of the review, and I am sure that the Member can use his influence in getting one of those Departments to catch up with the rest.

Ms Lo: What is the Minister's assessment of Government efficiency and accountability on the lack of provision for a marine management organisation in the Marine Bill, as the Bill covers six different Departments with varying functions and responsibilities?

Mr P Robinson: It would be wrong for me to involve myself in any discussion that relates to a departmental matter. The Member can take that up with the Minister concerned. The specific question that we are dealing with is about reducing the number of arm's-length bodies, and an assessment will be made by every Minister as to the value of those bodies in their Department.

Inward Investment

7. **Mr Swann** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their efforts to attract inward investment. (AQO 1784/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: Attracting inward investment is crucially important to creating jobs, growth and long-term economic prosperity for Northern Ireland. The deputy First Minister and I are determined to build strong economic relationships internationally in attracting investment and in deepening our strategic partnerships in opening up new markets and opportunities. We welcome the opportunity to support the economy Minister and Invest Northern Ireland's activities in overseas markets. We have participated in a number of visit programmes in recent months to proactively pursue

new opportunities in encouraging investment and promoting Northern Ireland's tourism potential.

We undertook an extensive programme of visits to the United States in March. North America remains a significant source of foreign direct investment for us, and we used our visit to reinforce the message that we have an outstanding record of success in assisting inward investors. We also undertook our first official visit to Canada, and we had very positive meetings with important business interests in Montreal, including senior management in Bombardier, which is our largest manufacturing employer.

I have already spoken about our investment trip last week with the economy Minister to India and the United Arab Emirates. The key message that we conveyed on those visits was that the Northern Ireland Executive are pro-business and committed to growing the economy. It is too early to be specific on the outcome of the engagement. It can be months, sometimes years, before the result of that activity is realised.

2.30 pm

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

City of Culture 2013

1. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the anticipated influx of visitors for Derry/Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 events, what action is being taken to maximise business and tourism legacy potential. (AQO 1792/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has been supporting the city council in Londonderry and Ilex to ensure that the city can develop an exciting events programme and has set aside £700,000 to support the programme. It has also invested capital expenditure of £8 million in built heritage projects as part of the Walled City signature project, along with £1.4 million for the city's lighting strategy. Invest Northern Ireland has offered financial support of £709,000 towards a suite of capability initiatives aimed at supporting businesses in the area, with the potential to exploit and capitalise on the business opportunities brought about by the City of Culture.

City breaks to Londonderry as UK City of Culture will be promoted in Great Britain later this year. We are currently promoting the city worldwide, through Tourism Ireland, in advance of the arrival in July 2012 of the Clipper and such events as the Peace One Day concert at Ebrington Barracks in June.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for her reply. One concern and complaint that a lot of Members receive from their constituency comes from small businesses that cannot access procurement or tendering through government sources — whether they be local government; Ilex, in my case; or the Culture Company — and do not have the capacity to do so. Given the importance of the opportunities it has for businesses and for them to become more sustainable, will the Minister's Department, through Invest Northern Ireland, for example, initiate a programme

of capacity building in the north-west area so that the true legacy of the City of Culture will be sustainable businesses in the community in the north-west?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. As I said in my substantive answer, Invest Northern Ireland has invested £709,000 in a capability initiative. The reason behind that is precisely as the Member says: to support businesses in the area, with the potential to exploit and capitalise on the business opportunities brought about through the designation of UK City of Culture. I know that he will be keen that we also work with Mark Nagurski and Digital Derry in all that they do in relation to attaining 100 new small businesses in that arena by 2015. So, we are being proactive in relation to the City of Culture. We believe that it is a huge opportunity not only for the city but for the entirety of that region of the north-west. We will, therefore, work with the local MLAs, in particular. If they bring us particular issues, I will be happy to look at what we can do to solve those issues.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Príomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. I thank the Minister for her answer and for her support for local businesses in particular. Will the Minister comment on the need for a good programme of events and how that will enhance the tourism potential? How does she view the recent announcement by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure on the investment in the programmes?

Mrs Foster: It is hugely important that we have a package of events that can be bought into by everybody in the city. I know that that issue was raised at the last Executive meeting that I attended, as was the need to make sure that everybody in the city buys into it. At that Executive meeting, we were assured that that was the case and that a programme of events was being brought together that would allow everybody in the city to buy into it and, indeed, to shine brightly during the UK City of Culture year, so that it leaves the legacy that we all so desperately want to see left behind after 2013, moving into 2014 and 2015. I can assure the Member that I will do all that I can in my capacity to support the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. I know that she brought that paper to the Executive. We supported that unanimously because, I think, we all get the fact that this is a huge opportunity for Londonderry and, as I said to the Member who spoke previously, for the whole region.

Mr Dunne: What is being done to promote the UK City of Culture in Great Britain?

Mrs Foster: As I indicated in my substantive answer, it is something that we are keen to promote, particularly towards the end of this year and moving on into next year. As the Member will know, we have a huge year this year, with ni2012. We want to make sure that we promote it, but ni2012 and what is happening in the UK City of Culture in 2013 is all wrapped up together.

Just yesterday, we were reminded that the World Police and Fire Games are coming to Northern Ireland next year as well. A lot is happening, and we want to make sure that the world knows about it. That is one reason why we used the opportunity, when we had the First Minister and deputy First Minister out in the UAE and India, to launch those events for ni2012. You can be assured that the city of Londonderry got a mention as well.

Fuel Fraud

2. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the discussions she has had with stakeholders dealing with fuel fraud about new licensing legislation specific to the storage and sale of diesel fuel on garage forecourts. (AQO 1793/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department chairs the fuel oil liaison forum, which includes officials from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. The forum considered the need for amending the relevant legislation to include diesel but concluded that it would not be appropriate to incorporate diesel for licensing purposes. The current legislation is predicated on controlling the keeping and dispensing of petroleum spirit through a licensing regime to minimise the fire and explosion hazard posed to the general public. Diesel does not present such risks, which, in this context, is unfortunate, as far as I am concerned.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for her reply. Given that fuel fraud, especially diesel fuel fraud, is a major problem in Northern Ireland, especially in my constituency of Newry and Armagh, does the Minister believe that the present legislation on fuel fraud is fit for purpose in dealing with this crime?

Mrs Foster: I can understand the Member's frustration. Indeed, when the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs at Westminster wrote to me on the issue, I tasked officials to be as creative as they could to try to deal with it. Unfortunately, as I have indicated, the legislation that sits in my Department deals solely with health and safety. Diesel does not present the same hazard as petrol, and, therefore, there was no remit in my Department to take action on that issue.

We know that fuel fraud costs the United Kingdom millions of pounds in lost revenue every year. As I understand it from the Select Committee, Northern Ireland alone is estimated to have lost £70 million in 2009-2010. That is a huge amount of money. Therefore, I believe that there is a need to move forward on the issue. I can only hope that the Minister of Justice has a look at the matter, and perhaps the Committee for Justice could look into it in more detail to see whether there is something we can do in a Northern Ireland context.

Mr Beggs: I understand, Minister, that there have been only 47 prosecutions between 2001 and 2009 and that millions of pounds go to criminal gangs as a result of fuel laundering. Does the Minister accept that the Executive as a whole should determine which Minister is appropriate to take forward and address the issue, so that there can be severe penalties for those dealing in this illegal fuel?

Mrs Foster: With respect to the Member, it is not my job to tell other Ministers how to do their job. If the Member has an issue that he wishes to raise with the Minister of Justice, he should do so.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. Given her role with responsibility for health and safety issues regarding the storage and sale of diesel, does the Minister's Department liaise with HMRC in relation to any indications there are regarding the storage or sale of illegal diesel or fuels?

Mrs Foster: As the Member will probably realise, we have chaired the fuel oil liaison forum since its establishment

in 2009. The forum includes officials from my Department, the HSENI and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. It also includes the district councils, which, as the Member will know, are the licensing authorities. The forum was set up to gather as much information as possible and for the training and development of council licensing officers. It was also to share the relevant information and intelligence with colleagues in HMRC, which, I think, is what he is asking about. We have increased the co-operation between district councils, the Department and HSENI. It is hoped that that will lead to further information on illegal activities.

Springvale Site, Belfast

3. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her Department has for the development of the Springvale site, Belfast. (AQO 1794/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI holds 48 acres of land at its Springvale Business Park. Most of this land has been developed by businesses. Invest NI is engaged in negotiations with a company over the sale of the remaining available land in the park. In the wider Springvale area, Invest NI also has 16 acres of available land at its Forthriver and Whiterock business parks. This land is held in support of economic development and is actively marketed to foreign and indigenous investors through the NI business information website.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for her answer. She will be aware that the site that I referred to is the interface site on the Springfield Road at Springvale, the former Mackie's site. Does the Minister agree that there has been considerable antisocial behaviour and violence in the form of rioting in that area and that the development of that site for the benefit of the entire community is essential? If there is agreement across and from the community, will she encourage her Invest Northern Ireland officials to work with those in Belfast City Council to establish a recycling plant for the benefit of that entire community?

Mrs Foster: There have been many ongoing discussions about the sites, particularly the one that the Member refers to, in which the city council has taken a particular interest. He is right to point out that, unfortunately, we have continuing instances of interface violence there and an ongoing issue with lower-level antisocial behaviour. That has an impact on trying to attract investment into the area because people see that antisocial behaviour continuing. We will continue to work with the Police Service on that issue. However, I reassure the Member that I am happy to work with the city council. I also assure him that we want to make sure that anything that goes on that site is acceptable to the host communities and will increase the site's value and the well-being of those who live in and around the site. Unfortunately, the issue has been ongoing for a considerable time.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I met Invest NI officials this morning in regard to that piece of land on the Springfield Road. I agree that there have been a number of antisocial behaviour issues, but a lot of good work is going on between the communities. That is a positive step that has reduced antisocial behaviour over recent months.

The big thing about the recycling plant is that Invest NI officials will tell you that it could jeopardise further investment in

that piece of the Springfield Road, so we have to be careful about that. I agree, Minister, that a lot of positive work has been done in recent months by some of your Invest NI officials to try to move forward with that site and get investment in.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question?

Mr P Maskey: Does the Minister agree that investment is key to reducing antisocial behaviour and creating employment in one of our most deprived areas?

Mrs Foster: I would very much welcome investment in that area because that is the end goal for all its representatives. However, the approach to this piece of ground has to be holistic, so that everybody can buy into the solution. As I did in relation to Londonderry, I say to the representatives from that area that I am happy to work with them to find a solution and to ultimately attract inward investment and, indeed, some of our local entrepreneurs into that area to make it a vibrant hub.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her previous answers and for her encouraging remarks about this land and her commitment to the development of it as an industrial/business centre. I remind the Minister of the very successful North City enterprise park, which is on the corner of Duncairn Gardens in north Belfast. It is built on an interface and is a good example of how —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question?

Mr A Maginness: — communities can get together. I cite that as an example that I would like the Minister to point to in encouraging people to invest.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his comments. As I indicated, the end goal is one we all share. Duncairn Gardens is a good example of how we can all end up with a situation in which we have economic development and an area that can be bought into by those who host the parks so that they do not feel alienated from what should be an integral part of the community. It is one that we can work together on with the city council, and I look forward to ongoing discussions on same.

2.45 pm

Fuel Supply: Industrial Action

4. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the possibility of industrial action by fuel drivers in Great Britain, what contingency plans she has put in place to ensure an adequate supply of fuel at the pumps. (AQO 1795/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) is facilitating discussions between employers and the Unite union. Discussions resumed yesterday, Monday 23 April, following rejection by Unite of the deal tabled on Friday 13 April. I welcome both sides' commitment to reaching a negotiated settlement on issues affecting pensions and contracts. However, if a decision is taken to strike, it should have very little impact on fuel supplies in Northern Ireland.

The UK Government's response to the fuel tanker drivers' dispute is co-ordinated by the Cabinet Office. Operational

planning is led by the Department of Energy and Climate Change, with all relevant Departments across the UK, including my Department, involved in contingency planning meetings.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for her response. I am sure that she agrees that it is vital to have an important and positive relationship between government and industry. In that context, have any negotiations taken place in Northern Ireland with regard to the possibility that something unfortunate may happen?

Mrs Foster: As I indicated when our national Government were having difficulties with people queuing for petrol, the position in Northern Ireland is different to that in the rest of the UK. If the situation remains the same, there should be no impact on fuel imports into our four terminals, and there is no indication that fuel distribution will be affected in the Republic of Ireland.

Only one of the companies whose drivers voted for strike action distributes fuel in Northern Ireland, and the number of drivers involved is very small. Therefore, the fuel distribution structure in Northern Ireland is totally different to that which exists in Great Britain and is much more fragmented. There are in excess of 15 companies distributing products to filling station forecourts in Northern Ireland. Many of them are locally owned, and, therefore, the drivers are not members of a union. I do not foresee that we will have any difficulties in Northern Ireland.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for her answer and the reassurance that she believes there will be very little impact on the fuel supply chain in Northern Ireland. However, due to the issue that has arisen in GB, are there any further steps that we can take to ensure consistency of supply, given the outline that the Minister has given to the House, which draws a distinction between Northern Ireland and the rest of GB as regards the impact of the issue?

Mrs Foster: As I have indicated, I genuinely do not believe that it will be an issue for us in Northern Ireland. However, we have undertaken extensive consultation on planning and testing over a number of years with a wide range of stakeholders to agree responses and ensure that they can be implemented if the worst-case scenario were to evolve. The work has also encouraged the emergency services and key functions to have appropriate business continuity plans in place, as well as central arrangements, so that they will continue to have access to fuel during any prolonged disruption. However, as I have indicated, I do not anticipate any such disruption, and I certainly will not be advising people to get out their jerrycans.

Mr McDevitt: I welcome the Minister's assessment that this is unlikely to become an issue at regional level. More broadly, will she inform the House what steps have been taken in order to ensure that the process of fuel pricing at regional level remains and can become even more, fair, open and transparent to us all?

Mrs Foster: The issue is the regulation of fuel prices. As the Member knows, we have a very competitive market. However, we are subject to global fluctuations and that is the difficulty with which we have to deal. That is why we need to ensure that our security of supply remains at the top of our energy agenda. It is one of the four main issues in our strategic energy framework, and I hope that everyone

will remember that the next time we discuss the more contentious issues to do with security of supply.

Invest NI: Audit Office Report

5. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the Audit Office report 'Invest NI – A Performance Review'. (AQO 1796/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I welcome the Audit Office's thorough work, and I consider the report a valuable addition to the research available on how Invest Northern Ireland is helping to address the significant challenges that the Northern Ireland economy is facing. The report clearly vindicates Invest Northern Ireland's approach and improved performance, particularly that in the third corporate plan period. It is helpful to have a balanced and positive assessment of its work. However, I am unable to make any specific comments on the Northern Ireland Audit Office's report, as the matter may come before the Public Accounts Committee for discussion.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for her answer. What is her assessment of the finding in the report that the east of Northern Ireland received 37% more planned FDI investment per capita than the west?

Mrs Foster: I noted the Member's contribution after the report was issued. I have to say that it is very mischievous of him to take the report in that way. I ask him to go and read it again. He will find that it did not highlight specific regional disparity in the spread of jobs; instead, it presented a regional analysis of Invest NI-assisted projects by comparing the east and west of Northern Ireland. It showed — this is the bit that the Member left out of his statement — that the ratio of new FDI jobs promoted for each 10,000 of the population for the east of Northern Ireland was 158 compared with 146 for the west. I do not know where he gets a disparity of over 30% from, but, on a comparable basis, the level of inward investment jobs that were safeguarded was also significantly higher in the west than in the east. If he is going to pick out parts of an Audit Office report, he would do well to look at that report in the round.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister give her reaction to the conclusion of the recent legal challenge to Invest NI's business start-up scheme and indicate whether there were any lessons for her Department from that incident?

Mrs Foster: As part of the legal agreement that has been reached with Enterprise Northern Ireland, it has put out a statement. Both parties indicated that they would say nothing further about the terms of that agreement. However, that seems to have been broken by one side, and I read pieces in periodicals over the weekend giving, I have to say, misleading and mischievous information.

For the record, the case was not abandoned or conceded. I well remember being in the House when Members were urging me to find a solution to the issue, because it was causing difficulties and was dragging on for a long time. It was through consciousness of the fact that it was dragging on for a long period that Invest Northern Ireland and CPD approached ENI to see whether they could come to a settlement. That is exactly what has happened.

I hope that we will now be able to procure a new scheme that will go out next month so that we can deal with the

issue as quickly as possible. Of course, I wish that this had not been the case, but ENI took the case, and, therefore, it had to be defended. I am just pleased that it has now come to an end.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Will the Minister give a commitment that, throughout the performance review, Invest NI will continue to focus its efforts on bringing investment into areas of social need?

Mrs Foster: Part of what it is doing is trying to deal in areas of social disadvantage through its new Boosting Business initiatives. The Member will be aware of those campaigns. They are going well, and I hope that the information on Boosting Business, particularly on the jobs fund and what has been achieved in neighbourhood renewal areas, will be available next week.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. I wish to come back to the issue of Enterprise Northern Ireland and Invest NI. Will the Minister enlighten us a little on the terms of settlement between the two bodies in the action over the procurement? What procurement changes have been made by Invest NI as a result of that action?

Mrs Foster: As part of the legal agreement, Invest NI was asked to contribute to the legal costs. On that basis, the case has now been settled, albeit a little after it could have been settled. It is something that we, along with colleagues in CPD, will look at closely, because we are clear that, if such cases are taken, we need to learn the lessons from them. It is my hope and desire that a new procurement will be available to our own indigenous companies in the very near future. Actually, that procurement ran only to, I think, the end of September next year, and, therefore, we would have had to look for a new procurement next year in any event. We need to get that procurement out as quickly as possible so that we can service those companies.

Economic Growth

6. **Mrs McKeivitt** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what alternative financing methods to help promote economic growth are currently being considered by her Department. (AQO 1797/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI is developing a range of funding initiatives, both equity and debt, that will provide over £100 million to small and medium-sized enterprises in the next six years. These initiatives will be primarily aimed at small and medium-sized enterprises that are or have the potential to be scalable, innovative, entrepreneurial and export-focused. These are the types of businesses that are likely to add most to Northern Ireland's economic growth.

Funding available for individual companies will be from £1,000 up to £2 million in any 12-month period, depending on need. The funds will be managed on Invest NI's behalf by approved fund managers, who will take all investment decisions and manage the funds on a fully commercial basis.

Mrs McKeivitt: I thank the Minister for her reply. What is her view of the role of public-private partnerships in filling investment gaps?

Mrs Foster: We recognise that there was very much a gap in the capital available to small and medium-sized companies.

That is why we, as a Government, felt that we needed to intervene in the market. As I said, the funds will be run on a commercial basis by independent fund managers. They will not be run by Invest Northern Ireland or by government but will be run independently. They will fill a gap, particularly the micro fund, which will, hopefully, go live in July, and the small business loan fund, which will go live next month. I hope that they will make a difference to companies, especially those that want to expand but cannot currently do so because of the difficulties that they have with their banks.

Mr I McCrea: I commend the Minister on her efforts to ensure that her Department and Invest NI do whatever they can to promote economic growth. Will the Minister update the House on any meetings or discussions that she is holding with the banks to ensure that they continue to provide much-needed help to businesses?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. He is right to put the focus again on our local banking sector. Obviously, a stable and competitive banking sector that meets the needs of not only businesses but individuals is vital to the economic recovery of Northern Ireland. Although we have no statutory control of the banking sector, I have met representatives of the main banks in Northern Ireland again to emphasise the importance of supporting business growth in Northern Ireland. Most recently, on 5 March, I met the new chief executive officer of Danske Bank, which owns Northern Bank, and I tried to underline to him the need for Northern Bank to be an open bank, to work with government and to try to deal with the specific circumstances of Northern Ireland. We will keep doing that, but it is right for the House at ministerial level, at Committee level and on the Floor to keep the focus on the banks to ensure that they are as open as possible.

3.00 pm

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given the potential of credit unions in helping to promote economic growth and the recent constraints imposed on them by the FSA, will the Minister ensure that any legislation coming through the Assembly in relation to credit unions gives them room to develop social investment, particularly in areas of deprivation and need?

Mrs Foster: The Member is right to point out the potential of credit unions. Now that they are FSA-regulated, it is my hope that they will be given more scope to do that. She will probably be aware that the big society capital initiative, launched earlier this month, will be available to the whole of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland; that was a very significant announcement. It will help to drive and develop a more sustainable social economy sector. It is my hope that we will be able to get our share of that money in Northern Ireland. The social economy sector should look to that as well as, of course, other mechanisms.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I ask that Members take their ease for a few minutes while we reorganise the desk.

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

Private Members' Business

Fuel Duty

Debate resumed on amendment No 1 to motion:

That this Assembly condemns the forthcoming 3p rise in the cost of fuel; notes that our people pay some of the highest fuel costs in Europe; and calls on the Executive to start negotiations with the British Government regarding the devolution of powers on fuel duty. — [Mr McKay.]

Which amendment was:

Leave out all after "Europe;" and insert

"and calls on Her Majesty's Government to halt their planned fuel duty increase and, due to Northern Ireland's periphery within the United Kingdom, to devise and implement a scheme for Northern Ireland similar to the rural fuel duty relief scheme which was recently introduced for the Inner and Outer Hebrides, the Northern Isles, the Islands of the Clyde and the Isles of Scilly." — [Mr Hamilton.]

Mrs Overend: I beg to move amendment No 2: Leave out all after "Europe;" and insert

"recognises the potentially significant cost to the block grant of devolving fuel duty; and calls on the Executive to lobby Her Majesty's Government to take action to address high fuel prices in Northern Ireland."

I thank the Members who tabled today's motion, as it gives the House a good opportunity to debate what is a very important and topical issue. However, at the outset, I will say that the Ulster Unionist Party will not be supporting the motion as tabled by Sinn Féin; instead, we propose amendment No 2, which recognises the significant cost of devolving fuel duty and calls on Her Majesty's Government to take action to address high fuel prices in Northern Ireland.

The current price of fuel in Northern Ireland is a particular worry for individuals and businesses right across the Province. The latest fuel price report from the AA, produced as recently as last Friday, stated that the average UK petrol price has risen to a new high of 142.48p a litre. Although that is concerning in itself, the fact is that prices in Northern Ireland are even higher, with motorists here paying about 1.5p more than the national average. The recent price rise is, of course, linked to panic buying at forecourts across the mainland last month. As an aside, I am concerned that the Minister affirmed during Question Time that the Department has no contingency plan in place should a similar scenario occur in Northern Ireland.

It is not just petrol prices that are high. Aside from south-east England, Northern Ireland also has the highest diesel prices, at 148.2p a litre, which is also above the national average. It is not just within the United Kingdom that Northern Ireland's fuel prices are disproportionately high; they are also high compared with those in the rest of Europe. Given that the UK has the seventh highest petrol prices in Europe and the second highest diesel prices,

Northern Ireland has among the highest prices in the whole of Europe, as the motion suggests.

The statistics give us a sense of the seriousness of the situation we are facing. Therefore, the proposed increase of 3p in August will worsen what is already a bad situation. At the outset I mentioned the particular worry that that brings for individuals and businesses, at a time when many families are already finding it hard to get by. It is becoming increasingly difficult to afford to run a car, and the cost of fuel in general accounts for a major part of a household's expenditure.

As regards businesses, fuel prices are driving up transport and haulage costs, and our private sector businesses are suffering as a result. The uncertainty surrounding prices also makes it hard for businesses to plan for the future. I accept that the volatile price of oil is not something that can be cured by the House or in Westminster. However, high fuel prices are obviously detrimental to the Executive's aim of rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy and ending our well-publicised over-reliance on the public sector.

We must also take particular account of the fact that rural areas suffer more. I know that only too well from my own constituency of Mid Ulster, where I hear weekly from local businesses and people who find it difficult to cope with fuel prices at their current level. As with other issues, such as youth unemployment, it is an unfortunate fact that rural areas are often hit harder. Due to the increased transport costs that are associated with being so dependent on cars to travel, the price of fuel has a major effect on those who live and trade in rural communities. Indeed, the DUP amendment highlights the rural fuel duty relief that is provided in Scotland for exactly those reasons.

The issue of fuel laundering should also be touched on in the debate. We have a particular problem in some areas of Northern Ireland. Fuel laundering undoubtedly plays a part in driving up the price of fuel. I know that that is an issue for the Minister of Justice and the PSNI. Although I would never condone any criminal activity, high fuel prices lead to more fuel laundering, which, in turn, drives prices up.

We have debated fuel fraud in the House previously. We are all aware of the extent of that problem. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) estimated that, in 2009-2010, the revenue that was lost to fuel fraud was in the region of £70 million. As well as that, convictions for that particular crime are relatively low. Performance statistics that HMRC and the Minister of Justice provided show that between 2001 and 2009 there were only 47 prosecutions for fuel fraud in Northern Ireland. We must work to alleviate the factors that lead to fuel fraud. That will have a positive effect on fuel prices.

In the light of what I said, the Ulster Unionist Party has no problem with the part of the Sinn Féin motion that sets out that fuel prices in Northern Ireland are high. We also have no issue with condemning the 3p rise —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Overend: I will in a wee second.

We also have no problem with condemning the 3p rise in the cost of fuel that was outlined in the recent Budget that the Chancellor brought forward. Indeed, my colleague Danny

Kennedy spoke out against that increase when the Budget was announced. We cannot, however, support the start of negotiations to devolve fuel duty. That would come at a significant cost to the block grant. In February this year, the Finance Minister outlined that the fuel duty that is collected in Northern Ireland amounts to around £900 million per annum. As my colleague Leslie Cree will outline in more detail when he speaks, we are already working to devolve corporation tax to Northern Ireland. The cost of devolving both would have significant effects on funding for other areas, such as health and education.

Does the Member still want me to give way?

Mr A Maginness: Yes, indeed. I am grateful to the Member for giving way. One reason that fuel fraud exists is the differential in fuel prices, particularly for diesel, between the North and the South. Does the Member agree that one way to address that would be to try to harmonise duty on diesel, and, indeed, petrol, between the North and the South so that that would at least act as a disincentive to those who launder fuel?

Mrs Overend: I thank the Member for his comments. Although I am not saying that fuel duty powers should be devolved, I think that the Government at Westminster need to look at the different areas in the United Kingdom.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member accept that, if that movement occurred, difficulties could arise with fuel laundering and smuggling between Northern Ireland and the UK? The problem of dye being stripped from diesel would remain. That is a major problem in which fraudsters are involved. Undoubtedly, if the Republic were to increase its fuel prices in line with those of the UK, that would also get rid of the other issue.

Mrs Overend: That is a very good point. Thank you very much, Roy.

The Ulster Unionist Party considers the SDLP amendment to be unrealistic, because it seeks to set up a commission with a view to devolving all fiscal powers to Northern Ireland. I want to make two points on that. First, the last thing that we need is another commission. We should seek to deliver efficiencies by rationalising existing commissions and quangos. My party has committed to bringing those efficiencies into government. Secondly, cost is, again, an overriding factor. I will be interested to hear how the SDLP proposes that its amendment will work to Northern Ireland's economic advantage.

My party believes that our amendment is pragmatic. It addresses specifically the main issue that we have with the Sinn Féin motion.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Overend: I think that I will just keep moving on. Thank you.

We believe that our amendment is pragmatic and that it addresses specifically the main issue that we have with the Sinn Féin motion, which is the huge cost that the devolution of fuel duty and subsequent lowering of tax would have on the block grant. Our Executive must lobby Her Majesty's Government to bring about an equitable resolution for the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr D Bradley: I beg to move amendment No 3: Leave out all after "regarding the" and insert

"establishment of a commission to assess the devolution of further fiscal powers, such as fuel duty, which would enable the Assembly to serve the people of Northern Ireland better."

Éirím le leasú uimhir a trí a mholadh. Before I continue, I will respond to some of the points made by Mrs Overend. She suggested that we were proposing the establishment of a quango. A commission is not a quango; it exists for a short period to deal with one particular issue, as was the case with the Calman commission in Scotland.

The SDLP has been highlighting the issue of high fuel costs for a long time at Westminster. I pay tribute to the work done there by my colleague Margaret Ritchie, the MP for South Down, who has been campaigning long and hard on this subject. The issue of fuel costs should not be seen in isolation, but should be viewed as part of a process of rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy. Short-term action may be useful in staving off the immediate effect of a particular escalation, but it is much better to look at things in a more holistic and strategic way to obtain a wider set of levers that would give us more control and help us to shape our own economic future.

We all agree that we have few enough tools in our economic toolkit and that we need more, so I believe that we should seek them. The original motion confines us to seeking one particular lever. Amendment No 1 confines us to a single scheme, and amendment No 2 does not even go that distance; it is all too vague in its import. The SDLP amendment does not preclude short-term action, but it places the issue in the wider, more strategic context of rebalancing the economy around this issue and others, which might include landfill tax, vehicle tax, enterprise zones, Crown Estate assets and winter fuel payments. That is not an exhaustive list. That is why I ask the House to take a wider view and support the SDLP amendment.

There has always been some controversy in the House when tax-varying powers are mentioned. The issue of cost obviously comes to the fore, and the question is whether the acquisition of a certain power would be a cost or a benefit to Northern Ireland. Indeed, many of these issues are complicated, and, in some cases, it is difficult to answer with accuracy, as was found with corporation tax. People are understandably wary that costs may outweigh the benefits, but rather than constantly reverting automatically to the default position, I believe that we should seek to explore what may be available to us on a cost-benefit basis.

I was going to say that the Minister of Finance and Personnel will, no doubt, rise to his feet, do a merry dance and berate us, but he is not in his seat today. We have the heir apparent here, although his succession is not always that apparent. In any case, on the question of the transfer of corporation tax powers, we have seen the wide variance in the estimates of costs and benefits between the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and the Treasury. Although work is ongoing on reconciling these estimates, the variance illustrates some of the difficulties involved. I congratulate the Minister on taking up the SDLP's suggestion to bring in external experts to assist DFP in its

negotiations with the Treasury, and I am glad to hear that progress is being made.

As I said, rather than treat each potential tax-varying issue singly, the SDLP believes that we should look at the situation in the round through an inquiry into all the possibilities open to us and the potential impact of each. The issue of fuel duty is most pressing at the moment, and I am not suggesting for one minute that it should be kicked into touch.

Recently, public transport fares have increased, and we hear today that Translink is under huge financial pressure —

3.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr D Bradley: — largely due to —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Sorry, you have 10 minutes.

Mr D Bradley: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. Those financial pressures on Translink are largely due to escalating fuels costs. As we have heard, petrol prices have reached astronomical proportions, with prices as high as 144p a litre being reported. We are now said to have the sixth highest price in the world, higher than anywhere else on these islands or in Europe. It is estimated that it now costs over £70 to fill the average family car tank, and, as the Minister and Members know, that is not an insignificant cost for the vast majority of people at a time when they are already suffering, with welfare reforms coming down the line and the cost of motor insurance being much higher here than in other areas. This is a particular problem in rural areas compared with other areas.

The average family sends around £700 a year to the Treasury just to cover fuel duty. The high cost of fuel is particularly problematic for the poorest in society, for whom such an amount represents a significant portion of income and for whom the use of the car is most important for their remaining economically active. There is not only a discrepancy between regions but within them, with rural areas here suffering particularly high prices.

As I said, we cannot separate this problem from the issue of investment in public transport services. Historically, we have received the lowest spend per capita on transport infrastructure, leaving the car as king and often the only viable choice.

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for giving way. He rightly says that families are struggling in the current economic climate, but he offers up devolving fuel duty as some sort of panacea for all these problems. Will he not accept that, if we are to get fuel duty devolved to the Assembly, there will be a significant cost to the Executive and that that means less spend for the very things that he has just laid out, such as public transport?

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Member for his intervention. I am afraid that he is wrong in insinuating that I am offering a reduction in fuel duty as a panacea. I do not think that I have said that anywhere in my speech. What I have said is that we should set up a commission to examine all the possible levers available to us and to examine them on a cost-benefit basis. That is exactly what I have said, and I do

not think that that is suggesting that one lever rather than another is a panacea.

To get back to the transport issue, people have no option but to get into their cars. Those who are priced out of the market by high fuel prices are often left economically and socially isolated. Indeed, there seems to be little joined-up thinking on a North/South basis regarding the fuel duty regime to avoid striking disparities, particularly around the border. This problem distorts the local market for fuel and leaves local retailers and consumers at a marked disadvantage. As other Members have said, it also encourages fuel smuggling and fuel laundering.

These problems are faced not only by people and by families but our businesses. As we know, oil is the blood that drives the heart of industry and commerce, and, when oil prices are high, costs soar, which weakens competitiveness and, in turn, threatens jobs. We hear the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and Treasury Ministers talk about rebalancing and growing the Northern Ireland economy. This seems to be rhetoric in search of a policy at the minute. One of the main things holding back business growth in Northern Ireland is the punitive price of fuel. Action here would be an ideal way for the Treasury to demonstrate its commitment to growing the Northern Ireland economy.

In conclusion, short-term action is useful, but it will only really be a stopgap and will not address the underlying issues in our economy. That is why I ask the House to support a holistic and strategic approach to our problems and to do so by supporting the SDLP amendment.

Mr Lunn: I thank Mr McKay and his colleagues for bringing the motion to the House today, even though we will not support it. It has given us an opportunity to discuss the matter at least.

I remember not so long ago when people were fearful of the £5 gallon. I am going back to old money here. For the record, at the moment, based on a price of £1.50 a litre, a gallon of diesel would cost just under £7. That is where we are with this at the moment. It is a serious situation. Somebody said that £70 is an average fill for a car. I do not drive a very big car, but I can get more into it than that at the moment.

I confirm that my party will oppose the motion, and I acknowledge Mr McKay's belief that a 5p reduction could be sufficiently beneficial to the Northern Ireland economy to make the measure cost-effective. However, I do not accept that that is the case. Mr Hamilton said earlier that it could cost close to £100 million to test such a measure. It is not feasible to do that. The whole principle of the devolution of tax-varying powers to the Northern Ireland Executive has been the subject of much discussion, principally around corporation tax. A little bit of time has been spent on air passenger duty, and, probably because of the relatively small amount involved in one long-haul connection, that has been able to be sorted out and has been solved fairly quickly. However, when we start to talk about serious money, as evidenced in the argument on corporation tax, it becomes much more difficult, and the length of time that that is taking, because the stakes are so high and the consequences of getting it wrong are so serious, is an indication of how difficult it would be to undertake the same exercise on fuel duty.

Amendment No 3, the SDLP's amendment, makes more sense to us, and we could support the call for a commission to assess the viability of the devolution of fiscal powers in general across the board. Indeed, if we get to the point of voting on that amendment, we will support it. However, that suggestion is perhaps aimed at the longer term, and it does not address the immediate, serious problem that the high cost of fuel is now having a noticeable effect on the lives of people in Northern Ireland.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: OK.

Mr D Bradley: The Member said that the SDLP amendment does not address the immediate problem, but neither does it preclude action on the immediate problem. I made that point several times during my speech.

Mr Lunn: Mr Bradley did indeed make that point, but I am going on what the amendment says, not what it might have said. It proposes a commission to look at the problem of the devolution of fiscal powers generally, and we would support that.

All this is now having a noticeable effect on the lives of people in Northern Ireland, through transport costs, commercial activity and day-to-day usage of cars, which we rely on here, and public transport.

Amendment No 2, tabled by the Ulster Unionists, is more immediate. Indeed, the amendments seem to get more sensible and agreeable the closer we get to the top of the page. We agree that the Executive should lobby Her Majesty's Government to take action. Indeed, frankly, I would be very surprised if that has not already happened, but I am not in a position to tell.

The preferred amendment to us is the DUP one, which points to the extension of a scheme that is already in place for reasons that could, at a stretch, be justified in Northern Ireland. It happens to give the same concession of 5p a litre. The peripherality — lovely word — and the rural nature of much of Northern Ireland are valid reasons for special relief, and I hope that the Assembly will vote amendment No 1 through and that the Westminster Government will take it seriously.

Mr McKay: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: I am getting a bit tight here, thanks.

At Westminster, Margaret Ritchie is not the only one who has been pursuing the matter. Naomi Long, in her response to the Budget, also registered her dissatisfaction that no recognition was given to higher fuel costs over here and to our greater dependence on the private car, which exacerbates the problem.

As I said at the start, we are in a new area here. The £1.50 litre has arrived, and it will not stop there. The cost of crude oil will continue to rise. That leaves the only significant variable in that equation as the amount that the Exchequer takes for each litre and gallon of fuel that is used. The only way to make a significant and immediate difference is to get the Exchequer to take a smaller take, to recognise the particular problems that we have over here and, in the terms of the DUP amendment, to make us a special case once again. At least there is a precedent for it. The islands off the

Scottish coast or on the Clyde might be pretty small, but the situation is the same. It costs more to produce the fuel and bring it to the pump in those places, just as it does here, particularly in our rural areas.

I hope that the House will support the DUP amendment on this occasion. If it does not, we will support either of the other two amendments, but not the motion.

Mr Irwin: I welcome the opportunity to comment in this debate on a growing issue for everyone in Northern Ireland. The price of fuel in Northern Ireland continues to rise and to put a heavy strain on not only drivers but our businesses and industries that rely heavily on transport. A report from the AA this week states that it costs more to fill up a car with fuel than the average two-child family spends on groceries in a week. That is a startling reality, and it shows just how serious the situation is getting. The amendment set out by my colleagues focuses attention on what is within the powers of Westminster as regards fuel duty and draws attention to the relief scheme operating in more rural areas of the UK. It would be excellent to see a similar scheme in operation here in Northern Ireland, given the significant price differences that exist here.

As someone who comes from a farming and rural background and who represents a constituency that is largely rural, I can certainly say that travel and transport costs are significant across all sectors. Many who live in rural areas and travel to work are under enormous pressure in terms of fuel costs, and we all know that driving for miles on rural roads requires a greater amount of fuel than driving on motorways or A-class roads. Many of my constituents drive to larger towns and then opt to use public transport to travel to work because they feel that that saves money and avoids serious wear and tear on their vehicles. However, after Minister Kennedy's announcement last week, we now have the added expense of higher public transport costs and higher car parking costs for those who choose to use public transport. It is quickly becoming a no-win situation for commuters.

Turning to the farming industry, and speaking as somebody who is involved in the industry, I know that fuel prices are becoming a massive issue for the industry in general. Fuel price rises affect everyone involved in the agricultural sector, from the farm gate to the supermarket shelf, and it is staggering just how much of an impact fuel costs have on margins within the industry. Farmers and the wider agricultural industry have deep concerns that, as we head into harvest season this year, fuel prices will be at a record high, with no signs of stability or reduction. In the harvest season, as you know, farmers have lots of heavy machinery out in the fields and on the roads, and it is staggering just how much fuel that work uses. The costs must be met upfront by the farmer.

Stiff competition among the major food retailers and large supermarkets mean that those rising fuel costs cannot simply be offset by asking for more for the product, as we know that the farmer has no control over the pricing. The farmer is left to pick up the tab for any rise in fuel and production costs.

Another sector that feels every penny rise acutely is the haulage industry. Only a few weeks ago, a well known haulier in the Newry and Armagh constituency had to close its doors after 40 years in the business. That came as a great shock

to the workers and the industry generally. The high cost of fuel is the major issue facing our hauliers at this time, and it is getting more and more difficult to make haulage pay. Competition is fierce in the industry, and operators really have their backs against the wall in trying to find work and keep contracts. It is now more important than ever to ensure that some meaningful solution is found to help offset the mounting cost of motoring and transportation within Northern Ireland.

I fully support the Assembly in making approaches to Westminster to discuss the matter and to work towards ensuring that Northern Ireland is no longer burdened with such significant cost differences. I support the amendment in the name of my party colleagues.

3.30 pm

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I am a bit disconcerted that we will not have a ministerial response to today's debate. I was here from the outset of the debate, and I am not sure whether we received an explanation of why the Minister of Finance has chosen not to attend. I hope that it is something that the Speaker can address. A debate on fiscal powers in the Assembly, with all the participants and the amendments, is an indicator of the interest in the issue. The fact that the Minister who has responsibility for some of those fiscal powers is not here to respond on behalf of the Executive undermines and undervalues the debate somewhat. I hope that an explanation of why we did not manage to secure a ministerial response to today's debate will come through the Speaker's office.

The debate and the amendments show the level of interest that there is in the issue of fuel duty and costs. Even though there are differences in the debate, there is a broad range of acceptance of the nature of the problems that we confront in relation to fuel duties. The spiralling costs have put us at the top of the European leader board when it comes to fuel prices. There is a general condemnation — certainly a lack of acceptance — of the fact that the British Government intend to put another 3p on the price of fuel later this year. Even Mrs Overend, on behalf of the UUP, accepted that these issues and the rising cost of fuel are damaging business and the rural way of life and are making it difficult even for the Executive to achieve Programme for Government targets in relation to rebalancing the economy. It has a serious impact right across our economy. The question is what to do about it, and that is where the disagreement arises.

I am disappointed with a number of amendments. The DUP's argument appears to be that we could have the power among a range of other fiscal levers that we could balance against one another and decide how to deploy in the interests of our economy. However, its preference is simply to lobby the Treasury, not to take the power on behalf of the people who elect us and hold us accountable. Mr Hamilton, speaking to his amendment, was not optimistic about the outcome of any such lobbying. The DUP amendment suggests that we should deploy this on the basis of a scheme given to the islands. When people talked about going for the same reduction in air passenger duty as applies to the Highlands and islands, the Department of Finance and Personnel accepted that that was not possible; Treasury had ruled that out. However, Mr Hamilton's

amendment seems to send us down the same route. I am not surprised that he is not optimistic about the outcome of any such argument to the Treasury, given that the previous one about air passenger duty, according to DFP, failed. I will give way.

Mr Hamilton: I will give the Member the opportunity to answer the question that his colleague to his left abjectly failed to answer during the debate. The Member has just said that we would take a range of measures and balance them against one another. What other taxes would the Member wish to devolve to the Northern Ireland Assembly, and, more importantly, which ones would he want to put up to achieve the balance that he mentioned?

Mr Murphy: My party position has always been quite clear: we wish to devolve the entire range of fiscal measures to the Assembly.

Mr Hamilton: What will you put up?

Mr Murphy: I am happy to put up wealth taxes and introduce a range of duties that would balance these off. The logic of the DUP defies the logic of its approach to corporation tax, where it can envisage a cost to the block grant that will have a greater economic benefit but only on that issue alone. If that logic applies to corporation tax, surely it should apply to a range of other fiscal measures, so that we could balance the benefits to the economy and the benefits in revenue to the Executive against the cost of deploying the measures. We have rates and other smaller fiscal measures available to the Assembly, and we decide how to deploy those as we see fit.

The UUP amendment —

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Murphy: I am sorry; I am running short of time. The UUP amendment proposes less than that: simply knock on the door and hope for the best. Our MPs who sit in Westminster say that they are lobbying hard on the issue, but they actually produce very little.

The SDLP amendment is interesting, and whatever means we can deploy to look at the full range of fiscal powers that are available would be useful. It is somewhat surprising that the SDLP has decided to attach that argument as an amendment to this motion. Perhaps it should have put forward the idea of establishing a commission to look at the broad range of the issues when we were dealing with the Programme for Government or debating rebalancing the economy, rather than tagging it on as an amendment to a single issue like fuel duty. Nonetheless, I think that the idea is worthy of support and that we should find ways and means of looking at the broad range of fiscal powers.

Other than that, Members are content to be a glorified county council, simply administrating whatever moneys are given to us with all the strictures that are applied by the Treasury. Do we not want to deploy the full range of powers available to us in the interests of the people to whom we are accountable, whom we represent and who come to us to provide some sort of difference to them in the issues and struggles that they face in their everyday life? The answer from the opposite side of the Chamber appears to be "Don't call us, call the Treasury, and we will do our best."

Mr D McIlveen: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. It is clear from the various contributions that there is a great deal of disagreement on how we approach the issue. However, it is important that we look at the issues on which we are agreed, as there are some issues that unite the House. We all agree that fuel in Northern Ireland is too expensive. In February, during a debate in Westminster, my colleague Ian Paisley Junior said:

"the little piece of water between the mainland and Northern Ireland ... is the most expensive stretch of water in these islands".

There is a lot in that.

We also agree that businesses that rely on fuel are being put under severe pressure. One of my good friends has a medium-sized business, and it costs him £80,000 a month just to keep his vehicles on the road. That is not sustainable. We also accept that the price of fuel causes a lot of pressure for individuals and families, and we have seen a 20% rise at the fuel pump over the past few years. We are agreed that a further 3% rise on top of what we have had to endure is a bad thing. We can all agree on those issues.

What we cannot agree on, however, is how we will get there. Whether we like it or not or deny it or not, when we devolve fiscal powers to the Assembly, it costs us money. My accountant has a saying, and, when he says it to me, it usually does not mean good news. It is "You can't saw sawdust". We should think about that. That is exactly where we are when it comes to the block grant that we receive from the Treasury.

Ms J McCann: Does the Member agree that, although there has been some work done on the cost of the transfer of corporation tax, there has not been any work done on other taxation powers being devolved to the Assembly? As no figures have been given, we do not know what the cost benefit will be.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Member for her intervention. Mr Hamilton dealt with that point in his contribution. I will not go over it again, but exact costs have been calculated and attributed. I encourage the Member to read the Hansard report when it is available. I will also deal with corporation tax in a moment.

Again, I ask the Members who tabled the motion where the money will come from. I am sure that there will be another contribution from a Sinn Féin Member, and I ask that Member to please give us the answer. Sinn Féin has Ministers who, I am sure, will be willing to step up to the mark and surrender the money to pay for it. Do we take it out of Agriculture, DCAL or Education? It has to come from somewhere.

Mr Ross: Does the Member share my concern that not only has Sinn Féin not said where the money will come from but, in her intervention, the Sinn Féin Member from West Belfast did not even know how much it would cost? Is that not the height of irresponsibility? Sinn Féin has tabled a motion, and its Members do not know how much it will cost us.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I will let Members from Sinn Féin defend themselves.

The Member for North Antrim who tabled the motion asked why we could not treat fuel duty in the same way as corporation tax. The very simple answer is that they are two completely different types of taxation. When we try to sell Northern Ireland plc to companies around the world, I admit that we can demonstrate that our education system and skill set are much superior to those in the Republic of Ireland, but we cannot compete with a 10% lower tax rate. There is no alternative for us when we go to sell Northern Ireland plc around the world but to bring in something to incentivise companies to invest in Northern Ireland. That means that there is no alternative other than this issue of corporation tax. That is why we are fighting so hard to get it. Incidentally, there has been broad support for that, apart from, I think, one Member.

Fuel duty is different. When we speak out against something, we are always asked what the alternative is. We have presented the alternative here in black and white. There is a system in place —

Mr McKay: Will the Member give way?

Mr D McIlveen: I am running out of time. There is a system in place. It is regarded as being generally successful in the other parts of this island. That alternative is there, and we can draw on that. It is not a matter of just knocking on the door and hoping for the best, as was insinuated. This is something that happens in other parts of the United Kingdom, so why can it not happen here? It is a very strong and forceful argument that we can make.

Our amendment is fair. We are asking for something that can be delivered. Although what is asked for in the original motion might be worth considering if we lived in an ideal world with infinite resources, we do not live in such a world. We have to accept that the motion is unrealistic. Therefore, I will oppose it but, of course, support our amendment.

Mr Cree: Many Members have outlined the differentials in fuel prices between Northern Ireland and the rest of Europe. I will resist the temptation to rehearse those figures. Suffice it to say it is clear that fuel prices in Northern Ireland are higher, much higher in some circumstances, than in many countries in the rest of Europe. The figures are clear in that respect. With growing levels of fuel, pensioner and child poverty, it is certainly not an ideal scenario for Northern Ireland to be in. High fuel prices are also bad for business as they push up costs. That is counterproductive for our economy, which is, of course, the Executive's number one priority.

I want to deal in some detail with the issue of devolving fuel duty to Northern Ireland, which is the proposal put to us by Sinn Féin. First, we must consider the cost of such a move in line with the Azores ruling. The Azores ruling by the European Court of Justice means that regional differences in direct taxation must satisfy fiscal autonomy. That means that Northern Ireland's block grant would have to be adjusted to reflect the cost of a reduction in fuel duty. We must ask whether Northern Ireland would be best served by a reduction of the block grant in this scenario.

Secondly, we must look at the cost of administering that tax. I do not think that has been referred to today. Currently, Westminster bears all the costs of the collection and administration of that tax, given that it is an excepted matter. If we were to devolve that tax, the Executive would

have to foot that bill. Has Sinn Féin got a figure for what that cost would be? Probably not.

Ms J McCann: Going back to 2008, does the Member remember the huge hike in electricity and gas prices? Just that increase cost £40 million. That £40 million over a short time went directly into the British Treasury instead of going into the Executive here. Does the Member not think that it would have been better going into the Executive so they could have put that money back into services that were needed here?

Mr Cree: I thank the Member for that interjection, but the money did not go to the Treasury.

Thirdly, it is important that we are able to plan our public expenditure in a strategic, long-term manner. The income generated from fuel duty is not constant from one year to the next. Therefore, it is different from the block grant, which has been outlined over the four-year cycle, which we are currently in, and allows us to plan accordingly.

We are, of course, in the process of working towards the devolution of corporation tax to Northern Ireland, and many Members referred to that. The joint ministerial working group on rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy is considering the cost to the block grant, and estimations so far range from £225 million to £400 million. Corporation tax is an issue that the Ulster Unionist Party has lobbied extensively on. We support its devolution, as we are convinced of the economic benefits it can bring to a growing private sector. However, we do not support it as a basis for opening the floodgates to the devolution of all fiscal powers, such as fuel duty, as that simply does not make economic sense. The cost to our block grant would be too severe to take the measures in the motion forward, and it is for that same reason that we have argued that the devolution of corporation tax powers should be phased in as foreign direct investment increases and our gross value added also increases. That is the big difference. The motion departs from that measured approach.

3.45 pm

Lastly, it is useful to look at current government policy on fuel duty. The fair fuel stabiliser was announced in the Budget of 2011 and replaced the fuel duty escalator. At the same time, the Chancellor postponed the planned annual inflation-linked RPI part of the duty rise from April 2011 to January 2012 and from April 2012 to August 2012. The fair fuel stabiliser annually increases fuel duty by the rate of the retail price index when the price of oil is above a certain trigger level. That trigger level is \$75, which is approximately £45 according to OBR estimates. Should the price of oil be below the level of that trigger, the annual increase in fuel duty will be by the rate of RPI plus 1p per litre. The decrease in fuel duty, at times when oil is above the trigger level, is to be funded by higher taxation on the profits of the oil and gas companies. By contrast, the fuel duty escalator annually increased fuel duty by RPI plus 1p per litre, irrespective of the price of oil. Therefore, the coalition Government have made some attempt to deal with the issue. However, my party contends that they have not gone far enough. It is for that reason that I support my party's amendment.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am glad of the opportunity to speak in the debate. I apologise for missing the beginning.

As many people have already said, maybe the one thing that we will agree on today is that soaring fuel prices are causing greater financial difficulties to families. That is the important issue that we need to debate. The average cost of petrol is approximately 143.9p per litre, and the average cost of diesel is 148.2p per litre. It costs £4.28 more today to fill a petrol car and £6.60 to fill a diesel car than it did this time last year. That is very worrying for families, motorists and businesses.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member accept that reducing the tax will impact on the Northern Ireland block grant? The only thing I have heard her colleagues talk about is Northern Ireland rates. If rates go up, that will affect homeowners and those who rent because landlords will put up rates. Rates were mentioned earlier. How will you plug the £100 million gap created by reducing the price of a litre of fuel by 5p?

Ms J McCann: I will come to taxation in a minute; I have only started. The issue of raising taxes is a red herring that you are throwing out. I go back to my point earlier: £40 million of tax revenue was raised by the electricity and gas hikes in 2008, which happened over a short period, and we did not see a penny of that here.

Mr McKay: The rate we were referring to earlier in the debate was the fuel duty rate. The fact of the matter is that the British Government have responsibility for that, and they have failed entirely to be innovative with that when it comes to our local economy. They are setting rates in the interests of the economy on the island of Britain, not here. If we can be innovative and take into account the fact that there are two rates on this island, maybe we can reduce the rate. By doing that, fewer people will go elsewhere on the island for fuel, which means that there will be more revenue for the Executive, which will make ends meet.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Member for his intervention.

Due to the rural nature of the North of Ireland, there is an even worse impact here. Public transport infrastructure here is so underdeveloped that people depend on their cars. Regional variations in prices, particularly at the large supermarkets, mean that people can pay up to 5p more for a litre of petrol or diesel. It is important to remember that this does not just have an effect on your finances; it has an effect on accessing work, going to the shops and getting children to school. It affects all the social aspects of your life. It is very important that, when we speak about it, we remember we are talking about real people's lives. It might not always seem like that when we listen to some of the debate.

A number of reasons are cited for rising fuel prices. One of those is the speculative practices of those playing the stock markets. We also have talk about the unrest in the Arab world and the price of crude oil. However, the main component in the price of petrol and diesel at the pumps is taxation: that is the reality. The rise in VAT from 17.5% to 20% on the pump price has had an even more adverse effect. The British Government's tax take is 58.5p of every pound that you spend on petrol and 56.5p of every pound you spend on diesel. Therefore, it is about 60% of the overall price.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Ms J McCann: I am not giving way any more.

The fact that the British Chancellor is set to raise that again in August by 3p beggars belief. When we talk about tax-varying powers in the Assembly, the red herring is always thrown in about its effect on the block grant. What I really meant earlier is that there has been no clear study of what effect it has on the block grant. We cannot just keep throwing out the line, "What about the adverse effect on the block grant?". We need to reflect the particular needs of the people here in the North of Ireland. Any tax derived from the rising cost of fuel needs to come back to the Executive here to be redistributed to people here and into services here and not, as I said, to the British Treasury. Some Members corrected me on that, but it does go to the British Treasury and into what they feel is important in their place.

We have all been part of the debate on the transfer of corporation tax and the particular circumstances of the North in relation to that. We had the motion in the Assembly and debates on it. We have also talked about other taxes, such as the aggregates levy in the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

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

Ms J McCann: As my colleague said, we need to be responsible legislators here. However, as someone else said, we also need to have all the tools —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Ms J McCann: — at our disposal for the people here and to address the particular circumstances that affect the people in the North of Ireland.

Mr Allister: It has to be common cause that fuel prices are horrendous. All of us in the Chamber know that. If we know that, how much more do those who are in far more straitened circumstances than any Assembly Member will ever be know it? It is truly hurting all our constituents very deeply. It hurts them not just in the price that they pay at the pumps but in the price that they pay at the supermarket till, because everything that they buy is transported. Therefore, it cuts across the entire cost of living with the most horrendous effects. There can be no dispute or doubt about that. The motion identifies that in the first clause but then departs into a land of fantasy and the fantasy economics of Sinn Féin. There is the amazing suggestion, "Oh, we might be a region that is dependent on the United Kingdom for subvention. Oh, we may be a region that raises less in tax than we spend. Nonetheless, give us tax-raising powers on this and everything else that we can think of." They say that without ever bothering to ask the question, "How will we pay for what we spend?".

The inevitable consequence of the lunacy of Sinn Féin's position is that you move as a region that is dependent on subvention to one that collects all its own taxes and raises all its own money and then you wonder where you will get the money to pay for welfare, for the various subventions right across the community and to pay the £16 billion. Where will we find it? The attitude of Sinn Féin is "Never worry", because, in fantasy land, such things are not a bother. In fact, according to the previous Member to speak, they are a red herring. I am afraid that, far from being a red herring, they are a reality. Regions that spend more than they raise should be very careful what they wish for.

Mr McKay: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: I am sure that it will be beneficial.

Mr McKay: In respect of the block grant, fuel duty revenue is apportioned according to share of consumption. Therefore, if fuel duty were devolved, we could make ends meet, and we could be innovative and ensure that revenue actually increases. The Member may not have any ambition to better the lives of the people that we represent, but we need the devolution of fuel duty powers to ensure that prices can be put down.

Mr Allister: I do not know what fuel is required to engage your brain before you engage your mouth, but the Member should reflect on what he has just said, which is that we could raise it. That is exactly the first question that arises. In fantasy land, if fuel taxes were devolved to Northern Ireland, what would you do with them? Would you raise them or reduce them? Would you reduce them to help people? If so, how would you pay for the deficit? That is the question that has been asked a dozen times in the Chamber today and to which there is no answer.

Mr McKay: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: If, on the other hand, he is saying that we are going to look after ourselves somehow, that is a coded way of saying that, in fact, we are going to raise fuel taxes —

Mr McKay: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: — because we want to spend more. Sinn Féin is all about spend; it is a high-spend party. Its attitude is "Let someone else pay. Sponge off someone else, and they will pay".

Mr McKay: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: That is the essential kernel of Sinn Féin economics. What will we do about VAT on fuel duty? Do we want VAT devolved as well? Do we live in a parallel universe where we think that we can have a different VAT rate in this part of the United Kingdom? Is that where we go next?

Sinn Féin has been clear. It wants all tax-raising powers transferred, not because it thinks that it makes economic sense or because there is a compelling financial case for it but because it ticks the boxes of its political agenda that you must cut all ties of whatever nature between London and Belfast because that is part of its paramount agenda. The Member nods in agreement. Whatever the price to the citizens of Northern Ireland, it is Sinn Féin's crazed policy. Fortunately, it is not a policy that I believe will command support today.

There is a little bit of merit in one thing that Sinn Féin has raised today: the parallel that it has drawn between opening a door to tax transfer and corporation tax and saying that, once you have opened the door on that, why not open it on everything. It brings me back to the point that a region that cannot raise all its spend should be careful what it wishes for — including on corporation tax.

4.00 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: May I remind Members not to persist when it is clear that the Member on the Floor does not wish to give way?

I call Mr Alban Maginness to wind on amendment No 3.

Mr A Maginness: It is regrettable that the Minister has not attended the debate. It would have been useful to hear his view and, I suppose, the view of the Executive in relation to the proposition that has been put forward by Sinn Féin. There is a degree of agreement in the Chamber on the horrendous price of fuel which is causing great hardship throughout the community. It is causing hardship not only to families, but to businesses. In fact, it is impeding business in this region. Therefore it is incumbent on the Executive, and on the Minister of Finance in particular, to address the issue openly and to seek innovative ways in which to reduce the pressures that exist.

Mr D McIlveen: Does the Member agree that one factor widely regarded as being responsible for the success in keeping fuel prices largely under control on the mainland is that there is greater competition there in the form of a lot more branded supermarkets than we have here? Does he agree that slightly more liberal planning policy in relation to supermarkets, as well as what he has suggested, may also help to bring the prices down?

Mr A Maginness: It could well do, but I am sure there is some political point behind that intervention. The fact is that you cannot build supermarkets overnight, and we still will not have the sort of keen price competition that exists in England and Wales. Therefore, we have to start from where we are, and we are in a very difficult situation. The pressures are going to increase unless something is done. At the very least, the Westminster Government should not proceed with the 3p rise in the autumn. That should be a demand coming from the Assembly and the Executive.

We need to be innovative about this. A number of ideas have been expressed through the amendments, and each one is meritorious in one respect or another. The reason why we brought our amendment relates to how such taxes should be considered. When you are considering the whole issue of tax, duty and so forth, you should not be doing so on a piecemeal basis. You should examine it on a comprehensive basis. The Calman commission in Scotland dealt with devolution at large. It did not deal only with taxation issues, although it did deal with taxation. We have suggested by way of an analogy that we use a commission such as that to examine the impact of taxation here in Northern Ireland and the implications of transferring some or all taxation powers to the Assembly. If we do that, we will be in a proper context in which to consider whether those powers should be transferred.

Let us say that we had the power in relation to fuel duty, as opposed to VAT, as Mr Allister referred to. Could we not use that innovatively, in terms of a significant reduction, which could, in fact, give us a competitive advantage to other regions? Could we not use it to stimulate business in Northern Ireland quite effectively? I think we should consider that thoughtfully and look at the issue much more seriously than we have before.

There is agreement throughout the Chamber on corporation tax, and I think that that opens up a very significant and proper argument that we should be looking at other forms of taxation and duty. Mr Allister said that this has opened the floodgates. It may not have opened floodgates, but it has opened an opportunity for all of us to consider what the Assembly should be like in the future.

Any transfer that takes place will not take place immediately, but over a number of years. I think that we should now be starting to consider what the fiscal powers of this Assembly should be like in, say, 10 years' time. Let us be imaginative and see how the transfer of those powers could, in fact, help to stimulate, rebuild and develop our economy so that we can exercise real control over our economic future. That is the nature of our amendment to the Sinn Féin motion, which we of course welcome. It is not an unreasonable position.

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

Mr A Maginness: I want to thank the Members who brought the motion forward in the first place for doing so. I hope that they will support the SDLP amendment.

Mr Beggs: The main motion sought to solve the difficulty of the high cost of fuel in Northern Ireland by simply devolving the tax-raising powers on fuel duty. What was not explained, although I did attempt to draw it out, is how that gap in funding would be filled. Clearly, there are European rulings and regulations to indicate that a region, if it is to diversify from other parts of the nation, must stand on its own feet with regard to that form of taxation. If, for instance, we were to reduce the tax on fuel by 5p as has been indicated, it would cost £100 million. Are we going to cut support to the health service or the education service by £100 million? There was no explanation.

The words "rates" and "wealth tax" were mentioned. No mention was made —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: I would like to pursue my comments. If I have some time, I will give way at the end.

No mention was made of what cost would be involved in administering any such systems and developing such additional taxes. It is not a well developed plan at all. There are huge dangers in what is being talked about, with no significant benefits; it is simply moving tax from one part to another, with no economic benefit clearly illustrated. Therefore, there is a problem with the main motion.

Sandra Overend proposed amendment No 2. She highlighted that one practical issue is that, effectively, we, along with other regions of the United Kingdom, including Scotland, Wales and other northern regions, would have to lobby Her Majesty's Government to highlight the difficulties we are experiencing as a result of the high cost of fuel, particularly in rural areas, where that has a big impact. We have to thank the Assembly's research department for its information. It shows that we have some of the highest petrol and diesel costs in the United Kingdom and that the United Kingdom costs are the second highest in Europe. We are suffering significantly due to our rurality, our peripheral position in Europe and the taxation levels that exist. People living in rural areas of Northern Ireland have to use more fuel to travel to town to shop, to work or to go to school.

My colleague Leslie Cree highlighted the issue of administrative costs. Dream up more and more ideas for devolving taxation powers, but bear in mind the taxation costs and the cost of developing very extensive computer systems to run and administer them. You do not get such things for free. He also highlighted the fact that, in those areas where there has been consensus to devolve powers

here, an economic business case has been thought out: for example, air passenger duty for long-haul flights, from which an economic benefit can flow, or, indeed, the potential for revitalising our private sector economy through corporation tax. Were we to eventually get to the stage of that being formally offered, there will be a cost involved. Really, to take anything more on board at this stage could actually rule that out. We cannot overload ourselves. Let us face the fact that we will have a cost to pay to deal with that and to enable our economy to take off. Let us not bring in uncosted, unplanned and uneconomic additional ideas that have been thought up on the back of a fag packet.

In speaking to amendment No 1, Simon Hamilton indicated support for widening the rural fuel duty relief scheme to benefit Northern Ireland. That is another practical solution that could benefit here, and it is something that I can support. We should try for it; there is no harm in trying. He also said that reducing fuel tax in Northern Ireland by 5p would cost £100 million. He and some other Members questioned how that would be funded. We must have a plan for how we will fund it. That issue was highlighted by Trevor Lunn, DUP Members, my Ulster Unionist colleagues and Jim Allister.

Jim Allister, to use his language, spoke about the “fantasy economics” of Sinn Féin, and rightly so. Sinn Féin Members want everything devolved. If you devolve everything, nothing comes, because it is all here. You are almost advocating an independent Northern Ireland in which we would stand now, today, on our own feet and with our own taxation policy. I am sorry, but, as a result of the many years of terrorism, our economy could not do that. At some point, we hope to reach the stage of not being as dependent as we are at present on the rest of the other regions, but we cannot do that today. I ask Sinn Féin Members please to think through the implications of what they are saying. They do indeed have fantasy plans.

The SDLP amendment proposes setting up a commission. We argue that we need to try to do things now. We do not want to wait six months or a year for a commission to report. Let us act now to try to stave off some of the proposed increases already earmarked for petrol prices not only in Northern Ireland but in the rest of the United Kingdom. Let us see whether we can gain some specific benefits for this region, and make our argument. The European Commission has accepted that peripheral regions of Scotland could benefit, so why not try for this part of the United Kingdom?

In conclusion, I ask Members to support the Ulster Unionist amendment and indicate that we can also support the DUP amendment.

Mr Ross: As my colleague stated in proposing our amendment, the problems that high rates of fuel duty are causing people across the Province, and the negative impact that that is having, is an issue on which we have all found agreement. However, trying to find agreement on the method to solve it is something very different.

Members have asked why there is no Executive response to the debate. The clue is probably in the fact that this is a reserved matter. It is perhaps interesting to note that two of the three signatories to the Sinn Féin motion are Members of the House of Commons. Perhaps if they took their seats in the Commons, they could raise these issues in the

appropriate forum. Indeed, as other Members said, other parties have been doing so. Other Members of Parliament have been pushing those ideas.

It is no surprise that Sinn Féin Members want to have more power devolved to the Assembly. Politically, we all understand that they want to pull as many powers as possible away from our national Parliament at Westminster. Therefore, even if we do not agree with it, we understand the rationale. However, when it comes to the economic argument that was put forward, I think that Mr Allister used very kind language when he called it “fantasy politics”, “fantasy economics” and “lunacy”. We could agree on the use of many more derogatory terms.

It makes no sense whatsoever to propose the devolution of fuel duty, and without VAT, the devolution of which would also be required in order to do this properly. Indeed, far from benefiting people in Northern Ireland, it would make things worse. That is why Sinn Féin did not refer specifically to the costs. Even when I asked Mr McKay — after eight minutes of his opening remarks — to tell us the cost and where he would find savings, he failed to do so. Other Members repeatedly asked Sinn Féin the same question during the debate.

Being unionists does not mean that we are opposed to looking at other powers that could be devolved. Indeed, the two examples used were corporation tax, about which discussions with Treasury are ongoing, and air passenger duty, on which we have got a positive result. Those are issues on which we found general agreement in the House. However, the two examples differ greatly from that of fuel duty. For example, a reduction in the rate of corporation tax is about rebalancing the economy by helping to grow the private sector. In the longer term, projections show that we will have a cost benefit from that. Likewise, with air passenger duty, the cost to the Executive is relatively low. The change will affect strategic air routes that are important for our economy and tourism and will be a benefit to Northern Ireland.

The issue that I heard from both nationalist parties is that they are both very keen to get as many taxation powers to the Assembly as possible. At least the SDLP takes a more sensible approach, in that it wants to look at this in more detail before saying that we should devolve the power. Indeed, from listening to some of the recent debates, where the nationalist parties talked about getting taxation powers and lowering taxes, you would almost think that they were now parties of low taxation and small government — big society parties. Of course, we know that that is not the case, because you need to pay for the taxes that you are looking to devolve. That means that you either radically cut public spending in education, health, road building, welfare, or you have to get powers over other taxation — the SDLP's Mr Bradley mentioned this — that inevitably will have to go up to cover the cost of fuel duty, which we want to reduce.

4.15 pm

So, while families are struggling at the moment, the nationalist parties' solution is not to lower taxes and the cost to families but to put up other taxes to compensate, thus hitting families harder.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member agree that, even if Sinn Féin Members perhaps

have ideas in their minds about how this can be paid for, unless they verbalise them, we cannot make an objective decision?

Mr Ross: Absolutely, and the statistics and evidence that we have suggest that it will cost in the region of £1 billion a year. As we heard, a 1p cut will cost between £17.5 million and £18.5 million annually. Getting the 5p cut that Members proposed will cost upwards of £100 million at least. If the price of crude oil rises in the future, as we all predict it will, the cost gets higher and higher. That means that they will either, in tandem, put up other taxes to the same level, which I think that they must inevitably do, or they will cut public spending at the same amount so that we have less and less money over the next number of years to spend on public spending. I do not think that that is viable either.

Those Members proposed a motion, which they think is a good idea, but they have not thought about it. If they have, they do not want to own up to the fact that it is not affordable for Northern Ireland. It is not a sensible motion. It would damage Northern Ireland's economy and would mean that we would have less money to spend on crucial public services. It is economic nonsense.

I ask the House to support the amendment in my name and in that of Mr Hamilton. It is the most realistic and sensible amendment, but I recognise that the others have some merit. However, other Members, including Mr Lunn, said that the DUP amendment is the most sensible. I hope that Members support us today. I also hope that they support us in our attempts, with Her Majesty's Treasury and the Government at Westminster, to ensure that we have a scheme that operates across the United Kingdom, recognises the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland and helps to ensure that people in Northern Ireland are not hit hardest by any increase.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I have listened to the debate. Usually, debates last one hour and 30 minutes, but this has already lasted one hour and 40 minutes. I am due to speak for 10 minutes, if I take that long. We are grateful to you for letting the debate overrun by 20 minutes.

I listened very carefully to each and every one of the other parties in the Assembly discuss the Sinn Féin motion. All sorts of reasons have been given as to why they cannot support it. However, there is a word in our motion that is quite clear. All the parties in the Chamber will tell you that they were all very good at this when it came to the talks. That word is "negotiations". That is the key word. You enter into negotiations with the British Government and then take the best out of that. That is very important. I am sorry that all the other parties missed that. They claim that they are very good at negotiations, but what they tell me and all of us here is that they are afraid of negotiations on the devolution of fuel duty at this stage.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he recognise that there are already European judgements on this? Where negotiations are concerned, costs have to fall on the region that will benefit. What does he say about that?

Mr P Maskey: What I say about that is that our party, as well as the Member's, has an MEP. We will take the negotiations to Europe as well, if that is what we need to do. Do not

be afraid of negotiations, Roy. I think that we have to get involved in them.

We need to consider a lot of issues. The important point is that we talk to people and negotiate the best means. If we do not negotiate, we will have failed all the citizens who put us into the Assembly and other places.

We tabled the motion because many people are suffering. That is the one area of common ground that all parties covered today. Many people in our communities are experiencing hardship because of fuel costs. Families on low incomes are affected, and people travelling to work are affected greatly.

At the weekend, I spoke to a man who challenged me on what we were doing about fuel costs. I told him that we had a motion coming to the Assembly on Tuesday and that I hoped that we could get all-party support for it: obviously, we will not. Every single day, that man has to travel from Belfast to Tyrone, which costs him over £100-odd a week. He is thinking of leaving his employment in Tyrone to try to find an employment opportunity somewhere in Belfast that will help to reduce that cost, because with fuel costs continuing to rise, it is becoming unaffordable for him to travel to work. It will be especially hard when the 3p increase is introduced in August. That will add to his hardship and that of the young family whom he is rearing.

In opening the debate, Daithí McKay stated that we have some of the highest fuel costs, the majority of which are because of the level of taxation. He mentioned that the high price affects many drivers' businesses and that it costs hauliers somewhere in the region of an additional £1,200.

Mr McKay: Does the Member agree that the scheme that the DUP amendment calls for, which is currently in place in the north of Scotland, excludes hauliers? That has been of some local concern. Also, the Highland Council has highlighted the fact that, because the repayment of that 5p a litre is in arrears, it is putting a lot of businesses at risk.

Mr P Maskey: I agree that it is having an adverse effect on many businesses throughout society, probably more so on hauliers, taxi drivers, and so on. That means, as was mentioned earlier, that food costs go up, taxi costs go up, and people cannot travel to and from work, go shopping or carry out their daily business. However, it is also stemming economic growth, which I think would be a major issue if we were able to have proper negotiations with Westminster on fuel duty.

We could look at a wide range of issues, including hauliers. Hopefully, we could create more employment opportunities that would not cost the amounts of money that Simon Hamilton talked about earlier. In proposing the amendment, Simon agreed that we pay far too much for fuel, but he was, unfortunately, unwilling to take control of the issue. He seems to be running scared of devolving powers from Westminster to here. He stated that the cost to us would be £100 million. However, I think that he may be putting some of those costs forward as a scare tactic. I agree that every 1p reduction would cost £17.5 million, but the issue is one of entering into negotiations with the British Government in the hope that we could reduce that cost to make it much more affordable.

With devolved power, we could control our destiny. I am not sure whether it would be possible, but this is about the art of negotiation. Could we go and look at places such as Venezuela, where fuel costs 2p or 3p a litre? This is what it is all about. I do not think that we should be afraid of having these discussions, because we all have a duty —

[Interruption.]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. A number of Members need to switch off.

Mr P Maskey: I appreciate that, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

This is where the conversation needs to be had. We should not be afraid to go around the world to look at where fuel is more cost-effective, as that could be much more beneficial for our citizens in the North. Those are some of the main issues that we have to deal with, and I am not afraid to start tackling them. Other parties may be afraid to do so, but I am not.

Dominic Bradley proposed amendment No 3, and we talked about the SDLP looking at a full range of taxation policies being devolved. In the previous term, Mitchel McLaughlin tabled a motion on the devolution of more fiscal powers to the Assembly. Unfortunately, however, we were unable to get the Assembly to pass that motion. I am glad that some parties are now saying that we need to look at having many more fiscal powers devolved to the North. That may be a step in the right direction.

Trevor Lunn said that he would support a debate on the devolution of powers. That is also to be welcomed. His preferred option is the DUP's amendment. However, again, in my view, he is shirking the responsibility that we as legislators have to take control and govern for ourselves. That is one of the serious issues today.

William Irwin said that he represents a rural area, and he, too, mentioned the cost of fuel for rural people as well as the added cost of public transport, especially given the announcement last week that those costs will increase in the very near future.

There are many issues. Conor Murphy stated that he was disappointed that the Finance and Personnel Minister is not in attendance today. When I asked him a question about the devolution of some fiscal powers from Westminster, he said that, because he is a Unionist, he simply does not want any more powers. I do not think that that is an option; it is not good enough. We need to take control of this. I do not think that even Sammy Wilson's supporters would be happy with that answer either. We need to take the lead. Sinn Féin is very happy to have all powers devolved from Westminster, and we make no excuses about that. We would like to have more control over our own destiny.

David McIlveen said that this is costing some businesses an additional £80,000 a month. So, we agree on many issues but not on a way to deal with them. That is some of the issue. It has a massive cost effect, and we need to take it seriously.

Leslie Cree talked about fuel poverty and child poverty and the cost of fuel adding to that burden. Again, he questioned the benefit of this power being devolved. I believe that it would benefit us, and it is important that we continue with this. Jennifer McCann raised the issue of the hike

in electricity costs and the £40 million that went to the Treasury in taxation. Leslie may be getting confused about where some of that taxation goes. The fact of the matter is that when the price was hiked up, an additional £40 million went to the Treasury. That is a major issue.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr P Maskey: No. I am running out of time. Sorry about that.

Jim Allister stated that the Sinn Féin position was lunacy. Jim just needs to look at himself in the mirror when he looks at loony policies, because I think there would be quite a few of them looking back at him. He did say that we can go and sponge from somewhere else. The fact is that the British Government have been sponging from the people of Ireland for hundreds of years, and it is time for some of that money to be paid back into the system. That is where we are at, and I think that we need to get real about how we look at it. I am certainly not a sponger. Unfortunately, I pay my tax like everybody else, but I pay it to the British Treasury, and I would rather not.

As regards what Alban Maginness said about devolution being done together and not in isolation, why is the SDLP, like all the other parties in the Chamber, supporting the devolution of corporation tax- and air passenger duty-varying powers? That is being done in isolation, not collectively. There are reasons why —

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

Mr P Maskey: Thank you. There are reasons and other issues —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr P Maskey: — the likes of which we should continue to look at to bring forward solutions to suit our people here in the North.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before I put the question on amendment No 1, I advise Members that, if this amendment is made, I will not put the questions on amendment Nos 2 or 3, as the wording to which they relate will have been deleted. I hope that that is clear.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 51; Noes 33

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

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

NOES

Mr Agnew, Ms M Anderson, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Gildernew, Mr G Kelly, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, 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 Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Boylan and Mr Brady.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly condemns the forthcoming 3p rise in the cost of fuel; notes that our people pay some of the highest fuel costs in Europe; and calls on Her Majesty's Government to halt their planned fuel duty increase and, due to Northern Ireland's peripherality within the United Kingdom, to devise and implement a scheme for Northern Ireland similar to the rural fuel duty relief scheme which was recently introduced for the Inner and Outer Hebrides, the Northern Isles, the Islands of the Clyde and the Isles of Scilly.

4.45 pm

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

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Armagh: East and West Link Roads

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes in which to speak, the Minister will have 10 minutes to respond, and, on this occasion, all other Members who wish to speak will have eight minutes.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as freastal ar an díospóireacht seo, agus cuirim fáilte roimh an seans an cheist thábhachtach seo a phlé faoi chathair agus cheantar Ard Mhacha.

I thank the Minister for attending the debate, and I welcome the opportunity to bring this important issue for the people of Armagh city and district to the Chamber. Before I comment on the projects, I welcome the support of other Members from the constituency on the matter. The Minister is well aware of Armagh city and district, and, more important, the constituency of Newry and Armagh. Over the past number of years, he has seen how Newry has grown, and, sometimes, the impression around Armagh city and district is that it may be the poor relation to Newry. It is most welcome that the Minister is from the constituency; that is a bit of a bonus to us. I pay tribute to the Department and the work that is ongoing in Armagh city and district. There are a lot of good road schemes, and I pass on my thanks to the Department.

As a resident of the constituency, I know from driving from Keady at the south end into Armagh city that the traffic is atrocious. Anyone familiar with Armagh city and district will know that the build-up of traffic can be atrocious and frustrating at most times, but especially between 8.00 am and 10.00 am and 4.00 pm and 6.00 pm when people are commuting to and from work and when schools are starting and finishing. Whether one is driving to Armagh from Portadown to the north, from Newry to the east, from Keady and Newtown to the south or, indeed, from Monaghan to the west, or from Dungannon to the north-west, they will find themselves in lines of traffic and frustrated that movement between two points that would normally take a couple of minutes turns into 15 or 20 minutes. That is not helped by the fact that some traffic lights are timed to allow no more than two or three vehicles through. That is the case along Friary Road, especially turning on the Newry Road. Perhaps the Minister will take that into consideration.

Armagh city is in a strategic location. Motorway access can be obtained by travelling north to Portadown, west to Dungannon or east to Newry. It has a main border corridor route with Monaghan. It is a digital corridor, and I hope that, through some infrastructural change, we can utilise that more. Armagh's location has seen it recognised as the main administration centre for the North/South Ministerial Council, the Centre for Cross Border Studies and the

Ulster GAA, which is one of the main employers in the city. Hopefully, through improved infrastructure, we can create more opportunities for other bodies to set up in the city, and I hope that that will bear fruit in the near future. Therefore, Minister, it is important that, although Armagh is not on the primary routes of the M1 and the A1, emphasis must be placed on the quality of the links to those main corridors to maximise the possibility of attracting employment, development, business and trade.

Traditionally, Armagh has been an administration centre with the public sector accounting for a relatively high proportion of its workforce, and whatever retail it has sits within that niche market. The review of public administration and the restructuring of healthcare have led to and will further lead to erosion of jobs. Therefore, the city and district need to be in a position to prove to potential investors and employers that the area should have traffic routes that will not be detrimental to business.

In order to address the issues that I have briefly covered, Armagh City and District Council, Roads Service and the Department for Regional Development (DRD) have recognised and agreed that two major link roads are required for the city. The first, which I, personally, argue is probably the most important project, is what is known as the north and west link. Included in the regional strategic transport plan of 2005, the road will form a semicircular route from the A3 Portadown Road to the A3 Monaghan Road, traversing the Loughgall Road, Moy Road, Cathedral Road and Killylea Road. It is envisaged that there will be access and exits to all the aforementioned.

That out-of-town option was announced as the preferred route by Roads Service in 2008 after a successful lobby by the local community to change the original proposal running through a built-up urban area. The revised route also opens up the possibility of land usage for development alongside the route, be it in business, which has seen interest in recent years, or social development. It would be a major boost and benefit for the city, district and its people. Indeed, I am aware of a major plan with the GAA to develop a centre of excellence on a site at Mullinure if it can get clarification from Roads Service of a slight variation on the route. I hope that the Minister will be able to comment on that today.

The second proposal is related to the linking of the A3 Portadown Road with the A28 Markethill Road, which is otherwise known as the Newry Road. As it stands, the proposed route would traverse the Hamiltonsbawn Road and use the existing Ardmore Road. Some concerns have been raised about that, and whilst the proposal appeared in the 2004 Armagh area plan and a preferred route was announced in March 2007, since then major housing developments have taken place on the Ardmore Road. Many of the mainly young families who acquired properties in Greenfield, Oakridge and Edenvale did so with no knowledge of the proposal to build a major arterial route within metres of their homes. I am not saying, Minister, that it was an issue for the DRD, because some of the estate agents sold off those properties and did not mention the road to some people, especially those who moved into the city in recent years and may not have been aware of it. The road will also impact on the residents of Dobbin Manor, Thornleigh, Jubilee Park and Ardmore estate, and I ask the Minister to review the route as the geography of the area has changed since the initial proposal.

I suggest an alternative route with less impact on residential properties. You could turn off the Hamiltonsbawn Road at the entrance to the industrial estate and proceed to Stockingmans Hill Road, which joins the Edenaveys Road that links directly with the A28 Markethill Road. That is the Newry Road, which, at this moment in time, as the Minister will know, is being upgraded with an overtaking lane, and that suggested route will retain the object of the project without having a detrimental effect on what has now become a heavily populated area.

In conclusion, I believe that both projects are essential, not only to ease traffic congestion in Armagh city, but to enable the city and district to grow and attract employment. I must also mention that it would be very beneficial to tourism. Armagh is not a big retail centre, it is heavily reliant on the tourism product that it has to offer with the two cathedrals, Navan fort and the planetarium, and the two projects would be beneficial to that. The projects would also complement the traffic management system proposed for the Mall, and that would help traffic flow in the city.

I ask the Minister to sign off on it today and to find moneys in his budget to ensure that the projects are carried out as a matter of urgency for the benefit of the people of Armagh city and district.

Mr Irwin: First, this is an issue that has great significance for Armagh city, especially for residents along the proposed routes, as well as businesses that operate in the city and commuters who pass through Armagh twice a day. The proposals for both an east and west link road around the city have been discussed now for some years. As someone who sits on Armagh City and District Council, I can relay to the House that the issue is the subject of ongoing debate.

On a wider point, the council is currently working on a master plan for Armagh to help improve prospects for the city, both socially and economically. That includes improving the road infrastructure in and around the city. Undoubtedly, one of the main concerns expressed by traders in the city is the need to improve footfall around the streets and encourage more visitors to the area. A key part of the master plan is to remove congestion from the key routes that pass through the city and to improve the flow of traffic. It is felt by those involved in trading in the city, as well as by councillors, that improvements to road infrastructure would make Armagh a more easily accessed venue for shopping and doing business. That is certainly our main aim.

With interest extremely high in the master plan, I am aware that Roads Service, under the auspices of Minister Kennedy, has undertaken a gateway review of plans already compiled and the potential for alterations to original proposed routes. We wait with interest to see what his Department's intentions are for the proposed schemes.

I must put on record my concerns, in particular my concern over the east link scheme's proposed routing, and express my disapproval at the proposal to take the new link road past a number of established housing developments. I met residents who had contacted me with concerns about the proposed routing, and councillor colleagues from the SDLP were also at that meeting on behalf of their constituents. The proposal to take the road through a heavily built-up area has rightly sparked concern among residents who live literally on the roadside. I also question the wisdom of

cutting through that particular ground, given that there are more favourable locations further along the route through which to direct the road. That would account for further development and avoid built-up areas.

I am keen to hear the thoughts of the Minister on the east link road proposals and his view of the residents' concerns over the close proximity of the proposed route to existing dwellings. The proposals in their current form require some work, especially those for the east link project. Of course, the important issue for everyone involved is the timescale for the projects. There appears to be no solid timeline in place for either project, and some certainty on proposed commencement targets would be welcomed. I await the Minister's comments with interest.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I dtús báire, ba mhaith liom mo bhfuochas a ghabháil leis an Uasal Ó Baoighealláin as an ábhar seo a thabhairt faoi bhráid an Tionóil. Gabhaim buíochas fosta leis an Aire as a bheith i láthair inár measc anseo.

I thank Mr Boylan for bringing the Adjournment topic to the House today. I am also grateful to the Minister for his attendance. I hope that he will be able to reassure me and my colleagues, as well as the community in Armagh, that the very real concerns around aspects of the proposals will be listened to and addressed.

At the outset, I welcome the proposals for the Armagh east and west link roads. They are much needed and, indeed, long overdue. They are necessary as a result of the various traffic bottlenecks that exist in Armagh, especially at rush hour.

5.00 pm

As a constituency colleague, the Minister will be very much aware of the concerns that were raised about the original proposal for the Armagh west link road. Thankfully, Roads Service has listened to those concerns, and a more acceptable route has been chosen, agreed on and settled. Unfortunately, however, the same cannot be said of the Armagh east link road. That route runs through the very heart of a built-up residential area, and it is very strongly opposed by residents who live in the locality. I understand those concerns; people obviously do not want to lose property or gardens as a result of the proposal. For those people, they are very real concerns. The local residents will have to live with the results of that proposal, if it goes ahead. I sincerely hope that it does not. They have real concerns, and we should address them.

The proposed route of the Armagh east link road was identified some 40 years ago. Roads Service continues to prefer that route despite the fact that the volume of traffic around the city has increased. The volume of traffic that would use that route has also increased since the proposal was first brought forward. In addition, hundreds of houses have been built along the route. When planning our roads infrastructure — or, indeed, any infrastructure — government and Roads Service should plan for the future.

The proposal may, in the opinion of Roads Service, suit the needs today, but will it suit the needs of Armagh in the future? If the proposed route is constructed, the Minister or his successor may find that he or she will receive representations from constituency MLAs or the MP for a road further out the Newry Road. The Minister attended a

meeting with councillors in Armagh about roads issues. My party colleagues Councillors Campbell and O'Hanlon, and the Mayor of Armagh, Mrs Donnelly, asked the Minister to intervene some months back. The Minister tasked officials to meet councillors directly and to try to address the concerns of the local community. However, the councillors tell me that, in the follow-up meetings, which I believe Mr Irwin alluded to earlier, there did not seem to be any attempt to reconsider the route or to allay the concerns of public representatives and the community.

I ask the Minister to consider withdrawing the proposed route of the Armagh east link road and to consider a new route further out the Newry Road, with an entrance perhaps at Edenaveys Industrial Estate. That would allow Armagh to grow for the future. It would allow better access to the industrial lands, help job creation and attract inward investment. In addition, that route would have greater support from the local community and residents.

Will the Minister identify when he expects the Armagh link roads to be completed? I believe that it has always been the view of the community, Roads Service and Armagh City and District Council that the Armagh west link road is the priority scheme and should happen first. I ask the Minister to reassure me, colleagues and the people of Armagh that that is still the case and that he will take time to review the route of the Armagh east link road and work with me and other elected colleagues from all parties to ensure that the most beneficial and acceptable route is constructed. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also welcome the opportunity to make a contribution to the debate. I congratulate my colleague Cathal Boylan on securing it. I am not so sure that I share his view of the recent investment history in Newry and Armagh; the Edenaveys project perhaps points to that.

This is an important debate, as the issue has been ongoing for a number of years. The Minister will be familiar with it, and I am heartened to see that he is here to respond. Both link roads will be of value to Armagh in curbing the traffic congestion that it and many other urban centres face. Given Armagh's strategic location and its crossroads nature, from North to South and east to west, the value of the link roads has been long established and the business case for them has long been made, albeit with some variations in the route itself. I have no desire to repeat the comments made on the congestion issues that Armagh faces or the benefits that such roads would bring. The case has been well made, and the Minister will be familiar with it.

The opportunities that the west link road, in particular, and, I am sure, the east link road will open up relate not just to the relief of traffic congestion or the potential leisure investment that they could create in the vicinity. However, the Minister will know that leisure investment is economic investment, and the creation of any facilities in that area would be beneficial to Armagh. More than most urban centres, Armagh is dependent on public sector employment, and the creation of more opportunities for development potential around that city, be those in the leisure field or any other, would be welcome to its people and help to redress the balance of the local economy.

I understand, better than most, the capital difficulties that the Department for Regional Development faces and the difficult prioritising decisions that have to be made. Nonetheless, such an investment, which is substantial, yet modest in the broader scheme of the capital investment available to the Department and Executive, could yield huge benefits for economic development and the quality of life of the people of Armagh. Like others, I would be interested in hearing the latest update on the proposals.

I understand that there are further issues with the east link road, and that view has been reinforced by the contributions today. There may be some minor outstanding issues with the lie of the west link road, but the east link road seems to be dogged with more issues of contention. If it is the case that the route of the east link road has to be reviewed, I hope that that will be done with all haste, or at least that the issues of contention will be addressed with residents. That will mean that, while we await the capital moneys coming through, all issues can be resolved by the time the schemes are ready to be funded, and they can, hopefully, begin and be completed. I am interested to hear from the Minister on those points.

My colleague Cathal Boylan mentioned the traffic progression issues in Armagh, particularly those around the Mall and in front of the jail. He also mentioned that Roads Service has been working on those and that it plans to bring in a new traffic directional system. Perhaps the Minister can update us on that. In the immediate term, that will have the effect of easing traffic flows in the centre of Armagh, and the greater impact on through traffic would then come through the development of both link roads.

The west link road appears to be in a better place to go ahead than the east link road, both in the agreement of its route and the benefits that it will bring. Nonetheless, I concur with the view that both projects are important to Armagh, and I look forward to hearing a report from the Minister on their time frames.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I thank the Member who secured the debate and the other Members who contributed to it. As an Assembly Member for the constituency of Newry and Armagh, I am very familiar with the road network and traffic conditions that prevail in Armagh city. I have also had the opportunity to meet and correspond with other elected representatives and colleagues, council officials and people who live and work in our historic cathedral city.

The regional development strategy, 'Shaping Our Future', which was endorsed by the Assembly in 2002, identified Northern Ireland's regional strategic transport network, and the city of Armagh is placed at the intersection of two link corridors. All Members are very familiar with the area. The A28/A29 link corridor extends south from Armagh city towards Newry and north towards Dungannon. The A3 link corridor extends east towards Craigavon and Belfast and west towards the border with County Monaghan.

Traffic levels on routes on the outskirts of Armagh city range from 9,000 vehicles per day on the A3 Monaghan Road to 18,000 per day on the A3 Portadown Road. The two link corridor routes along the city streets are fronted by retail, commercial and residential properties. In addition,

several schools, churches and other community facilities are situated along, or close to, those routes.

In Armagh, therefore, as in most of our towns and cities, there are competing demands for road space between passing traffic, parking, and loading and unloading activities. That gives rise to congestion, especially at times of peak traffic flow, which is compounded by pedestrian crossing activities at formalised crossing points and elsewhere along the streets. We heard Members highlight some if not all of those issues.

Within Armagh, the routes of those two link corridors coincide along a busy short section of the road network immediately adjacent to the city centre. By way of example, the traffic volume on Barrack Street, which forms part of that section, is 15 vehicles per day. Therefore, I confirm that I and Roads Service are aware of the range of benefits that the two link road schemes proposed for Armagh city may be able to provide. Both proposals are included in the Roads Service strategic road improvement programme and are being progressed on the basis of the three-stage procedures outlined in the Highways Agency's design manual for roads and bridges.

Roads Service officials have advised that in the case of the A28 east link proposal, and following an assessment of several corridor options, stage 2 has been completed and the preferred line confirmed. That reflects the corridor indicated in the Armagh area plan of 2004. The proposed road will be approximately two-and-a-half kilometres long and link between the A28 Markethill Road and the A3 Portadown Road around the eastern outskirts of the city of Armagh. The cost of that is estimated to be in the range of £12 million to £20 million.

I am aware of the concerns of Members, which we have heard. However, I am also aware of the concern of residents in the vicinity of the Ardmore Road area in the city about the prospect of that stretch of road becoming part of the A28 east link. I am also aware that the selection of the preferred line for the east link, which follows the line of Ardmore Road for 460 metres, and which was made public at an information event in March 2007, follows the careful assessment of several corridor options. It also corresponds to the line indicated in the Armagh area plan.

I can confirm that officials from Roads Service have met concerned residents and elected representatives to brief them on the proposal, including explaining the assessments that led to the selection of the preferred route. They explained what is involved in the progressing of the scheme through the statutory proposals, which will provide a formal opportunity to submit representations on the proposal, including objections. In due course, we will decide whether or not a public inquiry is required to decide whether the scheme should proceed as planned. Having listened carefully to Members, however, I will reflect on their comments and take careful note of their concerns.

In the meantime, my officials will continue to be available to meet those who have concerns, to describe and explain the scheme as it continues to develop and to discuss the impacts of the scheme and appropriate mitigation measures. I will continue to look closely at these issues, and I will carefully consider views, particularly those of householders or, indeed, landowners impacted by it.

5.15 pm

Roads Service has advised that work is progressing towards confirming a preferred line and junction strategy based on the out-of-town corridor for the A28 Armagh north and west link proposal that was published in July 2008. That work has included significant consultation with elected representatives, council officials and other important stakeholders. Roads Service is indicating that it expects to conclude that work in the coming months. Members are aware of the detail of the scheme. The current estimate of the cost is between £55 million and £75 million.

The objectives of the two schemes are to improve journey times and the reliability of journey times on that part of the strategic road network, to improve safety and, of course, to continue to improve traffic conditions and the general environment in the historic city of Armagh.

Traffic modelling has been undertaken, which indicates traffic volumes for the two Armagh link road schemes of around 6,000 vehicles a day on the proposed A28 east link road and around 9,000 vehicles a day on the proposed A3 north and west link road. The subsequent reduction in traffic in the city centre road network would make a significant contribution to the improvement of traffic conditions and the conditions generally in the city centre, where, for example, pollution associated with traffic congestion could be reduced.

I will pick up on a number of points that Members raised in the debate. The new proposed traffic arrangements around the Mall are a matter of interest to Members. The issue was raised by Mr Murphy, and we will provide an update on that, because Armagh City and District Council has been moving that forward as part of the overall master plan.

As both a Member for Newry and Armagh and as Minister, I very much support and am convinced of the merits of these road schemes and the benefits that they can provide for Armagh city and the wider region.

Members will know that, as part of the Budget for the period to 2015 and following the agreement that was reached at the Executive, it was announced on 14 February that there would be improvements to sections of the A5, A8 and A2. So, delivery of other schemes, such as these in Armagh city, will be dependent on the funding levels envisaged in the investment strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-2021, which is being finalised. It would be very supportive to me if all the Members who have spoken continue to press the case for further investment in the roads infrastructure all over Northern Ireland, because it would help me carry forward these very worthwhile schemes in Armagh city and, indeed, other places.

In the meantime, I anticipate bringing forward a proposal for the preferred route for the A3 north and west link scheme in the coming months. Thank you.

Adjourned at 5.19 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 30 April 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Matter of the Day

Newry Bomb

Mr Speaker: Mr Dominic Bradley has sought leave to make a statement on the Newry bomb, which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I will call Mr Bradley 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 will know, there will be no opportunities for interventions, questions or a vote on the matter. I will not take any points of order until the item of business is concluded. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leat as an deis cainte a fháil ar an ábhar thábhachtach seo.

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to comment on this very serious matter. I will begin by condemning outright and forthrightly those who planted or abandoned a 500-lb bomb on the Fathom Line, the road between Newry and Omearth, last Friday. The bomb was destined to cause death and destruction somewhere in this land. The SDLP, as you know, Mr Speaker, has always condemned political violence. We said that it was wrong in the past, and we say that it is wrong now.

After enduring 30-plus years of violence, the public, including the people in my Newry and Armagh constituency, are utterly repulsed at the thought of violence being used here again. Violence has been rejected by the people in both jurisdictions on the island, and those who seek to further their aims in that way should listen to the people and desist from what they are doing immediately.

Dissent must be channelled through exclusively democratic and peaceful means. Murdering police officers, planting bombs and causing destruction to property are not acts of dissent but acts of death and destruction.

I thank the police for their work at the weekend, and I will be meeting them shortly to discuss the detail of it. I also thank the army technical officer who put his life at risk to defuse the bomb and make it safe.

The one vital element that will further address the dissident threat is information. It appears that there has been an escalation in dissident activity and threat. Therefore, it is especially important that anyone who has any information, however slight, brings it to the PSNI in the North and to an Garda Síochána in the South. Doing that is an important

element in defeating the threat. We are grateful to all those who work to keep us safe day and daily. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Givan: I and my party associate ourselves with everything that the Member said regarding the incident. We, too, condemn the reckless act by the terrorists who planted the bomb and abandoned it in the way in which they did. It was a clear attempt to take Northern Ireland back to the past, but nobody here wants to go back to the way that things were. The peace that has been won has been hard fought, and nobody should be allowed to put that in jeopardy.

I commend the member of the public for demonstrating vigilance and contacting the police, and I commend the police for the way in which they responded to the incident. My party is concerned about the bomb's sophistication and about how it came about. We want to be assured that the police can effectively combat the threat that exists. The Executive have shown their commitment by giving additional funding to the police. Additional funding to deal with the terrorist threat was fought for with the Treasury. As I said, we want to be assured that the police can combat the threat that exists, and we will provide whatever support is necessary to assist the police in that.

It is a reminder to us that we must redouble our efforts to ensure that this place works for the people of Northern Ireland and that those who want to take us back do not achieve their aim. We can show that the fundamentals of democracy work and that their attempts to take us back will not succeed.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I also agree with some of the remarks expressed and share the condemnation of the bomb that was left on the roadside on the Fathom Line. There is an overwhelming sense of relief in the Newry area that the attack did not reach its intended target or have the undoubtedly devastating consequences that it could have had had it gone off.

There is a sense of anger and bewilderment that people are continuing to try to mount attacks at a time when there is no rationale for them. These sporadic, ongoing attempts to cause destruction of property or death seem designed only to prove that the people involved can do it. There is no other coherent strategy involved. There is no rationale or clear intended outcome behind them, and, crucially, there is absolutely no support across the community for the continuation of that type of attack. Therefore, we can only speculate about what the intended target was, and we can be relieved that that was not achieved, because it would have caused widespread destruction to the Newry area or widespread loss of life.

It is clear that people have moved on. A peaceful political path remains open to all those involved. While there is an honourable position by which people can dissent and disagree with the political process and engagement with policing, they also have a responsibility to offer a rationale. While no one has claimed responsibility for this incident or offered any rationale, neither have those who dissent from this process offered any rationale behind the occurrences. If they have a different means, or if what we are doing here is so wrong, and if our engagement with policing and the political process is so wrong, others are duty-bound to spell out how incidents such as these are a better approach.

I repeat my expression of relief that this attack did not go ahead or reach its intended target. I know there had been some concerns in the area in relation to police responses to these incidents, and we have articulated those. I know that some of our Sinn Féin elected representatives have met the police over this incident, and we will continue to raise those concerns with police. However, I think that the overwhelming sense is that the people who have put the lives and property of the people of the Newry area in jeopardy are those who left the bomb on the Fathom Line: that is directly where responsibility lies. The overwhelming message from the people of the Newry and Armagh area is that those people should desist from that type of activity.

Mr Kennedy: As a representative for the Newry and Armagh constituency, I, on behalf of my party, join others in expressing strong condemnation of the intended attack on the outskirts of Newry last weekend. The impact that a potentially lethal bomb of that size, some 600 lb, could have had on lives or property is unthinkable.

I join others in thanking and expressing gratitude to the army bomb disposal team, the PSNI and the individual who, due to concern that the vehicle posed a danger, raised the alarm. It is very clear that this is the latest in a series of planned operations in the Newry area by so-called republican dissidents. I do not believe that they have any widespread public support. Nevertheless, their actions, intent and capability represent the ability to wreak havoc not only along the border or in Newry but all over Northern Ireland. Therefore, I strongly believe that there needs to be a security response, a police response and a community response. I very much welcome the statements that indicate that people should co-operate fully with the PSNI in identifying those responsible for these actions. I do not believe that republican dissidents are in the market for some kind of negotiation or political dialogue. Those people are dedicated terrorists; they have set their face against the political and constitutional settlements that operate in Northern Ireland. Therefore, the appropriate response has to be a security response and a policing response in conjunction with the local community.

I heard what I think were unfair criticisms of the police response to the incident. To that, I simply say that police resources in the area are stretched. Political figures and parties have supported the reduction of policing numbers and police stations, particularly in places such as Bessbrook and Keady. We need to work together to ensure that the appropriate community response and security response will mean that these groups will not be allowed to impose their will.

Mr Dickson: I thank Mr Bradley for bringing this matter to the Assembly this morning and allowing us to speak with

a united voice in condemnation of those who attempted to carry out a bombing. Regardless of whether it was destined for Newry or somewhere else in Northern Ireland, the bomb would only have had one consequence, which would have been death and destruction. That, indeed, is all that those who attempt to make and manufacture those bombs can offer this society.

12.15 pm

I join others in thanking the PSNI; their colleagues across the border in an Garda Síochána; the army, who so bravely dealt with the bomb in this vehicle and, regrettably, deal with bombs on an increasing basis; and the vigilant member of the public who drew it to their attention. It is important that we are all vigilant and that anything that is seen to be out of the ordinary is reported appropriately to the police. If we stand together as a united community, these people will not — must not — be allowed to steal the peace from us.

Mr Allister: It is no thanks to the wicked, evil terrorists who constructed this bomb that, today, we are not marking an episode of mass murder and catastrophic damage. It is thanks, of course, once again, to a group of men whose courage we often take for granted — the army technical officers — that the bomb was successfully defused, and we should all be grateful for that.

This dastardly republican terrorist act is like so many carried out to the Provo template. It is no different from the many, many such bombs planted and constructed by the Provisional IRA. There was no justification then, and there is no justification now, for such involvement in terrorism. People ask why they are doing it. Obviously, they are committed to the cause, the same cause that drove the Provisional IRA. Maybe, in fact, they look at their MP, with his personal experience of unlawful handling of explosives, and maybe they say, "It worked for him". And so it did, because so long as there is a party in government in this country that refuses to disown and to repudiate the terrorism of their IRA, then so long will there be others prepared to be their clones and to carry on where they left off. As for the godfathers of today's generation of terrorists, the very least they can do is face up to, acknowledge and express regret and remorse over their terrorism and ensure that those they know still to be involved are made amenable for crimes that many of them were never made amenable for.

Assembly Business

Use of Electronic Devices

Mr Speaker: Before we move to the House's first item of business, I want to say something about the use of electronic devices in the Chamber. I wrote to the Committee on Procedures in October last year asking it to consider the use of electronic devices in the Chamber. Taking into account the Committee's views, I have now decided to revise the ruling, which has been in place for many years, prohibiting the use of electronics devices in the Chamber. With effect from today, Members may use small electronic devices, such as a BlackBerry or a tablet computer, in the Chamber. That includes their use in place of written speaking notes in debates in the Chamber.

I am content that such devices can be used discreetly without distracting other Members or without distracting from the business of the House. They must be kept on silent at all times and used in a mode that does not interfere with the audio scheme or the proceedings of the Chamber. However, in line with the Committee's view, laptops may not be used in the Chamber. I want to emphasise very strongly that laptops will not be brought into the Chamber to be used. I expect Members to use permitted devices in a responsible manner and to bear in mind the integrity of the House at all times.

Some Members were keen for the previous ruling to be reviewed so that they could have the flexibility to keep in touch with pressing issues in their constituencies and elsewhere in and around Parliament Buildings. However, I say to Members: that flexibility works both ways. Members should know that, currently, if they want to speak in a debate, they are expected to be present in the Chamber for opening speeches and for winding-up speeches and to remain in the Chamber for at least two further speeches after their own. I have watched all sides of this House and have seen Members come into this Chamber who have not even heard the opening remarks of a particular debate. They get up in their place, say what they have to say and then leave. They do not even have the courtesy to wait to hear at least some of the debate or to hear other Members speaking. We are watching that very carefully. It happens on all sides of the House, and I assure Members that, should it continue, I will deal with it. It is totally wrong and discourteous to other Members and to this House for Members just to walk into the Chamber, say what they have to say and then leave, not really caring what other Members might say or what the motion or business of the House is. It is the same culprits. So, we are watching Members very carefully on this issue. Engaging in debates is not just about a Member's own speech; it includes listening to others' contributions. With the new freedom to keep in touch with their offices and to do other work, I expect Members to be better able to comply with these conventions from now on.

I hope that the new arrangement will work well and that Members will find it helpful. However, I will keep it under review. If Members are not observing the terms of this ruling, it may be necessary to come back to the issue. I assure Members that we will watch this issue very carefully. If I need to come back to the House, I certainly will.

Finally, I advise the House that IT staff will be present in the Rotunda for the next few weeks to help Members and

to ensure that their devices are set to a mode that will not interfere with the audio scheme in the Chamber. I hope that Members now know and understand that they can use specific electronic devices in the Chamber.

Let us move on.

Committee Membership

Mr Speaker: I will read out the next item of business, but I understand that the Member is not in her place to move the motion.

As with other similar motions, this will be treated as a business motion, so there will be no debate.

The following motion stood in the Order Paper.

That Mr Chris Hazzard be appointed as a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development and as a member of the Committee for the Environment. — [Ms J McCann.]

Mr Speaker: Jennifer McCann's is the only name attached to the motion, so it cannot be moved.

Once again, I want to say something about Whips, especially Chief Whips, from all parties. There are occasions in this House when, for whatever reason, a Member is not in their place. I am not saying this because of Jennifer McCann; I am saying this to all Whips of the House in all parties. We have a problem with Whips not attending the Chamber. This is an issue that I raised on a number of occasions some time ago. In fact, if it were not for ourselves and the Clerks at Table, Members from all sides of the House would be missing when it comes to moving motions. If it were not for the Clerks, or whoever is chairing proceedings, realising that the Member is not in his or her place, they would not be here, because the Clerks have to try to see whether they can get Members into the House. It is not the Clerks' job to try to get Members into the House for business. It is up to the Chief Whips of all political parties to make sure that Members, especially their Members, are in the House to do the business of the House.

It is a warning, especially to Members who are Chief Whips of political parties. Clerks continually have to hunt down even Ministers and Members to get them here for the business of the House. Maybe what we should do from now on, to make absolutely sure, is this: if the Chief Whips are not doing their job, we should move on and let the business collapse.

Lord Morrow: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I take it that it is a genuine point of order, Lord Morrow?

Lord Morrow: It is.

Mr Speaker: All right. OK.

Lord Morrow: Just further to your ruling, we have a motion today but the Member is not here to move it. I do not know the reasons for that. It might be unavoidable. However, is there not a simple way around that? When a motion is lodged with the Business Office, more than one name could be attached to it. If that were so, we would not be in this position.

Mr Speaker: I could not agree more. I think Lord Morrow raised this issue at a meeting of the Business Committee some months ago. We said that to all parties, because there were some difficulties when only one name appeared with a motion. Irrespective of what the motion is, it is very useful if one, two or even three names are attached. I say that, not because Jennifer McCann is not in her place this morning, but because this is a general issue that Whips and Chief Whips of parties need to address within their own groups.

Committee Business

Standing Orders

Mr Speaker: Let us move on. We know that the Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures is in his place. As the next six motions relate to amendments to Standing Orders, I propose to conduct the debate as follows. I propose to group motions (a) to (f) as detailed on the Order Paper and conduct a single debate. I will then call the Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures to move motion (a), and a debate will then take place on all six motions in the group. When all Members who wish to speak have done so, I will put the question on motion (a). I will then ask the Chairperson to move formally the remaining five motions in turn, and I will put the Question on each of them without further debate. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Mr G Kelly (The Chairperson of the Committee on

Procedures): Go raith maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I will remain on hard copy for the moment anyway.

I beg to move

(a) In Standing Order 26(1)(a) leave out "a provision of the Northern Ireland Act 1998" and insert "any statutory provision".

The following motions stood in the Order Paper:

(b) In Standing Order 27, leave out paragraph (1) and insert —

"(1) Subject to paragraph (1A), the Speaker shall direct that the lobbies be cleared and the division bells sounded if —

(a) the Speaker is unsure whether or not a question is carried following the collection of voices under Standing Order 26; or

(b) the Speaker's judgement as to whether a question is so carried is challenged." [Mr G Kelly (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

(c) After Standing Order 27(1) insert —

"(1A) Where a question is put immediately after the result of a previous division is announced, and paragraph 1(a) or (b) applies —

(a) the Speaker may direct that the lobbies be cleared and the division bells sounded; or

(b) the Speaker may direct that the lobbies be cleared and proceed immediately in accordance with paragraphs (4) to (11) and in deciding whether to direct that the lobbies be cleared and the division bells sounded under this paragraph, the Speaker shall have regard to any representations made by any party whip." — [Mr G Kelly (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

(d) In Standing Order 27(2) line 1, leave out "this direction" and insert —

"a direction under paragraph (1) or (1A)(a)". — [Mr G Kelly (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

(e) In Standing Order 76, leave out paragraph (1) and insert —

“(1) Any determination made by the Assembly under section 47(2A)(a) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 shall be published in full.” — [Mr G Kelly (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

*(f) In Standing Order 76(2) line 1, leave out “also”.
— [Mr G Kelly (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]*

On behalf of the Committee on Procedures, I am pleased to bring to the House these motions to amend Standing Orders. The first four motions relate to voting in the Assembly and the last two to Members' remuneration and pensions. That may seem a strange combination, but they have been brought together purely for expedience rather than because of any link between them.

The first motion relates to Standing Order 26(1)(a). That Standing Order provides that every decision of the Assembly is to be taken by a simple majority vote other than a decision where the Northern Ireland Act 1998 or Standing Orders provide otherwise. More recent legislation, such as the Justice Act 2002, the Northern Ireland Act 2009 and the Department of Justice Act 2010 make cross-community support a requirement for certain matters. Standing Order 26(1)(a) is, therefore, no longer accurate and it does not reflect statutory requirements other than those in the 1998 Act. The proposed amendment will remove any conflict by replacing the reference to the Northern Ireland Act 1998 with the words “any statutory provision”. It will also cover any future changes in legislation that impose a cross-community support requirement.

The next three motions — (b), (c) and (d) — relate to Standing Order 27, which sets out the voting procedures for running Divisions in the Chamber. As Members are well aware, when a Question is put and the result is not clear, the Division Bells are sounded and after three minutes the Speaker puts the Question a second time. If the result still is not clear, or the Speaker's judgement is challenged, a Division is called. Under the current procedure, when a Division occurs immediately after the result of a previous Division, even if it relates to the same subject, the requirement for the three minutes to pass before the Question is put again remains. That means that if, for example, there are two or three amendments to the same motion and the result of the vote is not clear, Members would be waiting in the Chamber for three minutes each time before going through the Lobbies. The Committee on Procedures is of the view that, in those circumstances, the three-minute rule should not be mandatory but should be at the discretion of the Speaker.

12.30 pm

The proposed amendment will give the Speaker, in consultation with the Whips, the flexibility to dispense with the three minutes before putting the Question a second time, where two or more Divisions relating to the same subject are to be held in succession. However, there will be times when it may be better to use the three minutes, for example when there is a series of amendments to a Bill and Members may be unclear about how they are voting. In those circumstances, the three minutes would allow the Whips to ensure that their Members know which way to vote. I want to emphasise that, in deciding whether to dispense with the three-minute rule, the Speaker will take into account any views expressed by the party Whips. When the Speaker decides to exercise

the discretion to dispense with the three minutes, the Division would proceed immediately in accordance with the procedures outlined in paragraphs (4) to (11) of Standing Order 27. That is, Members would go through the Lobbies to vote as soon as the Tellers have been announced.

The final two motions relate to Standing Order 76, which deals with Members' remuneration and pensions. At present, Standing Order 76(1) requires the Speaker to publish in ‘The Belfast Gazette’ determinations in respect of Members' salaries, allowances and pensions. However, with the establishment of the independent financial review panel, which now makes such determinations, the publication of determinations in ‘The Belfast Gazette’ by the Speaker is no longer needed. The proposed amendment removes that requirement on the Speaker but provides that any determination made by the Assembly must be published in full.

The final motion is a minor consequential amendment to Standing Order 76(2). It simply deletes “also” in the first sentence.

Those are, I hope, all straightforward amendments, and I commend the motions to the House.

Mr Gardiner: As a member of the Committee on Procedures, I welcome these changes to Standing Orders. The House is often accused of never taking the simple way forward on anything. Therefore, I fully support the proposals to make the voting methods more efficient. I hope this is the start of an ongoing process that will identify and repair areas of the Assembly's operations that can be further improved. I support the motion.

Mr Clarke: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, and I was in my place. I thank the Chairperson for putting forward the motion and Sam Gardiner for his contribution. The motion involved lots of dialogue between the political parties. As was outlined by the Chairperson of the Committee, all the amendments to Standing Orders make common sense. They also make the business of the Chamber flow much more ably, especially when it comes to Divisions. So, I commend the motion put forward by the Chairperson.

Mr Speaker: Before I proceed to the Question, I remind Members that the six motions require cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(a) In Standing Order 26(1)(a) leave out “a provision of the Northern Ireland Act 1998” and insert “any statutory provision”.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(b) In Standing Order 27, leave out paragraph (1) and insert –

“(1) Subject to paragraph (1A), the Speaker shall direct that the lobbies be cleared and the division bells sounded if –

(a) the Speaker is unsure whether or not a question is carried following the collection of voices under Standing Order 26; or

(b) the Speaker's judgement as to whether a question is so carried is challenged." — [Mr G Kelly (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(c) After Standing Order 27(1) insert –

"(1A) Where a question is put immediately after the result of a previous division is announced, and paragraph 1(a) or (b) applies –

(a) the Speaker may direct that the lobbies be cleared and the division bells sounded; or

(b) the Speaker may direct that the lobbies be cleared and proceed immediately in accordance with paragraphs (4) to (11) and in deciding whether to direct that the lobbies be cleared and the division bells sounded under this paragraph, the Speaker shall have regard to any representations made by any party whip." — [Mr G Kelly (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(d) In Standing Order 27(2) line 1 leave out "this direction" and insert –

"a direction under paragraph (1) or (1A)(a)". — [Mr G Kelly (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(e) In Standing Order 76, leave out paragraph (1) and insert –

"(1) Any determination made by the Assembly under section 47(2A)(a) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 shall be published in full." — [Mr G Kelly (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(f) In Standing Order 76(2) line 1, leave out "also". — [Mr G Kelly (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

Private Members' Business

Taxation: Charitable Donations

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 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 expresses concern at the proposals by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to limit tax relief on large charitable donations; believes that this could have a devastating impact on charities; and calls on Her Majesty's Government to abandon this approach.

I am delighted to propose the motion. I am glad, in light of the general admonishment made earlier, that I do not have to join you by Skype or videoconference but have managed to make it here in person and do not have to Facebook my speech in. In light of the nature of the subject, we will not even be adding a smiley face at the end of the discussion.

I welcome the opportunity to raise what I think is a very important issue. I know that some in the media have been critical of the issue because it is not one that we have direct control over, but the impact on local charities could be very significant. I will say more about that in a moment.

There was considerable focus on a number of issues when the Budget was announced. The Government's point of view was that they were lifting a number of people out of the taxation system or reducing the levels of taxation, but, at a more critical level, there were changes to the top rate of tax, the so-called Robin Hood tax in reverse, which impacted on working pensioners, and the so-called pasty tax, which included an extension of VAT.

The announcement of a change to the tax relief on charitable donations did not initially attract a great deal of attention, although there has been considerable comment subsequently. This issue is close to my heart, as my late father was the covenant secretary of my local Presbyterian church and would have dealt with this issue. He saw the considerable impact of the change to the tax regime brought in by the previous Government.

For those who have not been following this, the Chancellor's intention, as announced in the Budget, is that, from April 2013, the Government would introduce a cap on certain unlimited income tax reliefs. Under the plans, previously uncapped tax reliefs, including charitable donations, would be capped at £50,000 or 25% of a person's income, if that was higher. In a point of unassumed irony, it is due to come in on 1 April 2013, the same time as the reduction in the higher rate of tax from 50% to 45%.

There has been a subsequent firestorm. Treasury Minister David Gauke said that he thought the impact on charities would be in the region of £50 million to £100 million. That is widely disputed by charities across the UK. If the impact is going to be insignificant from the Government's point of view, when that Government deals with a Budget that runs to hundreds of billions of pounds, we have to question why they are pursuing this in the first place. The reality is that

the figures are much greater than that. This is not purely linked with the charity aspect, but, in referring to the wider changes, different Treasury figures have been quoted. One set of figures state that, by 2014-15 on one calculation, there could be £870 million worth of a difference. Another set of figures states that, because of the post-behavioural costings, there will be around £500 million of a change. We seem to be awash with figures.

The reality, though, is that this will have a very significant impact. Last year in the UK, in the region of £11 billion was given to charities. I suspect that charitable contributions from Members of the House were not at the level that will be impacted by the proposed tax changes, but, as well as being dependent on relatively small donations from a large number of people, charities are very heavily dependent on quite large donations from a relatively small pool of people. For example, the figures suggest that 45% of the £11 billion given to charities in the past year came from just 7% of donors. From an impact point of view, it is, therefore, not surprising that a lot of the large charities in the UK, such as Cancer Research, Save the Children, Concern Worldwide, the National Trust, Age UK and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, have all written to show their opposition, as, indeed, have local philanthropists such as Sir George Bain, John Agnew and Angila Chada.

The situation is such that the proposals will not simply impact on the big charities. As Members know, in many cases, a lot of the larger charities have projects that filter down to grass-roots level and use, for example, smaller charities, churches and community organisations to deliver schemes on the ground. So, in Northern Ireland there will be a real impact not just at the higher levels of larger charities but on much smaller charities.

We should recognise the context in which the proposals are set. One researcher described it as a perfect storm for charities. It is hitting at exactly the wrong time, because there is greater demand on charities during a recession. Indeed, according to a recent survey, 69% of charities in the UK have experienced an increase in demand. At the same time, a lot of people's disposal income has been reduced because of the recession. As a result, they have cut back on the things that they see as being non-necessities, including charitable giving, which has reduced to some degree. Thinking about the projected impact, again, a survey found that eight out of 10 philanthropists said that they would rethink their charitable donations and that some would be forced to cut their charitable donations by 40%. So, the proposals could have a very real impact.

As indicated, there has been a high level of concern about and response to the proposals. In the House of Commons, my colleague Jim Shannon and others from across the political spectrum have signed an early day motion expressing concern about them. The proposals have also been opposed by the official Opposition and, as I indicated, by a range of charities. However, it is not just the usual suspects who are critical of the Government. For example, virtually all newspapers from across the political spectrum, including the likes of the 'Daily Telegraph' and the 'Financial Times', have expressed concern. Indeed, those who might be described as conservative commentators, such as Dominic Lawson and Fraser Nelson, who are hardly the type of people to jump on the general opposition bandwagon, have been highly critical of the proposals. I think that there

are a number of reasons why they have been critical of the proposals' weaknesses. We are told that the proposals are about ending tax avoidance. Obviously, targeting people who avoid tax is to be welcomed. However, that has been lumped in with targeting people who are attempting to offset some of their tax by putting it under company accounts or, indeed, by bogus activity. That issue is easily solved. If the idea is to prevent that degree of tax avoidance, the issue of charities, particularly legitimate charities, should be decoupled from that. If there is a concern that bogus charities are in some way being used as a device to avoid tax responsibility, that can be easily dealt with, particularly in Northern Ireland, where we have a commission that looks after charities, while other bodies look after charities' bona fides. The reality is that, on a number of occasions when the Government have been pressed on the number of people that they feel would gain some benefit from this, particularly in the use of charities, they have never been able to produce figures, which suggests that the proposals are like a hammer being used to crack a nut.

Indeed, the practicalities of the proposals have also been criticised by experts in the field, such as the Chartered Institute of Taxation and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales. So, it appears that the proposals will not work, are ill thought-through and run contrary to the spirit of government policy. We are told that David Cameron's great idea is the big society, in which society contributes a lot more to what is happening on the ground than the Government. However, here we have a device that runs against the level of intended philanthropy. I am not getting into the debate on the lowering of the high level of taxation from 50p to 45p, but it seems that the Government have a remarkable sense of priorities. They reduce the level of taxation for the highest earners in our society, and, at the same time, their one punitive measure for high earners discourages them from giving to charity.

It is clear from some of the remarks that the Government have made and from the indications given by George Osborne and David Cameron that they intend to consult on the issue in the summer, that it is dawning in some people's minds, prompted, no doubt, by parliamentarians of various ilk, that this is a bad idea, and the Government seem to be in slight retreat from it. It is important that, for the sake of the most vulnerable in our society who benefit from a lot of charitable work, the Assembly sends out a clear-cut message about where we stand on the issue.

12.45 pm

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

Mr Weir: The Government were wrong to put this proposal forward in the first place. It is due to take place on 1 April 2013, so there is still time for the Government to withdraw it. I urge the House to support the motion and make that clarion call to the Government.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As Mr Weir said, we do not have control over this matter, but it will have an impact here if it comes to pass. Initially, the British Government argued that their purpose and aim was to stop people using bogus charities for their own benefit. If such a problem exists, surely it can be addressed by regulators. It is interesting that almost half of charitable donations come from fewer than one tenth of donors. If tax relief is reduced,

it could mean that many donors would simply give less. It is also possible that, with a lower financial commitment, they may feel less motivated to provide time and other assistance.

Charitable donations in Britain lag behind America significantly. To reduce this gap and promote what is called “the big society”, surely it would be better to encourage more donations, not discourage those that are already being made. If the new proposals come into force, they will undoubtedly hinder fundraising for many charities. Surely a message needs to go out that philanthropy is essential and should be valued. It appears that the message that will be sent out is that such charitable donations are regarded as some kind of tax fiddle.

According to the Government, the revenue raised if the measure is implemented, when put into context, could be £50 million. That is not a great deal in the overall scheme of things, but charities, as Mr Weir pointed out, would argue that the final figure could be a lot higher. A clear distinction needs to be drawn between charitable giving and other activities that attract relief. Tax breaks that are purely for self-interest need to be separated from those that benefit the wider public.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that one of the flaws in the proposal is that any expert who has looked at it will say that the idea of tax avoidance is a red herring? If people give to a genuine charity on that scale, it is mathematically and financially impossible for them to make a gain.

Mr Speaker: The Member will have a minute added to his time.

Mr Brady: I thank the Member for his intervention. I absolutely agree with him that there is no doubt that it is a red herring. Indeed, when the Charity Commission was set up in the North — it was dealt with by the Committee for Social Development, of which I am a member — there was much debate around what constituted public benefit. That debate is ongoing.

The good intentions of those big donors to charity need to be recognised and applauded, and the Government need to recognise the case for charitable giving. In this time of continuing recession, surely it needs to be recognised that philanthropy has a particular strength in advancing the frontiers of knowledge and promoting artistic endeavours.

Tax avoidance is not the same as donating to charities such as Macmillan Cancer Support, the Red Cross and many others, which rely on the money that they get to carry out their work, which is often about supporting some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Surely the Government should be able to tell the difference between tax avoidance and supporting valuable charity work.

George Osborne has said:

“We’ve capped benefits. Now it’s right to cap tax reliefs, too.”

That was said about a Budget in which the taxation rate for the richest was lowered to give them more. To make such a comparison is totally disingenuous, as benefits will be savagely cut, and many vulnerable people will have to cope with reductions in their benefits that will certainly change the quality of their life.

Mr Cree: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the issue. The Ulster Unionist Party recognises the important work of charities in Northern Ireland and throughout the United Kingdom, and, in the knowledge that they often rely on the financial support of what has been referred to today as philanthropic giving, we support the motion and commend the Members who tabled it.

Charities are regulated by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, and they seek to deliver:

“A dynamic and well governed charities sector in which the public has confidence, underpinned by the Commission’s effective delivery of its regulatory and advisory role.”

Therefore, I believe that we have a system in place in which charities operate in a firm and fair regulatory environment where the public can have trust in the fact that, on the whole, charities produce positive and tangible benefits. Indeed, they play an integral part in many aspects of life in Northern Ireland. Educational charities such as our universities are essential in providing the economy with the skills and knowledge to grow the private sector and keep Northern Ireland in its current position as a region renowned for its skills base. Others, for example, the Positive Futures programme, address the issues associated with learning difficulties.

Many charities deal specifically with the important issues of poverty and social deprivation. In particular, I mention the Simon Community, which does a great deal of work in my constituency of North Down, as well as the NSPCC and Barnardo’s. Aside from the practical help that they provide, these organisations often produce detailed research that can inform and shape government policy. Adequate support of the social economy is also imperative. Although government funding obviously has a role in this, individuals can and do give money to social enterprises. All of these types of charity rely heavily on the goodwill of donors to fund some of their activities, but that may be affected after the proposals outlined by George Osborne in the Budget last month to change the tax relief that donors can receive in respect of large donations to charities. From 6 April 2013, the maximum will be £50,000 a year or 25% of the donor’s income. The result of this is a significant decrease in the amount of tax that philanthropists can claim back and, therefore, a reduction in the money given to charities. In this instance, the end result certainly does not justify the means. Tax avoidance should not be tolerated, and I commend any attempt to ensure that those earning the highest incomes pay their fair share, but it seems to me that this particular measure would hinder the very organisations that we should be encouraging.

The PwC report, ‘Managing Charities in the New Normal — A Perfect Storm?’, which a Member referred to, outlines the fact that the measures that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is seeking to bring in come at the worst possible time. The research shows that 93% of fundraisers say that money was more difficult to raise in the past year and 94% expect it to get harder over the next 12 months. PwC’s work also shows that charities believe fundraising to be an important means of income in the current fiscal climate, with 66% planning to increase their fundraising activity. Therefore, it seems clear that George Osborne’s decision will clearly disadvantage the good work that is being done by charities

at a very challenging time. Indeed, I am reminded that a previous Labour Chancellor made a similar mistake when he introduced a tax on pension funds. We all know that that has had a devastating effect on all final salary pension schemes.

Mr Weir mentioned that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs could bring in as much as £100 million through limiting tax relief. However, this means that there would be £500 million of lost donations, and we are told that that is a conservative estimate. Indeed, very big sums could be involved, and this is not an acceptable outcome. One positive aspect is that the Prime Minister has indicated that he is willing to listen and that full formal consultation will occur. I certainly hope that he will review his plans on charitable taxation, given that the proposal is not to be introduced until next year. That is what this House is calling on him to do, and I support the motion.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Éirím le tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún seo, agus gabhaim buíochas leis na Comhaltaí a thug faoi bhráid an Tionóil é inniu. I support the motion, and I thank the Members who brought it to the Floor of the House today.

The Chancellor's plan to reduce tax relief on charitable donations has caused considerable opposition from many voluntary and community sector groups which believe that they will lose substantial sums of money as a result. While we value the contribution made to our society by the national health system, the welfare state and other government agencies, the sad truth is that many aspects of our community's health and welfare are not sufficiently funded by government and need to be supported by the voluntary, community and charitable sector — the third sector, as it has become known.

One has little difficulty finding examples from the over 3,000 organisations that are backing the Give it Back, George campaign and that benefit from charitable donations. Those organisations deal with research into all types of illness and disease for which there is not yet a cure and for which ongoing research and support are needed. They include organisations that advance the arts, sports, music and mental health or deal with eating disorders, youth matters, hospice matters, arthritis, carers in general, community development etc. That list is not exhaustive. In many cases, the organisations have arisen from fundraising that has been initiated by the relatives of a sufferer of one of those diseases or disorders or, indeed, sadly, by the relatives of a person whose death has been caused by one of those illnesses. Quite often, a local campaign eventually becomes a national campaign, and a charity is set up.

Although the Government collect less tax as a result of tax relief on charitable donations, major economic support is provided through the scheme to charities that do the important work involved. Of course, if the Government were to cap the relief available on charitable donations, there is absolutely no guarantee that the improved tax take would be redistributed to charities or to the research and development work that many of them currently engage in and fund. It is also important to remember that many of the third sector groups that benefit from charitable tax relief also raise additional funds by other means that add value to the effects of charitable donations. Often, where an organisation requires a cocktail of funding to complete a project, charitable donations are the spur for further donations to complete that cocktail. So, at the end of the

day, donations that are encouraged by tax relief enable the third sector organisations to do work that badly needs to be done and that, at the end of the day, results in a lesser drain on government resources.

Under the plans announced in the recent Budget, individuals who give money to charity will only be able to claim tax relief on 25% of their total income or on £50,000, whichever is higher. The cap will be introduced from April 2013 and will apply to gifts of cash and shares. There will be a consultation, and I hope that the views of the Assembly will be included in that.

As other Members said, the proposals are aimed at thwarting people who donate to false charities. However, there is little evidence that that takes place on any great scale. There is a requirement by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) in almost every case that donors must provide the bona fides of the charity to which they are donating.

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

Mr D Bradley: I conclude by reiterating my party's support for the motion, and I hope that the Chancellor will take on board the views of this House.

1.00 pm

Mrs Cochrane: I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the motion. Critics might contest that there is an air of duplication in the nature of the motion, following a similar debate in Westminster a few weeks ago. However, I commend the Members for bringing the motion to the House. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Indeed, it is something that we in the Alliance Party take great comfort in every time we hear others talking about a shared future.

In recent days, I have been contacted by representatives from a range of charities in Northern Ireland, who are understandably concerned that the proposal will have significant negative consequences for our charitable sector. Although I support the drive to scrutinise unlimited tax reliefs, I would argue that greater and more realistic consideration needs to be given to that specific proposal, taking on board the expertise available within the charitable sector, to ensure that the proposed cap does not hinder the significant work of charities across the UK.

The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) has recently expressed concerns, supporting the Give it Back, George campaign. It has reasoned that the addition of the cap will serve only as a disincentive to potential philanthropists, with the impact likely to be felt not only by large charities but by smaller voluntary and community groups that benefit from grant-making trusts and foundations.

Our society consistently lags behind our western counterparts, such as the US, in relation to charitable donations and philanthropy. In that regard, it seems that the best way to address that problem would be to encourage more donations, not to discourage those already being made. I know that it could be argued that the upper-rate tax relief cap on donations may only affect a small number of high earners in our society, but, as others have already mentioned, in the UK, nearly half of all charitable donations come from fewer than 10% of donors — those affectionately known as the rich. The media do little to improve the public perception of the wealthy in our society, and, at times, key figures from

within the golden ranks do themselves few favours either, but the truth is that, in relation to this proposal, many of those individuals regularly give away a high percentage of their income. It is large donations such as those that provide the lifeblood to our charitable sector.

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

There is a growing perception that, through donating such large sums to charity and receiving — currently — unlimited tax relief on their donations, wealthy donors are somehow profiting from some fairytale charity loophole. However, as others have said, that is simply not true. The sad reality of reducing tax relief on those donations would mean that many donors would simply give less. There is also an ironic sense of illogicality to the proposals when we seek to align them to the Government's own ambitions for sustainability and growth in the third sector in the hope that it can fill a vital role in the road to economic recovery.

In addition to the financial red tape being tied around charitable foundations, the Treasury has also confirmed that community interest tax relief (CITR) will be included in the proposed cap. For those Members unfamiliar with CITR, the scheme encourages investment in disadvantaged communities by giving tax relief to investors who invest in community development finance institution that, in turn, provide loans to businesses and social enterprises. It almost seems in this instance that, while one hand from Westminster is patting the third sector on the back and seeking to provide assistance and support, the other is tightening the noose around its neck.

I am sure that Members will agree that there is some merit in concerns exercised over bogus and foreign charities being utilised in order to exploit the system, but the frequency and impact of such practices simply does not hold weight when compared to the frequency and impact of charitable giving. The problem of tax avoidance through the use of charitable relief should ultimately be dealt with by an effective HMRC. Having also discussed the matter with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, I have faith in its ability to investigate alleged charity misconduct or mismanagement.

It is my contention that, if we wish to seriously support our charitable foundations and strengthen our third sector, it is vital that we provide them with resolute support in relation to these proposals. The overriding principle in all of this should not simply be deterring a minority but emboldening the majority. It is on those grounds that I lend my support to the motion.

Mr Ross: It is refreshing that we have support for the motion from all around the Chamber. Indeed, it is perhaps surprising that we are listening to Sinn Féin supporting tax breaks for the wealthy in society. I think that it reflects the outrage among the public about the Government effectively attacking philanthropy in the United Kingdom. Indeed, we heard senior figures rolled out, not so much to defend the policy as to try to explain it and indicate a softening of their position and perhaps a rethink. That, of course, was against the backdrop of former Prime Ministers opposing the policy. Huge amounts of Back-Benchers from all of the main political parties at Westminster indicated their opposition to this move, as did more than 3,000 individuals and charities throughout the United Kingdom.

I believe the decision to be misjudged for two reasons: one of them financial, the other political. The Hudson Institute index of global philanthropy, which counts private donations to overseas charities, shows how generous we in the United Kingdom are. On average, British citizens donate four times as much as Germans, seven times more than Italians and nine times as much as Spaniards. Fund-raising programmes on television, such as 'Sport Relief', 'Comic Relief' and 'Children in Need', show us the huge generosity of the British public when it comes to charitable giving. As Mr Weir said in his opening remarks, they give to the tune of £11 billion annually and huge sums of that come from a small pool of donors — the wealthiest in our society.

I believe it is a misjudgement for the Government to suggest that the wealthiest in our society are giving to charities because of tax reasons. It is wrong to say that. As Mr Bradley said, many individuals choose to give huge sums because they have been touched by a charity or because members of their family have had an illness for which they have received help from one charity or another. I think that that is the primary reason for many people to give; it is not that they will, necessarily, benefit individually. Indeed, the difference between collecting money through the tax system and individuals giving money and getting tax incentives for doing so is that the individual rather than Government can decide how and where their money is spent.

That leads me to the subject of the political difficulty with this proposal. How can the Conservative Prime Minister or Chancellor argue that this is compatible with their notion of the big society? David Cameron launched the Conservative manifesto two years ago this month. At that launch, he said that big government was not the answer to problems, whereas people outside government, such as charities, are the answer to many problems. The concept that voluntary and charity groups can deliver many of the services that government has traditionally delivered, and do so more cost-effectively, is right behind the big society, and I think that there is much merit in it. Large donors — large charitable givers — should be at the heart of big society and should not be those whom the Government tries to attack.

We have to ask why this is happening. It has happened because Conservatives are so worried about being labelled as the party for the rich that they have had to try to close what many have argued is the loophole of the rich using charitable giving to reduce their tax. However, as Members have pointed out, 45% of charitable donations come from only 7% of donors. That corresponds with other countries. The highest rates of charitable donations come where the wealthiest are given tax incentives to do it — the United States is another example — whereas, in countries where the rich are taxed to the highest degree, charitable donations are much lower.

I suggest that it is not particularly wise to suggest that we label as tax dodgers the individuals who are counted on and relied on by charities to ensure that they can deliver their services to communities and those most in need. The Government have made a mistake in doing that. As Members also said, if the Government are concerned that individuals are giving to what they have labelled as dodgy or illegitimate charities, action needs to be taken to ensure that that is not the case. The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland has done a lot of good work to ensure that all registered charities are legitimate, and that is the

position that the Government should take. They need to remove this threat of a cap. If they do not, they will have a policy that is not popular. It is not a simplification of the tax system; it is not small government; it is certainly not big society; and it is not common sense.

Mr Copeland: The 19th century novelist Dudley Warner once said:

"It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no one can sincerely try to help another without helping himself."

The irony of that statement should not be lost on the House. Although the words remain the same, the situation they have been applied to has changed the sentiment.

Let me begin by stating that my party believes that the coalition Government are absolutely right to seek to cut the colossal sums that some of the wealthiest people in the United Kingdom seek to offset against tax. Figures released by the Treasury last Monday prove that the rates of tax avoidance are far higher than it has previously been willing to admit. Indeed, some of the wealthiest, who pay no more than 10% tax, are taxed at a lower rate than their secretaries are.

No one doubts the dire circumstances in which the Labour Government left the nation's coffers and the seemingly near-impossible task of balancing the books. In 2010, the coalition Government inherited a record deficit from the previous Labour Government. In March, the UK Government borrowed more than £18 billion, which is more than it takes to run everything in Northern Ireland for a year. The total borrowings for the 2011-12 fiscal year came in at just below £126 billion and have added to the total debt of £1.0225 trillion. The fact that hundreds of millions of pounds of income tax is avoided each year by people using seemingly legal loopholes does not help matters.

The clergyman Robert South once said:

"If there be any truer measure of a man than by what he does, it must be by what he gives."

Wealth is not there to feed our egos, but to feed the hungry and to help people help themselves. Giving to charity may be altruistic or self-interested, and it may or may not do good. However, the present system draws in taxpayers' money in the absence of such accountability.

Without doubt, the Chancellor has a duty to control and oversee tax reliefs. Offshoring money in tax havens, offsetting contrived business debts, converting income to capital gains via private equity and scores of other sleight of hand methods need to be controlled and, where possible, stopped. However, by including charitable donations, the coalition Government have taken a sledgehammer to crack a walnut. In the way in which only they can, they have taken a good proposal and turned it into something that could have a devastating impact on organisations that seek to do good. When combined with the so-called pasty tax and the granny tax, that measure demonstrates that the Budget may have been devised in an environment that is seemingly detached from reality and the difficulties experienced by ordinary people.

The proposal to cap the amount of tax relief that people can receive on charitable donations at £50,000 has

the potential to significantly reduce charitable income, particularly for some of the largest and, therefore, best-established charities, including those that deal with issues such as cancer and ex-forces organisations. It could also have a devastating impact on our beleaguered university funding system, which has shouldered its fair share of the reduction in the deficit. That would deliver yet another kick in the face to the aspirations and opportunities of our young people, who are being asked to pay for past fiscal irresponsibilities to which they were not party. The measure also has the effect of potentially demoralising genuine philanthropists by branding them as tax dodgers. Some of the donors who signed a protest letter against the Budget are entirely selfless, shy, retiring and generous and are ready to support unpopular and radical causes with no conceivable payback.

The coalition Government have, quite rightly, moved to take the least well-off in society out of the tax system by raising personal allowances. Yet, at the same time, they are taking away from them, by significantly limiting the resources that charities will have at their disposal.

The Tory Party MP Zac Goldsmith perhaps summed up the reaction to the measure perfectly when he said that if Ministers did not produce a:

"more intelligent measure which deals with the loopholes",

they would be remembered as the Government that "destroyed the charities sector".

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

Mr Copeland: I thank you very much for your time.

Mr Hamilton: I am happy to make the winding-up speech on this debate, which was proposed by Mr Weir and to which my colleague Mr Ross was a signatory. It is right that, during a fairly brief debate, the Assembly has had the opportunity to put forward its concerns about this attack on charitable giving, which we share with many in Northern Ireland and across the United Kingdom. It is only right that we have had that opportunity and that we can reflect those concerns.

1.15 pm

A constant theme throughout the debate has been the real generosity across the United Kingdom. Mr Weir put a tag on that when he said that £11 billion has been raised by charities in the United Kingdom alone. That is a colossal amount of money that is given each and every year to charities across our country. Within that cohort, the Northern Ireland people are exceptionally generous. Mr Ross pointed out that for events like Sport Relief, Comic Relief and Children in Need, every year you see that the tally that is raised in Northern Ireland far exceeds our population share in the United Kingdom. So, you see that our people are exceptionally generous.

A colleague, another member of my party who is here, told me a story one time about how he was acting as a treasurer for a committee that was raising money in his church. His church was allied to a church in Kent, England, in the leafy suburbs of London. It is known as the stockbroker belt and is somewhere you would think there was a lot of money. He said that the donations in the envelopes that came from the people from Northern Ireland far exceeded those from

the people from that place in Kent. That is fairly anecdotal evidence that people in Northern Ireland are exceptionally generous, but we can see it backed up by the money raised for events like Children in Need.

As others have mentioned, the closing of this loophole will probably not affect a lot of small, local and perhaps even church-based charities in Northern Ireland. Indeed, there may not be that many people in Northern Ireland who are going to be hit by the closure of this loophole. Many would like to be in the position where they could give away £50,000 or 25% of their income, but the reality in Northern Ireland is that there probably is not the degree of wealth to do that. However, we have seen, experienced and benefitted from philanthropists, to put a collective noun on the people involved. Perhaps that has been more through the big global or UK-wide charities, where we see some benefit here for people in Northern Ireland directly.

Mr Copeland mentioned universities, and I think of the late Allen McClay, whose generosity allowed a new school of pharmacy to be built at Queen's. There has also been a new investment in libraries, and we saw Mr O'Reilly donating to the brand new library at Queen's. So, we have seen the level of philanthropy that can make a real difference, particularly in our universities and our colleges.

Others have quoted the fact that some 45% of money given to charity comes from 7% of donors, which shows the extent to which we are dependent on philanthropists for charitable donations. The fact that around eight or nine out of 10 philanthropists are saying that they are going to reconsider the amounts that they are giving because of the closure of the loophole should fill us all with some dread about what the impact will be, whether it is on universities, cancer charities or charities for ex-servicemen, which Mr Copeland also mentioned.

The closure of the loophole could not come at a worse time for charities. Even in these difficult times, £1.1 billion has been raised in the UK over the past year. However, that number is under attack simply as a consequence of the downturn that we are in, because people are questioning everything that they are doing and everything that they are spending money on, including charities. So, this could not come, as Mr Cree said, at a worse time for charities in the United Kingdom.

This measure seems to be somewhat contrary, as Mr Ross pointed out, to the Government's flagship policy of growing a big society. We want charities to step into the breach and do more. Everybody in this House will subscribe to the argument that charities can often deliver public services that we are responsible for in the Assembly better because they have much better contacts in the community and a much better grasp of the subject than any institution or organisation that government can create. The Government have pushed the policy of a big society verbally, but a lot of the things that they have been doing have been contrary to it. There is no greater contradiction than the closing of this loophole or tax relief.

As Mr Bradley pointed out in his comments, the work that charities are doing is saving government in the United Kingdom and government in Northern Ireland money. It is exceptionally difficult to quantify the contribution that charities make day in and day out by saving us money

through the services that they deliver and the support that they give.

So, the measure not only seems contrary to the Government's flagship policy of a big society, but it seems to be attacking their own interests, in that we are quite probably going to see a lot of charities that deliver services across the United Kingdom coming to government, whether that is central government or local government, and saying, "We have had a reduction in the money that we bring in through charitable giving, in part because of the closure of this tax relief loophole, and we now need support from government." Therefore, it becomes a vicious circle rather than a virtuous one.

Judith Cochrane and others mentioned a perception about some of those who give to charity, and I think that everybody would accept that not everyone gives money for altruistic reasons. Some give to charities that are in their business's interest, and others give for reasons of corporate social responsibility, perhaps to take away from the bad look of some of their company's activities and make it look good by giving a lot of money to charity. Frankly, I do not care where the money comes from or for what reason, as long as it continues to come in large volumes.

There is a perception, cultivated by Her Majesty's Government's spokesmen, particularly those in the Treasury, that a lot of people dodge tax and give money to false charities or charities that are in their personal interest. If that is the case and the reason for closing the loophole, the loophole should be closed. As Mr Copeland said, a sledgehammer should not be taken to crack the nut. If the problem is that people are giving money to false charities, shut down those false charities, but do not attack all charities, including the good ones doing excellent work across our country.

A major problem with the policy is that the Government are trotting out as an excuse for it that people are exploiting a loophole by giving to false charities. It may be legitimate to want to close that loophole, but they should not remove people's ability to get tax relief on charitable donations. I appreciate that the Government have a laser-like focus on deficit reduction, at the expense of all other arguments that might be put forward. Given that they have to reduce the debt that they inherited, that is fine. However, whether it is the pasty tax, the granny tax or now shutting down charitable donations, they just do not seem to care what they target to achieve that objective. We hear stories that these ideas have been sitting in the Treasury for, in some cases, decades and are being brought out to the current Chancellor, who slavishly adopts them because they suit his purpose of trying to reducing the deficit at breakneck speed.

Closing a loophole in the tax system is no bad thing. I do not think that anybody here wants people to be exploiting tax loopholes for their own ends. There is no argument for that. An annual cat-and-mouse game takes place: highly paid lawyers and accountants versus HMRC. Every year, that is corrected by a Finance Bill, only for those highly paid lawyers and accountants to find another loophole to exploit. The process goes on and on. By all means, the Government should close all those loopholes, but the message from everyone in the House is that tax relief on charitable giving is altogether different. Although the Government's aim might be to target the small percentage who give to so-called false

charities, the result will be that millions suffer. The message going out loud and clear from the Assembly to Her Majesty's Treasury and Government is that we appreciate the work that charities do. Everybody here is grateful for what they do across Northern Ireland each and every day. We do not want that good work, which helps and supports what we in government are trying to do, to be curtailed by the closing of a tax loophole.

I am pleased to have been able to make the winding-up speech and grateful for the support from all parties in the Chamber who contributed. I thank everybody for their contribution and hope, as other Members said, that the Treasury will hear our voice added to the thousands on thousands of others asking it to think again, because its proposal will be hugely detrimental to the charities doing such good work across the United Kingdom.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses concern at the proposals by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to limit tax relief on large charitable donations; believes that this could have a devastating impact on charities; and calls on Her Majesty's Government to abandon this approach.

Private Members' Business

Tourism: "The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming"

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. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mrs D Kelly: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to support and encourage Tourism Ireland's plans for "The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming" in 2013, which will promote Ireland as a tourism destination to 70 million people worldwide; and further calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to engage with the Irish Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to ensure that the benefit from these plans is derived on an all-island basis and that the Derry/Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 celebrations are included as an integral attraction.

I am very pleased to move the motion on behalf of the SDLP. For a relatively small country, Ireland — North and South — has contributed much to the world through literature, poetry, music and sport. Over 70 million people worldwide claim Irish heritage, which is why "The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming" should be embraced here in the North. We should celebrate our achievements and showcase everything that we have to be proud of, be that our beautiful natural heritage found at the Giant's Causeway, our vibrant cities of Belfast and Derry, which are in contrast to our peaceful and green townlands across the North, the shore land around Lough Neagh, and, of course, the recent commemorations and successful showcasing of the Titanic story. We have invested so much in developing the Titanic as a tourist attraction and a symbol of manufacturing to be proud of, so why not promote it to a stage of over 70 million people?

In 2011, an estimated £368 million was spent in the North by overseas visitors, with 1.5 million of them choosing to stay overnight, which, of course, has a positive impact on the hospitality industry. With 2012 proving to be a successful year so far, with the Titanic project, the return of MTV to Belfast, the forthcoming Irish Open in Portrush and the opening of the Giant's Causeway visitors' centre, we, as public representatives with the interests of all our constituents at the core of our duties, should do all we can to ensure that the tourism wave that the North is now riding on continues to grow and develop.

"The Gathering" and all that it entails can lead to future events, investment and tourism inflow. It is a project not to be dismissed, as some people have done, but one to recognise and seize upon. The City of Culture 2013 will be a massive boost to our economy. It and the World Police and Fire Games can be even more successful than originally anticipated if taken as part of the homecoming celebrations on an all-island basis. We can combine our efforts to endorse the North as a viable tourist haven with the determination of the South to ensure that the homecoming is successful. The Irish Government are working hard to stimulate interest in the venture, with websites such as worldirish.com attracting thousands of visitors from around

the world to share stories of their homeland, which may result in them travelling home for the planned events.

Millions of people worldwide consider themselves to be Irish and have connections to not just the South but the North. Our diversity and differing traditions can be drawn together on the understanding that we are all connected by the island on which we live. Let me be clear: the homecoming does not have a nationalist agenda, which may be the understanding of some Members. Rather, the events that will be promoted include Galway's International Oyster and Seafood Festival and the Street Performance World Championship in Cork, alongside the promotion of Irish literature, music and sports.

Last week, the Irish President, Michael D Higgins, in an address to Magee College in Derry, said that North/South co-operation needs to be broadened and deepened to improve the quality of life for all on this island. He also said that, in times of austerity, North/South co-operation made sense in terms of economies of scale. The venture is important not only for those who wish to reclaim their Irish roots; it is imperative that we seize the chance to increase our employment opportunities for local residents. At September 2011, tourism and leisure jobs accounted for 8% of all employee jobs in the North. There is a very real possibility that we can increase that figure through not only the projects that are planned for 2012 but the many ventures that can be endorsed in 2013.

Unemployment stands at 7.2%, with 61,500 people claiming unemployment benefit. In February this year, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Arlene Foster, stated that her Department would make every effort to generate new employment opportunities. Therefore, it is astonishing that the Minister will not grasp this chance to promote this island, the North and local employment by actively encouraging and initiating discussions with the Minister in the South.

Her comments fly in the face of the recently stated intentions of her party leader, who said that it is no longer "them and us" and talked about shared heritage and history and how the commemorations that will be celebrated over the next decade will allow different traditions to be respected and different narratives to be heard among the clamour of voices from the past.

It is a sad part of our history that many people had to leave our country to seek employment.

1.30 pm

Mr Humphrey: Thanks very much to the Member for giving way. Does she agree that her utterances in the past few minutes do not suggest a united and uniform approach to the issue?

Mrs D Kelly: I do not think that you have been listening to what I have had to say. I really do not understand what you are saying. It is your party that seems to be divided on your true intentions and on whether you actually want to have a shared history and build a shared future, reconcile people and listen to the aspirations of others.

It is a sad part of the history of Ireland that many people had to leave the country to seek employment abroad. No event contributed more to the dispersal of our people than the famine. As a result, this celebratory event will encourage

the many people abroad who are aware that they have Irish heritage to visit their ancestral homeland and learn more of their history. There are also people who left our country as recently as 20 or 30 years ago as a result of the Troubles. This is a prime chance to display to the world the work that has been done here to achieve and sustain peace. I am sure that those who left during the Troubles would seize the chance to visit a peacetime Ireland.

I will finish with quotations from some people who are regarded as ambassadors. The actor Liam Neeson stated:

"Being Irish and a citizen of the world, has made me truly appreciate Irish culture, music and history. Whether you're first, second generation Irish or even with no connection to Ireland, you should visit in 2013 for a unique experience."

The event has also been endorsed by the actor Stephen Rea, who stated:

"Ireland has contributed enormously to the world through its literature, drama, poetry and music. Our country has enriched lots of people's lives. The Gathering 2013 is a chance to give back. And celebrate the achievements of our small island on a worldwide stage."

People will recognise those names worldwide and be happy with their endorsements of the event known as "the Homecoming."

It is, after all, a tourism initiative. That is all that it is — a tourism initiative. We ask the DUP to reconsider its position and to listen carefully and without prejudice to the rationale, aims and objectives of "the Homecoming". We ask it to seize the event as an opportunity to demonstrate its credentials in moving beyond "them and us" and to make decisions that are in the best interests of all the people whom we serve and represent so that we build a better future that says to the world that we will put the interests of our people first, seize employment opportunities and create a better future for this generation and generations to come.

Mr Moutray: All of us in the House will agree that we cannot overestimate the importance to our economy of developing and growing our tourist industry. When I say "our economy" and "our tourist industry", I am referring to Northern Ireland's.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Moutray: The motion is certainly tourist-orientated. However, it is a very green motion, and I am not surprised, given who tabled it. This is a case of the SDLP using tourism as an excuse to peddle its all-island agenda.

To my mind, next year's "An Irish Homecoming" will be hugely sentimental and very Irish in a way that I cannot and will not really identify with. It is a sort of "Mother Ireland" concept that conjures up images of leprechauns, shillelaghs, pints of Guinness, donkeys, dancing at the crossroads and thatched cottages. In other the words, it is the sort of stuff that we see far too much of in retail outlets at our airports. A quick glance at the list of venues and events related to "the Homecoming" reveals that almost all of them are in the Republic of Ireland. The initiative is being driven by the Irish Government, and it is being geared primarily towards boosting tourism figures in the Irish Republic in an effort to strengthen the ailing economy. Indeed, that is the

overwhelming impression that you get from the promotional literature and from statements by the Irish Tourism Minister and others.

I have no problem with the Irish Government developing their tourist base, and I wish them well for their homecoming initiative. Indeed, some tourists might cross the border into Northern Ireland, and we may benefit from that. There are times when it is right and proper that our tourism Minister will want to co-operate with her Irish counterpart, and if such co-operation will be to the benefit of the Northern Ireland economy or the broader UK economy, that is fine.

I am not the biggest fan of Tourism Ireland but I accept that it does some good work. I pay tribute to the role that its chief executive, Niall Gibbons, is playing in promoting Northern Ireland, particularly in relation to 12 July. However, Tourism Ireland's goal is the promotion of the island of Ireland, and the logical outcome of that is that its main focus will be on the Republic. We must concentrate on marketing our own distinct Northern Ireland image. That has to be our priority. We have plenty of work to do and plenty of opportunities to seize.

During the long hard years of the Troubles, we fell so far behind for obvious reasons. We have so much ground to make up, but I am glad to say that we are making up that ground. This is indeed our time, our place. Tourism estimates for 2011 were published a couple of weeks ago, and they are very encouraging. Last year saw a 20% increase in the amount of money spent by overseas visitors. One and a half million overseas visitors spent at least one night in Northern Ireland, which was up 4% on 2010.

That is all very encouraging. It is only the end of April and there is already a real buzz about the Province. The Titanic visitor centre, Titanic Belfast, has attracted worldwide interest in this centenary year, and I have every confidence that it will not only prove the naysayers wrong, but it will exceed all expectations. It has been described by the travel publication 'Fodor's Ireland' as being the world's biggest tourism story in 2012. In a couple of months, the brand new visitor centre will open at the Giant's Causeway, and we will have the Irish Open golf tournament at Royal Portrush for the first time since 1947. Plans are also well advanced for the celebration of Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant, and, like many others, I look forward to the Orange demonstration that will be held here at the end of September. Next year, Londonderry will be the United Kingdom City of Culture, and, indeed, the motion refers to that important year in the life of our second city.

Mr S Anderson: The Member may have referred to it already, but does he agree that what we have before us today is nothing but a one-sided green agenda and motion? Mrs Kelly said in recent comments in the local press that she was totally against the obelisk being erected in Portadown to commemorate the signing of the Ulster covenant in Portadown, and she is querying why planners gave planning permission for it. Does the Member agree that that proves that Mrs Kelly and the motion are both coming forward with a one-sided agenda?

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

Mr Moutray: I agree entirely with my colleague, but it is nothing new for Mrs Kelly to attack something that is

legitimately done when she has not expressed any concerns about an IRA monument in Craigavon, which has never had planning permission.

Returning to the topic, 2013 will be a challenging and exciting time for the city, and I encourage my colleague Arlene Foster and her officials to work closely with the Culture Minister and her officials to maximise the potential not only for Londonderry but for the Province as a whole. All the key players from Londonderry need to be involved. It is vital that all traditions that form the history and fabric of the maiden city are included in the various events being planned for next year. The plans must be broadly based and inclusive if 2013 is to be a success.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I oppose the motion.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht thábhachtach seo. I welcome the opportunity to participate in this important debate, but, at the outset, I must say that I am a wee bit disappointed at the tone that has been taken and the way in which it has been handled by Members from both sides of the House. However, it should be no surprise to anybody in the House that such a thing would happen.

Throughout the past four months, we have heard quite a lot about the ni2012 campaign. It is planned that some £7 million will be spent promoting it, and it is only right and proper that adequate funding is spent on promoting our growing tourism industry. We are in the midst of a global recession, but visitor numbers across the world are increasing. The number of people looking to come into Europe from places such as China and India is growing all the time, and it is important that the Executive are to the fore in trying to attract visitors to this part of Ireland.

It is also important that all options that are open to increase our visitor numbers and our tourism revenue are explored. The DUP has claimed that this is a green motion to try to expedite some sort of united Ireland. It is nothing of the sort, and I think that to say that it is so is a bit of a red herring. It is not a green motion, and "The Gathering" is not a green initiative. It is not a scheme that has been devised by the Dublin Government.

Mrs D Kelly: Does the Member agree that if nationalists on Derry City Council had taken the same attitude as Members across the Floor in the DUP, Derry would not be in the position to celebrate the UK City of Culture next year and that the people would be denied all the opportunities that will flow from that?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Flanagan: I am at a loss as to what the Member is getting at, so I will not bother responding.

"The Gathering" is an initiative that was started by the Scottish Government in 2009 to try to encourage visitors with their roots in Scotland to come back to Scotland. What is being run by the Dublin Government is basically a carbon copy of that. Across the world, people see their roots as being in Ireland, and they see their ancestors as being Irish. Most of those people left this island before partition. So the heritage of being Irish that they speak about reflects everybody, regardless of whether you perceive yourself to be a unionist or a nationalist.

I come from and represent a border constituency.

Mr Allister: If what the Member says is correct, will he point to one item on the official website that makes mention of the Ulster-Scots heritage or anything that is not as vividly described by Mr Moutray?

Mr Flanagan: To be honest to Mr Allister, I have not scrolled through the entire website to see the various events that are taking place. If the Member has an opportunity or an event that he wishes to bring forward, as others have done, he should bring it to Fáilte Ireland, which is running the event, and I am sure that it will happily facilitate it on the website.

I come from a border constituency and can clearly see how such an initiative, if worked out properly, would benefit the entire local community and economy. In my area, Belleek Pottery welcomes up to 200,000 visitors each year. Most of those visitors come from tour operators that are based in the South, and the people fly into Dublin Airport. Their only trip into the North is the 70 yds they take across the border to come into Fermanagh. Greater collaboration with tourism activities in the South, therefore, would provide an economic benefit to our citizens and to the businesses that we represent. We need to ensure that much more is done to attract the visitors who come to this island to come North to experience our unique product offering.

Members highlighted the different cultural aspects here that may not be so prominent in the South. It is important that those are marketed to people across the world who might be interested in seeing them.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Member for giving way. Is the Member aware of what work Fáilte Ireland has been doing to encourage the people who fly into Dublin to come to Northern Ireland? My understanding is that it remains the case that only one in eight people who fly into the Republic travel to Northern Ireland. What is Fáilte Ireland doing to rectify that?

Mr Flanagan: Unfortunately, I cannot speak for Fáilte Ireland, and I am not au fait with what happens in Dublin Airport, but I can give the Member an example of what happens at the airport at Knock. The airport managing authorities there are working hard to try to promote the north-west of this island as a tourism destination for visitors. The Member will be aware that Tourism Ireland is responsible for marketing the North of Ireland and the island of Ireland abroad. It is doing a good job promoting this island to visitors, and we have seen increases in visitor numbers in recent years, which is very welcome. We are still not back to where we were in 2007 when things were at their peak, but we are going in the right direction. It is important that we continue that trend.

1.45 pm

Many people come to this island to experience a wide range of activities. A recent conference in Belfast heard that promoting the North separate to the rest of the island was confusing for potential visitors, and there is some merit in that. However, the danger of promoting the North completely separately from the rest of the island does not only lie in the potential confusion of visitors. When somebody is looking at a website at home for places to visit, particularly those from places like Australia or America where there is quite a length journey, they will mostly come here for 10 days or a fortnight. Many will find it difficult to find enough activities

or events to go to to justify staying here for a week or a fortnight. Therefore, there needs to be more work done there, and I urge the Minister to continue on that path.

Mrs Overend: Tourism is fundamentally important to our economy, and it is vital that we make the best use of Northern Ireland's potential in that area. We have debated in the House the importance of the decade of centenaries, such as the covenant and the Easter rising, as well as speaking on the Titanic, which is something that we are all rightly proud of. My party has also tabled Matters of the Day on our golfing success and the Oscar that was won by the Northern Irish film, 'The Shore'. We should all be keenly aware of the value of tourism, combined with the Irish Open, other signature projects and the World Police and Fire Games, in promoting economic growth and in working towards the goal of a shared future for Northern Ireland over this Assembly's mandate and, indeed, further. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) figures from earlier this month show that improvements are evident in our tourism industry, with money spent by overseas tourists increasing 20% on last year. We must work to sustain and build on that result, moving forward in order to reach and even exceed our Programme for Government targets, which were so badly missed in the 2007-2011 period.

Today's motion tabled by the SDLP calls on the Executive:

"to support and encourage Tourism Ireland's plans for 'The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming' in 2013".

I have looked closely at "the Irish Homecoming" and, undoubtedly, it will play a key role in attempts to restore the troubled Irish economy, and we all wish them well as they seek to do so. It is estimated that in the similar celebration that was held in Scotland throughout 2009, £53.7 million of additional tourism revenue was generated: 95,000 visitors were influenced to travel to Scotland as a result, and £154 million of positive global media was generated by the PR campaign.

It is clear that the potential for the Republic of Ireland is huge. However, one simply has to look at the schedule of events planned to realise that "the Homecoming" is an initiative from the Irish Government for the benefit of the Republic of Ireland. The SDLP's motion attempts to bring the UK City of Culture into the equation. However, I felt that Mrs Kelly's contribution did not focus primarily on that part of the motion. The reality is that Londonderry is not part of "the Irish Homecoming" of 2013. Some Members in the House fail to recognise that Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are in competition: we are in competition for foreign direct investment; we compete to attract jobs; and our tourism industries are competitors.

Rather than debate linking our tourism plan to an Irish Government initiative that lasts for one year, would it not be much more relevant to discuss the fact that Northern Ireland does not have a strategy that is dedicated solely to the fundamentally important sector of tourism? A draft strategy was produced in 2010. It was an industry-led document, drawn up by the industry and given to Arlene Foster to bring to the Executive. The Minister indicated recently that the draft strategy has been delayed, given that we are now in changed economic times. However, we are two years on from

the publication of the draft, and the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee has yet to see a finalised document.

Tourism is a key driver of the economy, and the economy is the number-one priority of the Executive. It follows, therefore, that an ambitious strategy in that area should be a prerequisite as we seek to rebalance and rebuild the Northern Ireland economy. The missed opportunity is made worse by the fact that Northern Ireland's tourism sector has so much potential, as I outlined earlier. Of course we need to capitalise on the increased number of tourists visiting the Republic of Ireland in 2013, and I believe that we are well placed to do so, given the many high-profile attractions that we have. Despite what a Sinn Féin colleague said, I believe that Northern Ireland could certainly welcome people for a week or a fortnight, and they would have plenty of things to do.

The Ulster Unionist Party has confidence in our tourism potential. As I am sure the Minister will outline, we will continue to work with the Irish Government in matters of mutual interest. However, in conclusion, I say that what is more important than encouraging Tourism Ireland's plans for the Republic of Ireland is to encourage its plans for Northern Ireland, and for the Minister to bring forward the tourism strategy that is sadly lacking.

Mr Lunn: I support the motion. I see this as a real opportunity to join in a unique tourist initiative. I hope that the Minister, even at this late stage, and the Tourist Board will recognise the potential of "The Gathering" and capitalise on it.

The Republic of Ireland Government are, I believe, putting a total of about €16 million into this venture. It is a very serious and well planned initiative to attract anything up to 300,000 visitors and emigrants back to Ireland during the year 2013. It is targeted at 12 specific events. However, there are actually 42 events in total on the complete list. We have specific events here that could and should be linked in. People have referenced Londonderry/Derry as the City of Culture, but there are pipe band championships, the Highland Games and the whole Ulster-Scots connection. If the Ulster-Scots agencies are not looking at this in a favourable way, I wonder what they are about. If you want to promote Ulster-Scots culture and heritage —

Mr D Bradley: Does the Member agree that the DUP and the UUP have displayed an astounding myopia around this festival and that it is indeed an excellent vehicle for the promotion of tourism here and one that we should piggyback onto to ensure that tourist numbers are increased beyond that envisaged already?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Lunn: I will not get into insulting the DUP and the Ulster Unionists just yet. However, I agree with what the Member said.

Mr Allister mentioned the Ulster-Scots connection and the lack of reference to it on the Fáilte Ireland website. Why should it mention it? It is up to the Ulster-Scots connection to promote themselves. If that means co-operating with authorities in the South, on an all-Ireland basis, why should they not —

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: I have given way enough.

There are 70 million people worldwide who either claim Irish ancestry or are first- or second-generation emigrants from these shores. That includes a huge number who come from Northern Ireland. There is no reason why we should distance ourselves from this. I think it was Mr Humphrey, or maybe his colleague next to him, Mr Anderson, who suggested that our Tourist Board is some kind of stand-alone operation. It just cannot be —

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: No.

It really cannot be that way. This island is too small. This event should be promoted jointly; of course it should.

Look at the Northern Ireland connections in the USA and Australia for evidence. Look at the musical connections — the Appalachian and bluegrass connections — that people from Lisburn are so keen to develop. Look at Alister McReynolds, and so on, and the various initiatives in Atlanta. That is to be applauded. Why not try to develop that through this initiative in the Republic?

The Minister, in her comments so far in answers to questions, has not really demonstrated a level of enthusiasm commensurate with a major tourism opportunity. On 23 November, she confirmed that there are no plans to mark "The Gathering". On 9 January, she said:

"We will capitalise on all the tourism initiatives running in 2013 to maximize visitor numbers".

On 31 January, she said:

"Any increase in tourism numbers to the island is to be welcomed and Northern Ireland is well placed to benefit as the initiative fits well with our plans for 2013 when Londonderry is the UK City of Culture".

That is fair enough, but it is hardly an enthusiastic or ringing endorsement, nor is it any commitment to co-operate or work with the Irish Government on this initiative. I encourage those who deal with these matters to invest in the project or to co-operate with Tourism Ireland or Fáilte Ireland to make sure that the benefits to the North are maximised. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say today. Hopefully, she will be a bit more progressive than her party's Members have been so far.

How can we claim to be serious about tourism and our heritage if we pass up an opportunity to become engaged in an all-Ireland project of this magnitude? I notice the experience of "the Homecoming Scotland 2009". It is fair to say that conclusions about the economic benefit were mixed, but there is no doubt about the number of people involved: 95,000 people came to Scotland, in some measure, because of the publicity around "the Homecoming". That is very revealing. I firmly believe that the Irish event will exceed that figure by several multiples. The figure of 300,000 is suggested, but there could be a lot more than that because the Irish diaspora — as we call it — is far more pronounced around the world than the Scottish one. I look forward to hearing from the Minister about that. I particularly look forward to nailing down the Ulster Unionist Party's view. My party will be supporting the motion; it is an opportunity too good to miss.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. Although there will be benefits for Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland's latest tourism initiative, it is important that we keep focused on promoting Northern Ireland as a premier tourist attraction across the world.

This year to date has been very exciting for Northern Ireland, not least with the 2012: Our time, Our place campaign. I commend the Enterprise Minister Arlene Foster for leading on this very positive and, to date, successful project. We look forward to many more events that are planned across the country this year and beyond. Also, 2013 will be a very special year, particularly with Londonderry celebrating its year as the UK City of Culture. It is important that we maximise the benefit locally for Northern Ireland throughout those key events and celebrations. I understand that the Apprentice Boys will be walking on 10 August in 2013, during the Fleadh Cheoil. My pronunciation of those words may not be correct: it is not my strongest point. There could be a clash of cultures, but we hope that we will all be singing from the same hymn sheet, or perhaps walking to the same tune.

The launch of the Titanic signature project, the recent Circuit of Ireland Rally with its worldwide television coverage and the up-and-coming Irish Open golf championship are just some examples of events and projects that have and will showcase Northern Ireland across the world. All those positive developments have helped to bring a great boost to the local economy. I certainly welcome recent confirmation of a 4% increase in overseas visitor spend in Northern Ireland in 2011. I look forward to seeing that figure grow in the near future. For too long, we did not sell Northern Ireland to the world; now we are beginning to change that, and this is something in which we can all share.

We need to ensure that we continue actively to promote and encourage greater tourism and economic activity, and I welcome the creation of the Northern Ireland Air Access initiative, which is a practical measure designed to improve and promote access to Northern Ireland and, indeed, the Republic of Ireland. Great potential exists, and I look forward to further developments.

I also commend the delegation led by the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment to the Middle East and India recently. I hope that we will see progress in getting a direct flight link established with the Middle East. That could be a key opening for significant links to be established with that important world market, and all those measures and developments prove that Northern Ireland is open for business.

Any initiative by the Republic of Ireland that will bring visitors directly or indirectly to Northern Ireland is to be welcomed. We need to continue to build on the excellent work of the Executive, DETI, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland. I am slightly concerned that this motion has more to do with politics than with the promotion of Northern Ireland or the Republic. That is why I oppose it.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and thank the Members who tabled it for bringing it to the House. The tourism outlook is good, as many stakeholders have already outlined, and it could be better. Last year, the North had a growth figure of 4%; the rest of Ireland had a figure of 7%.

The rest of the island is ahead of us in tourism, so we need to take advantage of the more developed tourism product on the rest of the island.

I think that that is a common sense approach and that it makes economic sense. "The Gathering" is a good tourism initiative and is quite similar to the event that was held in Scotland, which attracted 95,000 people, as Trevor Lunn, a Member from the Alliance Party, pointed out.

2.00 pm

The previous Member to speak said that any initiative that takes tourists to the North is to be welcomed. That is exactly what this initiative will do. Regardless of their politics, and given the present economic situation, I think that we have to look at things more and more through an economic prism as opposed to with political blinkers on. Unfortunately, that has been the approach from the other side of the House so far. So, we need to exploit this event for economic benefits.

There seems to be some focus on Derry in the motion and no mention of the north coast, so I take exception to that. On the north coast, of course, you have Bushmills, the Giant's Causeway, Carrick-a-Rede, Ballycastle, Rathlin and the glens. I will support the motion today, but I warn the Members that they should maybe include a reference to north Antrim the next time. *[Laughter.]*

With regard to a lack of a joined-up approach, the events that are outlined for "The Gathering" say to me that the Department has not engaged effectively enough with Departments in the rest of the island to try to ensure that we are included. Events in north Antrim, Derry, Craigavon and Belfast should be included, because thousands upon thousands of people will be going through the brochures. They will read the information and will see no mention of the events that are taking place in those places and others such as Belfast. That is an opportunity missed, it makes no economic sense to me, and it will reduce the number of tourists coming North, which is to be regretted.

Obviously, tourism is one of the green shoots of the economy, and the economic possibilities that will arise from it should not be underestimated. Ulster-Scots and Scots-Irish heritage was mentioned. The diaspora that exists in Australia, the US and across Europe includes those of Ulster-Scots and Scots-Irish heritage. Being part of this initiative will bring those people back to this country, so I do not understand why that is not being thrown into the mix, because it is quite obvious that they will be attracted back through this initiative.

Phil Flanagan, a Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, referred to a recent conference. Some media outlets picked up that the marketing can be confusing, because a number of people from places such as the United States who want to come to Ireland go through Dublin. Comments were made about Dublin Airport, and so forth, and I think that we, the Minister and the Department need to think more on an all-island basis, especially as the market comes to this island mainly through that airport.

There are also difficulties with the NIO's approach in that we cannot put in place a tourist waiver scheme to ensure that the same tourists from Asia who are going from North to South can go from South to North. A lot of issues arise

from a lack of an all-island approach, which has resulted in fewer tourists coming to the North and is doing us economic damage.

We have a huge tourism market throughout this island, particularly in the rest of the island. Not to take advantage of that is absolutely barmy. Trevor Lunn referred to the Minister saying that there were no plans to mark "The Gathering". I think that that is an opportunity missed. Tourists will be lost, which will harm economic growth. Anybody, particularly the public, can see that as well. I urge the Minister not to follow in the footsteps of her political colleagues who have spoken so far, to take the political blinkers off and to not miss this opportunity.

Mr Frew: Again, I find myself debating a motion that, having read it, I do not think really deserves to be in this Assembly. To me, it is a nothing motion. Of course, how could I ever support a motion on tourism that does not even mention the Giant's Causeway or north Antrim, as my colleague across the way said? It really is a shame of a motion on tourism, and I tut-tut when I see something on tourism that does not reflect the true meaning of Northern Ireland, the Giant's Causeway and north Antrim. That is a plug for my constituency.

I want to stay in this mindset, because there is so much self-defeatism from the Benches before me. Mr Flanagan represents Fermanagh and South Tyrone; a beautiful section of our Province, and somewhere you could certainly spend 10 days without any problem. Here he is, representing that area, and struggling to stay in Northern Ireland for 10 days. I find that a shame.

Other Members across the way say that we have to be involved with the Republic and stay under its wing; that this is how we will enhance things and make them better. Let me tell you this, folks: you are not representing your people very well when you talk in that way. You have your own constituencies, and you should be bringing them up and advertising them for what they are — jewels in the crown of Northern Ireland and this Province.

Let us not have any more self-defeatism; let us promote Northern Ireland for what it is. Let us promote Fermanagh as the holiday destination that it is — a place where you could spend 10 days without any problem whatsoever.

Mr Swann: Rather than promoting Fermanagh as a holiday destination, stick to promoting North Antrim.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Frew: I thank you, Principal Deputy Speaker, for that extra minute. I might just spend all of it speaking of North Antrim, if the Member wishes. He knows all too well how much we promote North Antrim, how much we work and how much the DUP has worked of late to encourage business and to get a successful planning application for a golf course on the north coast. He will know that only too well.

The motion is flawed. It mentions Tourism Ireland's plans for "The Gathering", when it is Fáilte Ireland that is promoting, working at and managing this at the behest of the Republic's Government. It is fine for Fáilte Ireland to do that, but remember that this initiative was born to assist business and the economy of the Republic of Ireland.

Dr McDonnell: Does the Member accept that perhaps we could do with a bit of assistance for business and tourism up here?

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for his intervention. Yes, but I do not see how a factory opening up in Cork or Limerick will help South Belfast one bit. That is why we have to make sure that we glean as much benefit from this as possible without getting involved. Why would we get involved, spend money and promote this when we are going to benefit from it anyway? It is clear and it is a given that there is a certain amount of cross-border footfall from the Republic. We accept that and will gladly take it, but we should not get involved in a scheme that will initially help business and tourism in the Republic, that will have no direct benefit to us and that will make us lose our focus on the events that we will be hosting in 2013. That is —

Mr Flanagan: Does the Member agree that there would be merit in the Minister or NITB approaching Fáilte Ireland to see whether it could include on its website a list of events or activities that are on in the North? It may not actually cost the Tourist Board or the Department any money. I think that approach should be made.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for his intervention, but, again, that is not what this motion is about. It is self-defeating to think that our Ministers, including this Minister, are not engaged across the table with Ministers in the Republic on issues such as this and on issues that purely promote Northern Ireland. When we send Ministers down to the Republic, we expect them to represent their people — Northern Irish people — to try to make sure that we promote Northern Ireland and get the best benefit for Northern Ireland in any situation. Why would we want to promote Galway, Limerick, Dublin and everywhere else, in either business or tourism, if we do not get a direct input into it?

My time is nearly up, and I have not got through even half of what I wanted to say or half of what I wanted to say about North Antrim. However, you can be assured that we in Northern Ireland will retain the focus on what will be Londonderry UK City of Culture, a year-long celebration for Northern Ireland. We also have the World Police and Fire Games, which will be vital to the world of sport and tourism in this Province.

I have no problem with our gaining benefit from either the Republic's footfall or its tourism strategies. However, let us not plough into the middle of this and lose focus from what should be Northern Ireland's tourism industry.

Mr Swann: I warn the House that I feel another advertisement for north Antrim coming on. I cannot start my contribution without following on from what the Alliance Party Members said. They were very keen to see where we were standing. It is obvious from Trevor's intervention: we should be piggybacking — I think that I am quoting there — on what the Republic of Ireland is doing. If all that this place has achieved in the promotion of tourism for Northern Ireland is the ability to piggyback on the Government of the Republic of Ireland, it has sadly failed in yet another escapade. Co-operate maybe, but "piggyback" was the word that you used.

We have to learn to stand alone. That is what this place is about: the promotion of Northern Ireland and its tourism. I have to come back to this point, which I know has already been mentioned. Mr Phil Flanagan said that he could not

spend 10 or 14 days in Northern Ireland. Given that you are a public representative for Fermanagh, which is a fantastic area for tourism, I think that you, sir, should get back and look at your own tourism brochures. Your colleague is from up there in north Antrim, so if you want to come up to our end of the country, we will show you how to participate in tourism for a fortnight.

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): So, where are you going to show him?

Mr Swann: Kells, as usual, and probably my constituency office.

Mr Flanagan: The Member told me to go and look at the tourism brochures for Fermanagh. However, if he does the same, he will see that the only event is a show in County Tyrone.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Swann: I am sure that the Minister will correct you. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr Swann: I am sure that the Minister, who represents the same constituency, will correct you. Again, there is a failing there if that is all that we can do.

Given the amount of funding given to and the emphasis placed on tourism by the Irish Government, the Northern Ireland Executive must be at the top of their game when promoting our tourism in our own country. I use the word "our" quite happily: this is our country and our tourism. When we talked about the decade of centenaries, I know that Members in this place tried to remove the word "our" and replace it with the word "the". They wanted us to talk about "the history", "the culture" and "the tourism of this country". That is wrong. We are all here to represent our own constituencies and our areas, which have fantastic tourism potential.

We look forward to the decade of centenaries, which has already started. We have already celebrated the 100th anniversary of the launch of the Titanic, which generated positive media and increased visitor numbers to Northern Ireland. We will soon have the Irish Open and the World Police and Fire Games. We also have signature projects such as the Causeway Coast and the glens. The new Causeway visitors' centre, which I visited recently along with our MEP, Jim Nicholson, is opening soon and will be a fantastic tourist attraction for the whole of north Antrim. We have asked for something to be done in Bushmills and the surrounding area. The SDLP has put forward a motion calling for funding to promote "The Gathering" on an all-Ireland basis. However, perhaps it could look at getting a wee bit of funding to regenerate Bushmills town, given the number of people who will be travelling from the visitors' centre to the Causeway distillery. I have already asked the Minister about whether he would be willing to look at that.

Mr McKay: The Member outlined some of the great tourist attractions that we have in north Antrim. However, there is no point in having such great tourist attractions if people are not going to come and see them. One of the issues that people along the north coast, such as B&B owners, etc, have raised with me is that tourists are coming to

likes of the Giant's Causeway and Ballycastle, etc, for only one day. The fact is that, when you go on to Google and search for websites about Ireland, references to the Giant's Causeway, and so forth, do not come up, and that is where we are losing out on tourists. We need to market this on an all-island basis, because that is what tourists are looking for.

Mr Swann: You will agree with me that we need to market tourism principally in our areas in Northern Ireland.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. Is it not a failing of Tourism Ireland, which is there to promote all-island tourism in Northern Ireland and the Republic, if it cannot promote the Causeway and north Antrim in the way that it should?

Mr Swann: I agree fully. I could honestly talk about north Antrim all day, but I want to get back to the motion. An awful lot of the Members who spoke veered away from the motion, and I think that we should get back to it. The most significant element of the motion for us in the Ulster Unionist Party is the reference to the UK City of Culture celebrations, which should be promoted as a Northern Ireland tourist event.

The Executive have already put an extra £12.36 million into the UK City of Culture of Londonderry, which should include enough marketing material to promote that city. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment can back me up on that figure when she speaks later.

2.15 pm

Mr Frew said that it is a year-long celebration. The UK City of Culture has one of the most fantastic tourism legacies of events that are promoted as UK events. Liverpool is still maximising its status as UK City of Culture, which took place as far back as 2008. There is potential there if we invest the money correctly in Northern Irish tourism potential. There is a lot more to get out of that.

One thing that we are missing out on is the Scots-Irish connection, which has fantastic tourism potential if we look towards America. We should develop something specific. A Northern Ireland Tourist Board paper titled 'Genealogy and Roots Tourism' is available. Our tourism Minister should look at developing the link and promoting Northern Ireland so that people can come from America and Canada to look for their roots and genealogy in Northern Ireland and not have to concentrate on somewhere in another jurisdiction.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. "The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming" is set to be a unique tourist event in the Irish calendar in 2013. It is all about attracting here anyone who has a connection with Ireland, be it through family, sport, music or just a love of the country. It will be similar to the homecoming in Scotland in 2009. What makes this event unique is that it will involve the entire country, from the top in business, music, sport, media, advertising, and so on, right down to the festivals and events in towns and villages across the Twenty-six Counties.

Some of the events are already household names. Some Members have said that the calendar of events has been deliberately put out to play to an all-Ireland agenda. Let me remind them of just some of the 50-odd flagship events, some of which have been around for years, perhaps for longer than some Members have been alive. They include the Rose of Tralee, the All-Ireland hurling and Gaelic football

finals, Kinsale Arts Week and the Galway Races. The organisers are saying that, no matter what your interest, it can and will be catered for some time, some place in the year's calendar of events.

A project board has been set up already, and it has come up with a unique and cost-effective way of promoting the events to a worldwide audience through a voluntary council of champions. It is made up of individuals who are recognised worldwide and have the contacts and networks to get support and help with fundraising. All of that is totally voluntary.

Ireland in 2013 will be the place to be. We already have the Titanic project, and we are going to open the Causeway centre this year. New events will include the City of Culture in Derry, the All-Ireland Fleadh, the Irish Open, the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race and the World Police and Fire Games. That is a great calendar of events to look forward to. It could generate up to £140 million for the economy and provide much-needed income and business for the hospitality sector across the whole island.

In Southern Ireland, the tourist and hospitality sector is a €5 billion industry that employs in the region of 180,000 people. It is now down to the two Governments to show leadership and show the world that the island of Ireland is open for business. Here, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment welcomed the new £2 million Northern Ireland air access initiative, which will offer competitive fares and ease of access. Another welcome part of the scheme is the inclusion of the ferry companies, which will increase visitor numbers. The Irish Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport has confirmed that the special 9% VAT rate for tourism and leisure activities will continue into next year. I believe that both Ministers have, in their own way, shown support for the incoming historic year.

It will not be the Ministers who will sell this tourist initiative; rather, it will be the quantity and quality of events and the visitor numbers that will make 2012 and 2013 a success. The City of Culture has already been made an integral attraction. It is a global event, thanks to everyone involved in it.

If anyone looking to go on holidays were in here listening to some of the things that are being said, they would pack their bags and go home. As for some of the Members talking about the South of Ireland's programme for tourist events —

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr McMullan: No, I will not. I am still talking, so sit you down. *[Laughter.]*

Some Members said that the programme of events in the South of Ireland is just for its own agenda. Unless you have been in cloud cuckoo land or sitting up a tree for years, what do you expect that country to do? It is the same here; we are promoting our own tourism. However, as the Minister said, if The Homecoming is there, we must see where we can connect with it and see what we can get from the overspill from it.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way now?

Mr McMullan: I am nearly finished. I will give way.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he agree that he could spend 10 days in Fermanagh?

Mr McMullan: I do not doubt that I would be very welcome, but, equally, I could spend 10 days in Ballymena, and that is something else. If you could spend 10 days in Ballymena, you could spend it anywhere. We have to stop being parochial and making it an issue of us and them. If there is an event in the South of Ireland that will overspill here, we will get the benefits and vice versa. We talk about the Irish Open golf tournament, but where has it been for years? This is the first time that it has been here. As far as putting this country up as a place for donkeys and leprechauns is concerned, do you realise how many millions of pounds tourism brings into this country? You are the silly one for even trying to turn that around.

Dr McDonnell: By this stage, I am nearly sorry that I set out to speak, because this is a very sad situation where people are turning a serious issue into a bit of codology; it has been turned into little better than a schoolyard squabble. This is what happens when you have people who do not know much about how tourism works or how it could work: tourism is about persuading people from other places to spend time, and perhaps a bit of money, here and enjoy it at the same time; it is not about caging people somewhere of our choice for a week or 10 days or whatever we might decide. However, that seems to be the attitude of some. I despair when I hear some of the attitudes that have resonated around the Chamber. Generally, when we discuss tourism, I despair because, frankly, we do not have a clue. I humbly suggest that we are a liability when it comes to creating tourism in the North. Tourists have a choice about where they spend their money.

Chair, I find it difficult with the chattering in the background from a sedentary position. Is it possible to deal with it?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: It is not something new.

Dr McDonnell: No, but these schoolboys do not have a clue. Tourists have a — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has the Floor. Order.

Dr McDonnell: I am happy to give way if any of them has anything constructive to say. Does anyone have anything constructive to say, Mr Deputy Speaker?

Tourists have a choice of where they spend their money, where they go, how much they spend and what they spend it on; we should not view them, as has been happening in today's debate, as a flock of stupid sheep that can be herded wherever we want them to go. I am sure that Mr Frew in all his wisdom has not spent 10 days in Fermanagh; if he wants to go to Fermanagh for 10 days, I am happy to contribute to his costs. *[Laughter.]* Members should not make outrageous proposals in the Chamber. Fermanagh is a good place to visit; however, 60% of our real tourists — those not visiting friends and family — enter Northern Ireland, Ulster or whatever we want to call it, via Dublin airport. We have to remember that. If Members want rid of those 60%, that is fine, but I do not.

Somebody made the point that a business coming into Cork was not of any consequence to us here. Not so many days ago, I happened to listen to Mark Henderson who runs Mash Direct, and he said that the biggest market for his product, which is Comber potatoes and vegetables, is in Cork. People need to get to the stage where they realise that the world has gone global and that tourists are global and have global

choices. If people do not recognise that, economically, we are stuck with each other whether we like each other or not, and that prosperity in Cork can, in turn, bring prosperity here and vice versa, we are wasting our time.

There is no nationalist tourism or unionist tourism. Tourists who come here do not give a damn what our politics are. They have a wide range of choices and many markets throughout the world they could go to. Let us take Ulster tourism, if we want to call it that. There are Ulster Scots — or the Scots Irish as they prefer to call themselves — in Tennessee or wherever they are. Let us take that sector in the US and use “The Gathering” to mine it and follow it through, and let us mine the Ulster roots of many in Canada, because it is waiting there for somebody to do something about it. Let us look to Australia, where there is a vast market and substantial Ulster roots. Last but not least, let us look to the UK. Let us look to the whole swathe of young people there who either graduated from Queen’s or the University of Ulster or left school here to go to another university.

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

Dr McDonnell: There are vast opportunities to explore. Let us take a leaf out of the Scottish example.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Dr McDonnell: There are vast opportunities there, and I appeal to the Minister and the Executive to take up the very generous offers that have been made by the Irish Government.

Mr Weir: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I did not want to interrupt the Member in full flow, but he said that tourists “do not give a damn”. For future reference, could we have a ruling on whether or not that is parliamentary language?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We will discuss it.

Question Time begins at 2.30 pm. I suggest that the House takes it ease until that time, when the debate will continue with the Minister’s response.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

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

Oral Answers to Questions

Agriculture and Rural Development

Strangford Lough: Fishing

1. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she is putting in place to restrict fishing in Strangford lough in order to avoid EU infraction fines. (AQO 1807/11-15)

Mrs O’Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. That is a serious matter, which my Department shares with the Department of the Environment. Officials from both Departments have had very helpful recent discussions with the Commission and proposed a range of actions in Strangford into the future, which we are hopeful that the Commission will accept as a meaningful management strategy for the horse mussels. Those arrangements will include further fisheries restrictions, among a broader range of actions. I discussed the implications of those with fisheries stakeholders earlier today. We are engaged in a formal process with the Commission on that issue, and will require its formal acceptance of our proposals. It would be wrong at this stage to speculate about the detailed outcome of that process, but it is fair to say that we are working through all of the issues that have been identified.

By way of an update, as I said, earlier today I met the fishermen who fish Strangford lough. They had a very constructive approach around the issues that we need to address. It is very clear that we are going to be able to work together to create the restoration plan that the Commission is calling for. I think that fishermen can be part of that plan. Also, in moving forward we have to continue to engage with the Ulster Wildlife Trust.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for her response, and I am very pleased about her engagement with the fishing industry. I know that she probably cannot say very much about the details, but will she indicate whether there is going to be an acceptance of a much wider exclusion zone for fishing?

Mrs O’Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Yes, what is being proposed at the moment and discussed with the Commission are the yellow zones according to the Queen’s University report. That is what I discussed with the fishermen today. I think that is clearly the minimum that the Commission is prepared to accept. However, there are a few additional areas that fishermen feel could be explored as a further potential to not close that down, so we are going to go back to the Commission with that. It is about working together in partnership with the fishermen, the Department and the Ulster Wildlife Trust.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer thus far. Will she tell us

how many vessels fish on Strangford lough, and what is the value of their catch?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat. Strangford lough is restricted to vessels of 40 feet or less, and can only be fished by pot fishing. There are seven small vessels that fish there for longer than seven months a year, and it supports over 20 on a part-time basis. In 2009, the lough provided landings of langoustine, velvet crab, brown crab and lobster, all valued at approximately £140,000.

Mr Rogers: Does the Minister plan to introduce further exclusion zones for fishing, and, if so, has she carried out an assessment on the economic impact that that will have on local fishermen and businesses? I am particularly concerned about the areas of Ardglass and Kilkeel in my constituency of South Down.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am also concerned about the livelihoods of fishermen, who depend heavily on being able to fish on the lough. The minimum exclusion zones that the Commission will accept are those proposed in the Queen's University report, which leads to an increase in exclusion zones. However, I think that we are in a better position than we were before speaking to the Commission last month. On the economic impact, as I said, landings in 2009 were worth around £140,000, so it would be detrimental for the seven larger boats that are fishing on the lough.

Rural Schools

2. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what actions are planned to assess and address the impact on rural communities resulting from rural school closures. (AQO 1808/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Quality education and good schools play a vital role in sustaining our rural communities. Indeed, I recently raised concerns about rural school closures directly with the Minister of Education. School provision is the responsibility of the Department of Education and, therefore, any proposal to close a school is a matter for the Minister of Education. It is my understanding that a published statutory development proposal is required before there can be any significant change in the schools estate, such as a school closure. I am assured that the Department of Education's sustainable schools policy, which addresses the issue of rural schools and was rural-proofed prior to publication, rigorously assesses any published development proposal.

The Minister of Education has advised that he appreciates the central place that a school has in many communities, both rural and urban, but that his focus is on the quality of education provided to those children.

He will not take lightly any decision to close a school, but he will not shy away from any such decision if it is the right thing to do. Although the Department of Education takes the lead on this issue, I will continue to work with my ministerial colleagues and their departmental officials through various means, including the rural White Paper action plan, to ensure that the provision of high-quality education supports the sustainability of our rural communities.

Mrs D Kelly: I am sure that the Minister is well aware of her party's Love Rural Ireland campaign south of the border, which will fight the closure of rural schools and states:

"The small local school is at the heart of most local communities."

How does the Minister feel that the current threat by the Education Department in the North to close rural schools compares to the Dublin Government's threats to do so, and will she explain her party's somewhat schizophrenic approach to the issue?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am absolutely aware of my party's rural Ireland campaign, and I am delighted to be part of it. I will attend one of its events next week. I do not think that my party is anywhere at odds with itself. It is clear, and its argument for lower enrolment numbers for rural schools showed Sinn Féin's commitment to protect such schools. The sustainability criteria are not just about numbers. They are also about educational experience, which has to be at the core of decisions on where not to maintain schools. It has to be about accessibility and strong links with the community, and those are just three of the six sustainability criteria. That shows that there is no being at odds with, or any difference in, the approach that my party is taking right across this island.

Mr G Robinson: Does the Minister believe that the long-term impact of rural school closures will raise the number of our young people who will look elsewhere for education and employment because urban schools will not have the same understanding of rural communities?

Mrs O'Neill: Quite a lot of our rural communities are being decimated by many young people going elsewhere, particularly Australia, for work. Some communities are being hit very hard and would have difficulty in fielding a GAA team because of the number of young people who are leaving. The Executive and Assembly need to do all that they can to maintain the rural way of life and to maintain and support people to enable them to continue to live there. As I said, the criteria for sustainable rural schools look at links with the community, accessibility, strong leadership and management, and the educational experience of the child, which are vital to maintaining our rural schools.

Mr Elliott: Has the Minister identified any specific areas where closing rural schools would be detrimental? If so, where are they?

Mrs O'Neill: Assessing the sustainability of schools and their future is a matter for the Department of Education, not me. My Department will continue to work with the Department of Education and any other Department to rural proof any of their policies. In developing all policies, we need to be mindful of their implications and any inequality that may result. Someone may be disadvantaged just because of where they live. That is the type of work that this Department will be involved in.

Woodland

3. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what commitment her Department will give

to increase protection for ancient and long-established woodlands.

(AQO 1809/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. In January this year, I visited an ancient woodland at Drumlamph, just outside Maghera, and saw at first hand how the local Carrtogh Community Association, in partnership with the Woodland Trust and supported by my Department's Forest Service, is working to maintain and enhance the special wildlife characteristics of this ancient woodland for the whole community. In addition to supporting the management of these woodlands, my Department's proposals for a felling licence, made under the Forestry Act 2010, will offer some protection for ancient and long-established woodland from unregulated felling by permitting felling under licence, subject to conditions to be set out in a felling management plan.

Section 18(5) of the Forestry Act makes special provision for ancient woodland by requiring my Department to:

"have regard to the desirability of maintaining the special character of that woodland".

The felling management plan will include details of the characteristics of the woodland in which the proposed felling is to take place, details of planned felling and re-establishment operations and the species of trees with which the land will be replanted. A condition of any felling management plan will be that the land is replanted in accordance with the rules and practice of good forestry as set out in the 'Forestry Standard'. On ancient woodland sites, the standard recommends that the features of ancient woodland remnants are protected and consideration is given to the progressive restoration to native woodlands.

However, in certain situations, the Forestry Act excludes the requirement for a felling licence; for example, when felling is required for the purpose of carrying out development authorised by planning permission or when felling is required close to an electric line. In those situations, the Act does not provide protection for ancient and long-established woodland. A further protection is provided for ancient woodland by my Department's Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) Regulations 2006, which regulate deforestation for the purpose of converting woodland to another type of land use.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Minister for her answer. The Minister may be aware that three areas of woodland in my constituency — Glenarm forest, Glenariff forest park and Woodburn forest near Carrickfergus — are currently affected by Japanese larch disease. What action is her Department taking to tackle those outbreaks? Can she update the Assembly on its progress in that regard?

Mrs O'Neill: A number of forests across the North have been affected by Japanese larch disease, and there are a number of different diseases such as *Phytophthora ramorum* and *Phytophthora lateralis* out there. Forest Service has a management plan in place and forestry officers regularly visit all forests to examine trees for potential signs of disease. We encourage private forest owners to do the same and to continue to engage with the Forest Service. Like any disease, it is important that we catch it as early as possible.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. How will a felling licence work?

Mrs O'Neill: A felling licence will require woodland owners who intend to fell woodlands to apply to the Department for a licence. Felling will only be permitted subject to a basic felling management plan that is agreed by the Department. It must include information on how the felled area will be regenerated, the time of the felling and the species of trees with which the land will be restocked, all according to the principles of the sustainable forest management plan.

Mr Cree: I am sure that many will be pleased to hear that the 2006 regulations make provision for ancient woodland. However, the Minister's Department has said that the onus is on it to determine whether woodland is ancient. What procedures will be used to determine if that is the case?

Mrs O'Neill: The term "ancient woodland" means that the land has to have been continuously wooded right back to — I think — 1600. The term "long-established woodland" means that land has to have been continuously wooded since the first Ordnance Survey maps were produced between 1830 and 1844. When landowners identify ancient woodlands or something in their forest that is relevant to that, it is important that they come to the Department so that we can look towards a management plan. We are responsible for the overall strategy for the management of ancient woodland. It is important that anyone who has ancient woodland, particularly in private ownership, comes forward so that we can work out a plan.

Water Boreholes

4. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on a water borehole scheme for people in rural areas who do not have access to mains water.

(AQO 1810/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The rural bore wells scheme is currently in the later stages of development, and I aim to open it for applications in the summer. As you know, that scheme is one of a wide range of initiatives developed under the 'Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework', and it is a strong example of cross-departmental working to tackle an issue that impacts on isolated rural households.

Working in partnership with the Department for Regional Development (DRD), officials are finalising the development of a grant scheme towards the cost of the installation of private bore wells and associated water treatments, with the aim of providing access to safe drinking water where it is not available in isolated rural areas. You will appreciate that there are complex issues with such a scheme to ensure water and construction quality and to maintain complementarity with existing DRD policy.

Householders will be eligible for the grant assistance towards the cost of a bore well if the cost of their water mains requisition exceeds £10,500, as that will ensure parity with householders who receive the maximum allowance for a water mains requisition. Properties must have been built before 1 January 2000 or have replaced domestic properties built before 1 January 2000 that were declared unfit for human habitation. I look forward to the

roll-out of the scheme and the benefits that it will bring to households that do not have access to mains water.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for her answer. Does the Minister have a target date in mind? Will she outline how long the scheme will remain open?

Mrs O'Neill: The bore wells scheme is scheduled to be open for applications from Wednesday 6 June to Friday 29 June inclusive. It is anticipated that the scheme will reopen for applications in each of the next three years, subject to demand and a review of the scheme at the end of year 1. As we had to address a number of key development issues, the opening of the scheme could not have been scheduled any earlier.

Those include the quality standards that should be applied to the bore well installation works and water treatment requirements, and the co-ordination of input from DRD, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), the Drinking Water Inspectorate, the Department of Finance and Personnel's (DFP's) Central Procurement Directorate and the Geological Survey of NI. We have also sought Executive agreement for the scheme, which has been obtained, and I have submitted a business case in support of the scheme for DFP approval, which we are confident we will receive very soon.

2.45 pm

Mr Byrne: Does the Minister agree that there are still some areas, like in the Sperrins above Gortin and places in the Mourne and the glens of Antrim, where there is still no public water supply? Equality of access is crucial. Will every effort be made to try to provide a public water supply in preference to a single borehole if that is possible?

Mrs O'Neill: The beauty of this scheme, and all the other schemes that are included under the tackling rural poverty and social isolation strategy, is that it acts as leverage. There are very positive schemes from other Departments that would not happen if this scheme were not taken forward. So, the fact that we are able to leverage support for rural areas that we would not necessarily have had is positive.

In the absence of universal access to the mains, for reasons of cost or otherwise, at least this gives people a good supply of good quality water and access to the borewell. That is not to take away from the fact that DRD is responsible for providing public water. I will always be very supportive of any schemes that can be taken forward in rural areas.

Rural Development Programme

5. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the work her Department has undertaken to prepare for the new rural development programme.
(AQO 1811/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The EU proposals for rural development were published in October 2011, and negotiations on the detail in Brussels are still at an early stage. I and my officials are working with Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the other devolved Administrations to ensure the Commission's proposals remain flexible enough to allow us to meet our future rural development needs.

In preparation for the new rural development programme, my Department is considering the six EU priorities in the proposals and the 23 measures proposed. My officials are initially considering the needs and opportunities for the agrifood industry and the development of our rural areas. Lessons learned from the current and previous programmes, along with examples of best practice, will also help to inform programme development.

The shape and size of a future rural development programme will largely be dependent on the available rural development budget, which will not be known for some time. Therefore, it is important to retain a flexible approach to programme development, as the content of the proposals are subject to change. An important part of the programme development will be engagement with stakeholders and partners. A consultative partnership will be set up later this year to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to provide their views on future programming proposals.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given that the MEPs and the member states are suggesting that the budget will be completed in 2014 and that the start of the new common agricultural policy (CAP) will be in 2015, what discussions has the Minister had with the other member states and the UK regions about preparing for a possible period of transition between the two programmes?

Mrs O'Neill: I was in Brussels during the past two weeks, and I put the implications of delay to Georg Haeusler from the EU Commission. He assures me that things are moving on according to their timescale. Obviously, we have to be very mindful that that may not be the case. The Commission would obviously take that approach at this stage. However, their agreeing on the budget is key to moving forward because it will mean we can actually get into the detail of what will be on the table.

I am going to London on Wednesday for a meeting with the DEFRA, which will include representatives from Scotland and Wales, and we will be discussing CAP reform and contingency plans around all of this and where we will be if they do not agree a way forward in time for 2014.

Mr Frew: How does the Minister respond to the criticism that local action groups (LAGs) are being excluded from opening calls in the present rural development programme, which means that they cannot spend the money that is badly needed on the ground?

Mrs O'Neill: I am desperately trying to make sure that this money is spent. We have £100 million left that we need to spend by the end of the programme. Spend has been slow for various reasons that the Member will be aware of, not least the economic climate and the fact that banks are not lending. I have taken a number of measures throughout the course of the programme to encourage spending, and things are improving. The call that I made in December for strategic projects is something that areas have welcomed and constructively engaged with.

Numerous projects have come forward, and I have not closed calls for further applications. However, if we are sitting with a pile of unprocessed applications, our priority should be to send out letters of offer, get the money spent and ensure the continuation of the programme. The strategic projects have been very positive and very much welcomed by all the groups I have spoken to.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What effect will the review of public administration have on the delivery of a future rural development programme?

Mrs O'Neill: Over the coming months, my Department will work with local government and other Departments on the possibility of governmental involvement in a future rural development programme. Proposals for the next round of EU structural funds have also been published and include a requirement for all EU funds to have a complementary approach and common objectives. Officials from my Department and DFP are considering the EU funding proposals and the potential for a more joined-up approach across funds and Departments. These changes, required as a result of the review of public administration, will have to be taken into consideration at that stage.

Mr Allister: What lessons will be learned from the high level of squandering on administration in the present programme when it comes to applications to the next? Will there be a more efficient process than under the present programme?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member frequently raises the issue of administrative spend. It is fair to say that the percentage of administrative spend is higher when any programme is being set up. Unfortunately, when compared with the overall spend, the balance does not look right. As the programme goes on over the next 18 months, that will, in some ways, even out, and our position will look far better. It is also fair to say that the LAGs and joint council committees (JCCs) have done great work in trying to get out as much spend to the rural communities as possible. We must continue supporting them in doing that. Numerous lessons have been learned, and, in developing the new programme, it would be foolish not to learn from what did not work in the past. We must take good practice on board and make sure that we follow through on that. A consultative partnership will be established later this year, and it will include all those involved in the previous programme. They will work with the Department to ensure that the new programme is fit for purpose and that we deal with the, quite frankly, silly obstacles that the LAGs and JCCs had to overcome in the past.

Rural Heritage

6. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the action her Department is taking to protect rural heritage. (AQO 1812/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Under the rural development programme, measure 3.6 of axis 3 has a budget of £4 million to support projects aimed at conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage. At present, eight projects have been supplied with investment of £52,000, and a further 49 projects worth £2.3 million have been issued with a letter of offer. Only recently, I attended the official opening of Lissan House outside Cookstown. The 17th century country house on the banks of the Lissan river was restored by the Lissan House Trust at a cost of £1.2 million and opened to the public as a new tourist attraction and heritage facility. Part of that funding was an award of £250,000 from SWARD under the rural development programme.

Through this restoration work, Lissan House Trust aims to encourage the sustainable development of the house and its estate, promote its heritage and tourism potential, and create employment opportunities for the benefit of the local

and wider community. I am confident that the easement for strategic projects may assist similar larger projects that would not otherwise be possible.

Additionally, participants in DARD's agrienvironment schemes protect and maintain any historic monument sites on their land that are vulnerable to farming practices. There are, for example, restrictions on cultivation and slurry spreading in the protection zone around a monument. Currently, 1,394 agrienvironment scheme participants manage historic monument sites as part of their management agreement. My Department works closely with colleagues in the Environment Agency, which has responsibility for designating historic monument sites.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she detail what her Department is doing specifically to promote townland names as an important aspect of rural identity and heritage?

Mrs O'Neill: Fáilte go Baile Lios na Scáth. The historic, cultural and linguistic importance of townland names cannot be underestimated, particularly to the rural community. As the Member knows, there is a great association between people and places. Many townland names have been handed down through time by people who lived there; they are a significant part of our shared and local heritage, and I am keen to support their promotion and preservation. In line with the initiative of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, my Department has, for some time, utilised townland names in the addresses of all our DARD offices.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister, in the past couple of questions, referred to the strategic projects that she has asked organisations to come forward with. Does she accept that some projects formerly considered by Departments are best operated and finished by Departments, and will she reconsider her position no longer to allow Departments to apply for funding?

Mrs O'Neill: My priority is to make sure that we do not have to send money back to Europe and to make sure that the money is spent to the best effect for the rural community. We have to do that within the terms of the rural development programme as agreed until 2014, so those are the terms within which you have to continue to work. So long as we get the spend and the projects are viable and sustainable, I intend the Department to work to use that rural development money to the best effect. As I said, however, you have to work within the rules of the current rural development programme. Making changes at this stage would take a very long time in the Commission, and we would actually be at the end of the current programme before you would be able to get anything like that through.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí sin go nuige. I thank the Minister for her responses. The Department of the Environment (DOE) has a role to play in the protection of rural heritage, and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has a role to play in its promotion. Will the Minister outline what strategic communications and discussions have taken place with those Departments? Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs O'Neill: It is important, as you say, that we work across Departments, and with DOE in particular, given that it will designate the historic monument. There is a lot of engagement at official level about making sure that protections are in place, with farmers' input, and making sure that the Environment Agency and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development work together. It is also important for tourism potential. As I said, I have not had any official meetings with the Environment Minister or with the tourism Minister, although I know that those are ongoing at official level.

Mrs Overend: The Minister will, no doubt, agree with the sentiment that the Executive should stress the sustainability of conserving and re-using old buildings in the current financial circumstances, especially for consideration as new homes. Will she give her assessment of the thoughts that she is picking up from the contractors and architects involved in regeneration projects? Does she agree that the planning and listed buildings systems are far too processed rather than outcome-led?

Mrs O'Neill: I have had meetings with the Minister of the Environment about planning. Sometimes, fantastic projects for rural development funding get stuck in the planning process for a long time. It is nearly like a chicken-and-egg situation of whether you have planning permission before you come forward. Those are all things that we need to improve for the new rural development programme. Lissan House is a good example of such a project. The Lissan House Trust is passionate about the project, and the Department will do anything that it can to continue to promote it. It is a tourism project, but it is also a community development for community use; it ticks all the boxes for sustainable rural communities. The Department will try to attract more people to visit our rural communities and the countryside.

Single Farm Payments

7. **Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the number and value of single farm payments that have yet to be processed. (AQO 1813/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As at 30 April this year, my Department has completed 94.8% of all claims and paid out almost £251 million; that leaves 1,942 claims left to process, with a maximum of £17 million still to be paid for the 2011 scheme year. Those claims are outstanding for a number of reasons, including the need to apply inspection findings, or possibly because probate has not yet been completed or because the farmer has not provided bank account details to allow payment to be credited to their bank account.

Not all the remaining claims may be due to receive a payment because of ineligibility or the application of penalties under scheme rules.

3.00 pm

The Department is obliged to administer the single farm payment scheme in accordance with EU rules, which means that the results of validation checks, including on-farm inspections, must be applied to individual claims to calculate the correct amount due before a payment can be released. Some assessments are complex, particularly for claims that have had an on-farm inspection and take longer

to clear. At the same time, I am conscious of the current economic climate and recognise that late single farm payments can add to farmers' severe financial difficulty. Indeed, I have met many farmers about that.

I want to drive forward improvements in the way in which claims are processed. I have put in place a number of measures to help to speed up payment in the remaining cases. I have also met the main local banks — I have just one more to meet — and impressed on them the need for flexibility in dealing with farmers to allow them time while they await their 2011 payment. I have to say that the banks have indicated their willingness to consider the circumstances of individual clients caused by late single farm payments.

Finance and Personnel

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members to refrain from audible conversations so that I do not have to intervene later. They are a distraction to me and, I am sure, to other Members who are trying to listen.

Regional Pay

1. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on the issue of regional pay. (AQO 1822/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel):

I raised my serious concerns about any move towards regional public sector pay with the Chief Secretary, whom I met on 5 March along with the Ministers from Scotland and Wales. My concern really rests on three issues. The first is the deflationary impact that any such proposal could have on an economy such as Northern Ireland's. Secondly, I do not believe that public sector wages in Northern Ireland have distorted the market and made it impossible for the private sector to recruit individuals. Thirdly, I believe that if there is a rate for a job, that rate should be paid.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for his commitment to equal pay for equal work, regardless of location, and for the other principles that he wishes to abide by. Bearing in mind his talks and the speculation and debate in the media and elsewhere, does he buy into the argument about the money that could be saved, accrued and reinvested in the local economy? What indications has the Treasury given to him about the possibility of any such savings being made?

Mr Wilson: Members of the Conservative Party in Northern Ireland have criticised me for not being visionary enough as far as this policy is concerned. However, I sometimes wonder where they learned their economics. I do not know how you stimulate the economy of Northern Ireland by taking money out of the pockets of workers and spending it through the Government. That does not add to the total amount of money in the economy and, therefore, cannot and will not have a stimulatory effect on the economy.

We will continue to make representations to the Government. It is important that we do not allow the foot in the door on the issue. The Government have said that the block grant will not be affected by such a proposal in this spending period. However, I have no doubt that if, for

example, the costs to the health service were reduced by reducing the amount of money paid to nurses in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the north-east of England, the north-west of England, and so on, that reduced cost to the health service would come back to Northern Ireland in the form of the Barnett consequential. If a smaller amount of money is spent on the health service as a result of those changes, our proportion of what is fixed will be smaller, and the total amount of money coming to us will be reduced, hence the deflationary effect.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Although I am certainly in favour of the idea of devolving more powers to the Assembly, I am sure that the Minister will agree that the motivation behind such a proposal is to try to cut public sector workers' pay even though our public sector workers lag behind those in Britain. The issue is clearly that private sector pay here is too low rather than public sector pay being too high.

Mr Deputy Speaker: May we have a question, please?

Mr Murphy: Does the Minister think that it is much better to move towards the concept of a living wage that has been developed, rather than the idea of a minimum wage?

Mr Wilson: The Member has made a very important point. The idea that public sector pay in Northern Ireland is equivalent to what it is in other parts of the United Kingdom is a false notion anyway. Public sector pay here is 3-5% below the UK average and about 22% below the London average. The difficulty is that private sector wages are about 26% below the national average. I think that it would be absolute madness for us to work on the basis that we make Northern Ireland a low-wage economy. What Arlene Foster is doing, and the whole thrust of our economic policy at present, is to try to attract investment that pushes wages up and adds value in the private sector. That is the kind of economy that I want, not pushing it down to the lowest possible rung.

Mrs Dobson: If regional pay is introduced throughout the United Kingdom, will the levels of economic activity be detrimentally affected and widen the productivity gap between the regions and the greater south-east of England?

Mr Wilson: There is absolutely no doubt about that in the long run, even though the Government gave assurances that in the current comprehensive spending review period, regional pay would not affect the block grant. Let us make no bones about it: the Government are all about delivering health and education, and they see bringing down wages in the regions as a way of reducing the cost of delivering those services.

Under the Barnett consequentials, we get about 3% of what it costs to deliver the service UK-wide. If you drive down the cost of delivering that service, you drive down the amount of money that comes to places such as Northern Ireland. That has a deflationary effect, and it is certainly not a way to stimulate a regional economy.

Air Passenger Duty

2. **Mr Doherty** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the devolution of air passenger duty powers. (AQO 1823/11-15)

4. **Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline progress on the devolution of air passenger duty powers.

(AQO 1825/11-15)

8. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the proposed devolution of air passenger duty powers.

(AQO 1829/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Mr Deputy Speaker, I will take questions 2, 4 and 8 together, since they all relate to air passenger duty.

I will go through the steps that have to be taken for the devolution of air passenger duty powers to Northern Ireland. The first step has already been taken, with the 2012 Finance Bill, which was published on 29 March and is being scrutinised at Westminster. I expect that to receive Royal Assent by autumn at the latest. A legislative consent motion will then be required to seek Assembly agreement in that regard, that is, that Westminster has done the business for us in terms of the legislative change. The Finance and Personnel Committee is considering that.

When Royal Assent has been granted, there will have to be an Assembly Bill, which will enable the Executive to follow through on their commitment to reduce air passenger duty on direct long-haul flights to zero. The draft Bill will be available by the summer and will be brought to the Assembly in early autumn. In the meantime, there will be discussions with HMRC about the full cost, the administrative arrangements and any associated costs.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Has his Department undertaken any analysis of the benefits to the local economy of being able to exercise a broader reduction in air passenger duty rather than just confining it to north American flights?

Mr Wilson: The only power that will be devolved to the Assembly will be for direct long-haul flights. However, they will not just be for north America. If other direct long-haul flights want to come into Belfast, they will be subject to the same changes that we are proposing for flights to North America.

There were a number of reasons why we did not seek wider devolution. First, there was a time constraint. It was an issue that, we believed, we had to deal very quickly, otherwise we were going to lose the Newark flight. Secondly, there was the cost element to that. If we had wider devolution, the cost to the block grant would, of course, have been much greater. However, we have made the point that, generally, air passenger duty, as it is currently applied by the Treasury at Westminster, is having a damaging effect on the aviation industry in the United Kingdom as a whole, and I believe that it will have a long-term effect on tourism and other economic activity in the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Further to that, has there been any other analysis done on what potential income could be brought to local businesses, for example, if such remuneration is granted?

Mr Wilson: One of the reasons why we were so insistent on keeping the direct flight to north America and having this power, so that we could promote other routes, was that we believe that having that connectivity is absolutely vital

in attracting foreign investment and in being able to do business with other parts of the world.

Just before Christmas, I attended an event in London, at which the chief executive of Newcastle City Council indicated that since the north-east of England started direct flights with Abu Dhabi — I think; I cannot remember — their business with that region had increased tenfold. That gives an illustration of the importance of having those direct flights into Northern Ireland. Of course, it is not just for business. If you are going to bring foreign investors in, they will want to have direct contact with the place in which they have invested.

Mr McGimpsey: I refer to wider devolution. As I understand it, air passenger duty in Dublin is €3, but it is £60 in Belfast and the UK. There is a massive differential there. Aviation, passengers and airports in Belfast, therefore, start at a massive disadvantage. That has to be looked at in the wider sense.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we have a question, please?

Mr McGimpsey: It has to be looked at in the longer term to give our airports a level playing field, at least, on which to compete.

Mr Wilson: That, of course, is exactly what we have done. Over last summer, when it seemed that we were not winning this battle, Arlene Foster and I had a number of meetings with Hugo Swire, who, at that stage, was standing in for the Secretary of State. Sometimes, we are very critical of Ministers at Westminster, but when push came to shove, Ministers responded. I know, because I have attended debates in the other place, that the Scottish National Party is envious of the change that has been made in respect of Northern Ireland. It will enable us to create the level playing field that the Member has mentioned, because, of course, the stated intention of the Executive, once we have the power devolved, is to reduce air passenger duty on the direct long-haul flights not to €3 but to zero.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his answers so far and congratulate him and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for securing the concession in relation to the air passenger duty for the Newark link. Why is air passenger duty not being devolved and reduced for all flights from Northern Ireland?

Mr Wilson: There are two reasons for that. First, we had to get a decision by the Government by last September, because that is when Continental was going to pull out. I do not believe that we could have got a commitment from the Government to devolve all the air passenger duty to Northern Ireland within that time constraint. Secondly, there is the issue of cost. It is estimated that the cost of devolving duty on direct long-haul flights will be about £5 million. The devolution of all air passenger duty would have cost us between £60 million and £90 million, and I did not think that that was something that we could have afforded in the block grant.

3.15 pm

Dr McDonnell: Will the Minister tell us whether the people in his Department have had a chance to make any assessment of how other jurisdictions deal with air passenger duty and whether there are any lessons that we might learn from

those jurisdictions on how they have handled the question of taxing flights or air passenger duty?

Mr Wilson: Of course, other jurisdictions have not got themselves tied up with the environmental nonsense that has driven the air passenger duty debate. In fact, it is significant that very few other major economies hamper their economies and their airlines in the way in which the UK Government have done. Of course, this all goes back to the Climate Change Act 2008 and the idea that, somehow or other, by taxing our travel we will save the world. Other countries have been cynical about it. I do not believe that the current Government believe that they will save the world by doing it, but they will certainly fill the Treasury's coffers, and that is what it is all driven by now.

Government: External Consultancy

3. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the targets for reducing spend on external consultancy.

(AQO 1824/11-15)

5. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the recent Public Accounts Committee report on the use of external consultants, whether he will introduce a requirement for a business case to be prepared for all external consultancy proposals.

(AQO 1826/11-15)

Mr Wilson: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 3 and 5 together.

In 2010-11, which is the last year for which expenditure is available, the amount spent on consultancy across Departments and arm's-length bodies was £16 million. That is a reduction of 56% from the level in 2007-08, and it shows the significant strides that the Executive have taken to reduce the expenditure on consultancy.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for his response. Does he believe that all parts of the public sector should be subject to the same scrutiny when it comes to financial accountability?

Mr Wilson: I believe that all parts of the public sector should be subject to the same scrutiny. Unfortunately, I have got myself in some trouble because I have suggested that bodies such as the Northern Ireland Audit Office, which preaches to other Departments of the need for transparency, scrutiny and abiding by the rules, has decided that it should be exempt from those rules. I am sure that that will draw criticism, and I am looking around for the likely suspects who will stand on their feet in a moment or two to challenge me on that.

My Department believes that when consultancy is undertaken, there should be transparency on, first, the need for it in a business case; secondly, the process by which the consultants are obtained through the procurement exercise; thirdly, an assessment of whether the consultants' exercise has delivered what it was promised would be delivered; and, fourthly, what lessons have been learned. Unfortunately, the only part of government that seems to think that it is exempt from that scrutiny is the very body that preaches to others that we need to be scrutinised and transparent, and that is the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. It is clear from the PAC report that some of the business cases were of extremely poor quality. What is the Minister going to do to rectify that?

Mr Wilson: We already have guidance in place. That is why it is important. I believe that there should be transparency right across all of government spend. In order to ensure that the consultants that we employ and the results that we get from that consultancy are not of poor quality, there should be an evaluation of what has been learned from the report, the effectiveness of that report, etc, at the end of every consultancy exercise. Those are the kind of guidelines that we now lay down for Departments. I do not have the figures in front of me, but most Departments are now abiding by that. In about 95% of all cases, we do have that learning, assessment and evaluation at the end of the exercise. Of course, the other thing is that, before the process starts, Ministers should ask whether there is a need to have consultants. That is one of the reasons why we have introduced the rule that any consultancy exercise of £10,000 or above has to have ministerial approval.

Mr Elliott: I note that, in 2008, the Department assured the Committee that comprehensive and accurate data on external consultancy expenditure would be available at the touch of a button, which I assume would make it easily accessible to Members of the House as well as to the public. I wonder whether the Minister can tell us what the up-to-date situation is on that. Has there been any progress?

Mr Wilson: I am not too sure what the Member is referring to. I can say that, as far as consultancy is concerned, every Minister should now be aware of what consultancy exercises are going on in their Department, because every Minister should sign off any consultancy exercise that costs £10,000 or more. Indeed, a Minister can set a lower threshold if they so desire.

Mr Dallat: I have listened carefully to the Minister. It is good to see him give his fully qualified support to the work of the Audit Office. Can he tell me what guidelines he has put in place to end the gravy trains that have dominated life in this Assembly for far too long?

Mr Wilson: Let me put this in context. Consultancy represents 0.2% of the total spend of Departments in Northern Ireland. The Member used the term "gravy trains", but let us get this in context. Let me say again for the record that, since 2007-08, we have reduced consultancy spend in Northern Ireland by 56%. Last year, the reduction was, I think, 38%, bringing it to the lowest figure possible. The Executive have set a target of reducing consultancy spend by 10% year-on-year for the period of this Budget.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 4 and 5 have already been answered.

Loans: Interest Rates

6. **Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what measures his Department can take in relation to individuals and financial institutions that are providing loans with extortionate interest rates. (AQO 1827/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for that question. Regulation of financial institutions is, of course, not a devolved matter. It is outside the control of my Department. However, I am concerned about lending practices within the high-cost credit markets. I feel that those types of loans are used as a means of exploiting the vulnerable in our society. The Westminster Government are concerned about this, and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is taking forward research in this area that will specifically address the impact on consumers and business of introducing a cap on the total cost of credit that can be charged in the short-to medium-term high-cost credit market. I look forward to the results of that research.

Mr Givan: Does the Minister agree that those vulture capitalists who prey on the socially disadvantaged — the most vulnerable — need a better form of regulation, particularly in the advertising and promotion of the types of extortionate interest rates that drive people into destitution?

Mr Wilson: I do. Unfortunately, during the current recession, more and more people are being dragged into this. We have already had debates in the House on payday loans. I believe that the vulnerable in society are now being targeted by many of those who charge extortionate interest rates.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Are there any actions that the Minister's Department can take to warn individuals and families of the dangers inherent in taking out such loans?

Mr Wilson: Not particularly through my Department, but through the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, which is of course responsible for the trading standards service and enforcing the Consumer Credit Act. There is a requirement to ensure that the rules on advertising, pre-contract disclosure, credit agreements and post-contractual information are all available to people who take out these loans. That is where I think the role of trying to protect people can be found.

Mr Gardiner: Is the Minister satisfied that all the loan companies that advertise their financial services in the media are controlled by the Financial Services Authority?

Mr Wilson: They are not, at present. Indeed, that is one reason why the Government are looking at how they cap the interest on loans, and so on.

I am really glad that the Member has raised the whole issue of how the media is used. He may not have realised it, but his own leader is guilty of what I would describe as almost the promotion of loan-shark type activity. I note the words used during the payday loans debate in the Assembly, when the Member's leader — he was not the leader then, of course — said that he supported the motion for fair interest rates and protection of consumers. However, until this weekend, his own website was promoting Cash Genie, which enabled people to borrow between £75 to £750 at — well, it was a snip, really — an average APR of 2,339%.

Maybe the Member would take that back to his own leader. I am quite happy for the Financial Services Authority to deal with the issue, or for Arlene Foster, through DETI and the consumer credit authorities to deal with it, but maybe just by a bit of self-denial, the Member's own leader could do it. He, in the very week when he was going to visit poor families to see how he could help them in the current recession, was

advertising loans for those poor families at 2,339%. Maybe that is where the action should start.

Public Sector Pensions

7. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on discussions with trade unions on public sector pension contributions. (AQO 1828/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As Minister of Finance and Personnel, my area of responsibility is the principal Civil Service pension scheme and, therefore, I can only comment and update on trade union discussions relevant to that scheme.

The consultation on the proposed increases to employee contribution rates for 2012-13 was launched in October 2011, and that was issued directly to the main Civil Service unions. The Department of Finance and Personnel's response document was issued again to the Civil Service trade unions on 6 February, and they were provided with copies of the draft legislation before it was laid. Further increases in member contributions will take effect in April 2013 and April 2014. The structure of those increases is subject to further consultation and discussions with trade unions.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he recognise the importance of proper and meaningful dialogue with the unions on the issue to ensuring a better local understanding of the position imposed on the Executive by the Westminster coalition?

Mr Wilson: I do. I, like many other Assembly Members, have had representations made to me in the past couple of weeks as increased pension contributions have started to show through on people's payslips. I fully understand the difficulties that the increased pension contributions are causing people who are in employment at the moment, especially where wages are frozen. Of course there needs to be consultation. However, I caution the Member and indicate that our room for manoeuvre on this is fairly limited. Had we not introduced even the increase that went through in April of this year, we would have had to find £140 million from the spend on public services to subsidise those pensions. So, while there will be consultation — I intend there to be full consultation — nevertheless, I must add that warning to any answer that I give. We have very, very limited room for manoeuvre in this.

Mr Durkan: Can the Minister tell the Assembly whether any increases to the Civil Service compensation scheme will be subject to the approval of the Assembly?

Mr Wilson: There are two ways in which this can happen. The legislation is going through Westminster, and Northern Ireland changes could be linked onto that if a legislative consent motion were accepted by the Assembly, or we could have a full debate on it in the Assembly. What course we take on it is up to the Executive. The one thing that I would say to the Member is that we can have all the discussions that we want in the Assembly, but our room for manoeuvre is very limited.

Even the financial wizardry of the SDLP, such as it is, cannot save us from the consequences of the very costly deviations from any scheme that is proposed on a UK-wide basis.

3.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: There are no other Questions. Sorry, Sammy Douglas.

Government: External Consultancy

9. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps have been taken in relation to irregular external consultancy spend. (AQO 1830/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In relation to any irregular spend, not just an external consultancy, the procedures to be followed are well established. Where it is found that any expenditure, including expenditure on external consultancy, has been incurred without prior approval or in excess of approved levels, that is then reported immediately to the Audit Office. The Audit Office, which has a very important role in acting independently, albeit it should still be subject to the same transparency, will, in turn, report on any such occurrences in the course of its annual audit of the relevant accounts. The Department or other body found to have incurred irregular expenditure will then be required to explain the circumstances that gave rise to the irregular spend and provide satisfactory assurance that it has taken steps to avoid a reoccurrence.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes Question Time.

Private Members' Business

Tourism: "The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming"

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to support and encourage Tourism Ireland's plans for "The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming" in 2013, which will promote Ireland as a tourism destination to 70 million people worldwide; and further calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to engage with the Irish Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to ensure that the benefit from these plans is derived on an all-island basis and that the Derry/Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 celebrations are included as an integral attraction. — [Mrs D Kelly.]

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment):

I will address some of the issues raised in the debate. I listened carefully to what Members said. Some of it was enlightening; some of it was not, frankly. I have to say from the start that the motion is fundamentally flawed in so far as it calls on us to welcome Tourism Ireland's plans for "The Gathering". Of course, it is not Tourism Ireland that is promoting or has brought forward "The Gathering". It is an initiative of the Republic of Ireland's Government.

Many others referred to "The Homecoming" in Scotland, which is the model that the Republic of Ireland's Government took for their initiative. In that initiative, the Scots invested £5.5 million to bring, as they hoped, many extra visitors to Scotland. As it happened, they brought just 95,000 extra visitors into Scotland. Indeed, the fact that 45,000 Ulster people went to Dublin at the weekend shows that it was not a great return for the Scottish Executive.

I congratulate the Ulster rugby team on its marvellous performance, and we all look forward to going to Twickenham to —

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Flanagan: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Foster: I will, indeed, give way.

Mr Flanagan: I just ask for clarification on the Minister's figures: is she talking about only the rugby, or is she including the fans who went to see Fermanagh and Tyrone play in Croke Park?

Mrs Foster: There could be extra figures, if that is the case, and that means that there were more Ulster people in Dublin at the weekend. The point I am making, however, is that the Scottish Government put an awful lot of money into "The Homecoming". Indeed, it was the subject, as I understand it, of a Public Accounts Committee investigation, because they did not feel that they received the value for money that they would have liked.

However, the point I am also making is that this motion calls on me to get involved with Tourism Ireland's plans. They are not Tourism Ireland's plans. It then goes on to talk about me engaging with the Irish Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, which, of course, I do on an ongoing basis. It then talks about the UK City of Culture in Derry/Londonderry

being included as an integral part of what is happening through "The Gathering".

It is important to put "The Gathering" into context. It was launched at the Clinton Global Initiative in October of last year. It was launched as not just a tourism initiative but something much wider. To give you a line from the Republic of Ireland's own Department, it saw "The Gathering":

"being positioned as a platform for business or community to connect with networks around the world. It is seen as an opportunity to help restore the local and national economy, rebuild local and national pride and renew Ireland's global reputation."

"The Gathering" is not just about bringing more tourists into the Republic of Ireland or onto this island; it has a much wider remit. That is fine; that is something that the Republic of Ireland's Government have decided they need to do in the context of the many difficulties that they have had in the past.

My focus is on the continuing success of ni2012 as we concentrate on upcoming events such as the Irish Open, the opening of the Giant's Causeway visitor centre, the Clipper race, the Peace One Day concert, the Land of Giants festival and the fiftieth anniversary festival at Queen's. I mention those because they are in our group of eight international-scale events, but I want to say across the House that there are many other activities happening in 2012 and 2013. I have four pages of details of what is happening in Fermanagh between now and the end of the year, and I am quite happy to share those four pages with the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone after the debate.

As I have said in the House and in answer to questions, I welcome any initiatives for 2013 that bring visitors onto the island, but my main focus in 2013 will be on the significant plans that we already have for the UK City of Culture in Londonderry and the World Police and Fire Games to be hosted in Belfast, not to mention continuing to build on the legacy that we hope will have been generated by ni2012.

The programme of events in 2013 is being developed by Northern Ireland's Tourist Board, which is working closely with the Culture Company in Londonderry to ensure that we have an exciting programme of events, highlights of which will be released in May and the full programme in September 2012. I can confirm that the city will act as host to the Turner prize, which will be only the third time it will have been held outside the Tate Britain, its base since the prize began in 1984. That is a hugely significant event for the Maiden City.

The city will also act as host to the all-Ireland Fleadh Cheoil, again the first time that this celebration of Irish music, song and dance and culture will be held in Northern Ireland. As one of our signature projects, Londonderry has a lot to offer the tourist already visiting. It has a unique tourism offering and the potential to achieve international standout. I get rather disappointed when I hear Members trying to talk down the tourism potential of the many beautiful areas around Northern Ireland.

There has been over £10 million of capital investment in Londonderry to date, resulting in the redevelopment of the city's historical buildings through a built heritage programme led by the Tourist Board. The programme provides a way for Londonderry to retell its many stories and reveal its

shared culture and heritage to tourists, visitors and the community alike. Mrs Kelly said that she hoped we had moved away from a "them and us" agenda. If she wants to look anywhere, she should look to the city of Londonderry as an area where we are sharing our culture and heritage and putting that forward to tourists who come from all over. We hope to continue with that in the way we are investing in the city of Londonderry.

I look forward to seeing that work completed, whether it is the Guildhall, the "Wee Nun's School" as it is known colloquially — the Aras Colmcille — or the Apprentice Boys and what they are doing in relation to their hall. We will support all of those because we want to support the tourism offering right across Northern Ireland and right across the community in Northern Ireland.

Turning to some of the points that have been made, I want to say to Mrs Kelly that we are promoting the Titanic in the rest of Northern Ireland through the work of Tourism Ireland; not just to the 70 million members of the Irish diaspora that she talked about, but to a global audience. One disappointing thing about this debate had been the quoting of statistics that have quite frankly been wrong. Mr McDonnell told us that 60% of our international tourists come through Dublin. That is wrong. Thirty per cent of our international visitors come through Dublin, and we want to see more such visitors; of course we do. The unemployment statistics that Mrs Kelly —

Mr Flanagan: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Foster: I will do so if you let me finish this point.

The unemployment statistic of 7.2% that Mrs Kelly stated is wrong. The unemployment statistic for Northern Ireland is 6.8%.

I am happy to give way to the Member.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Minister for giving way. Far be it from me to defend Dr McDonnell after the way he spoke to MLAs in the House, but I think that the figure he was quoting related to the number of people coming to the island who are not here to visit family and friends; not all overseas visitors. I do not have the figures to hand, but that is the figure he was trying to quote.

Mrs Foster: The percentage he quoted to me — this what I understood it to mean but I stand to be corrected — was that 60% of visitors to Northern Ireland come through Dublin; whereas, our figures are, I think, 28% for 2010 and around 32% or 33% for 2011. I am not making a point because obviously we want to see as many visitors come up to Northern Ireland as possible. Statistics have been thrown around this afternoon, and, frankly, very few of them have been accurate. Members would do well to look at the statistics before they come to the House.

Mr Moutray stated that our tourism industry should be represented and that we should try to build Northern Ireland as a brand, and that is exactly what we are trying to do. Mr Flanagan commented on Homecoming Scotland, which I already mentioned. He said that he wants to see collaboration between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. There is good collaboration between both jurisdictions. However, I have to say that the collaboration will stop at Twickenham when Ulster take on Leinster.

Mr Flanagan: There are nine counties in Ulster.

Mrs Foster: I am quite happy to admit to that at this time.

Mrs Overend said that we should not be looking to the Irish Government but to our Government to see what we can do in Northern Ireland. She referred to the draft tourism strategy. I would like to have seen the draft tourism strategy through the Executive. However, is that holding back what we are doing in tourism? No, it is not. What we have seen over the past period of time is a 4% increase. I am very pleased with that, and I want to see it growing.

Mr Lunn referred to the fact that we were too small to do something on our own and that we should look to a bigger entity. I have to tell him that we are looking to a bigger entity: it is called the United Kingdom. We are jointly connected with a larger initiative called the GREAT campaign. We are very much part of that campaign. We have been profiled, along with the rest of the UK, for all the visitors coming to our shores to celebrate the Olympics later this year.

Mr Dunne spoke about the recent visits to the Middle East and India. Mr McKay said that the Department was not engaged.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for giving way. I wish to point out that the stats, if any of them were wrong, came from the Assembly's Research and Information Service. I will speak to it and clarify that point. In relation to the British Olympics, the Westminster Government took so little acknowledgement of Northern Ireland that they decided not to host any of the games here. Therefore, it has not been very successful at all.

Mrs Foster: I think that the Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister would have something to say on that, given that we are to have training camps here.

Mr Ross: It is the London Olympics, not the UK Olympics.

Mrs Foster: It is the London Olympics, as my friend rightly points out.

Can I also say to her: is she so ignorant that she does not realise that the Cultural Olympiad is playing a very significant part in the major events that are taking place here this year? I know that the Member is blinded by the idea that everything has to be on an all-Ireland basis. However, she really needs to be less myopic and to look at what the United Kingdom is doing for us and our tourism figures. Actually, most of our tourists come from Great Britain. So, is she now saying that she does not want visitors coming from Great Britain? Is that what the Member is saying?

Mr McKay talked about why the Department was not engaged on the issue of "The Gathering". I was told about "The Gathering" initiative — and members of the SDLP might like to take cognisance of this issue — one day before it was launched in Dublin at the Clinton Global Initiative.

Mr McKay then went on to speak about the NIO's negative approach in relation to the visa waiver scheme. It is actually the Irish Government that need to come up to the mark on security issues in order to allow the visa waiver to happen. Indeed, anybody who has a United Kingdom visa can travel to the Republic of Ireland, so visitors who come to the UK

during the Olympics can go right throughout the British Isles with a UK visa.

3.45 pm

Mr Frew said that there was a need to be positive about Northern Ireland, and Mr Swann referred to tourism in our own country. I will point out to him that Tourism Ireland has a statutory duty to give stand-out to Northern Ireland in its work across the world. There will be a very strong legacy after the UK City of Culture. I am more than happy to look at genealogy tourism; we are doing a lot of work on that in North America through Tourism Ireland mailshots.

Mr McMullan said that we were being parochial, but I do not accept that. We are using our contacts across the UK and through Tourism Ireland. Dr McDonnell gave us a lecture on what we needed to do. In his view, more visitors come from Australia to Northern Ireland than come to the Republic of Ireland. That is a fact that people sometimes miss.

When I spoke to Mr Attwood at the Executive meeting last Thursday, I told him that I would not support the motion because it was political. It is clearly a political motion, but that will not stop me from working with colleagues in the Republic of Ireland to promote tourism in Northern Ireland. The motion should be voted down because of its political nature, and I look forward to working with colleagues to promote Northern Ireland across the world.

Mr A Maginness: In summing up, I want to reflect on some of the points that have been made. The motion is not political, nor was it ever intended to be. It was intended to be a helpful motion and to create an extra dimension to tourism in Northern Ireland. It was intended to be beneficial to all our people and to be a boost to tourism.

The idea of "The Gathering" — the Minister referred to it having been mentioned at the Clinton summit in Dublin — is very much based on drawing in all the disparate elements of Irishness throughout the world, whether they be Ulster-Scots, a more Celtic or Gaelic view, or just a common perception of Irishness. "The Gathering" is intended to be a magnet to bring together all the talents throughout the Irish diaspora. Indeed, it is based on the experience of people in Israel, who have used this worldwide pool of talent to draw in investment, tourism and anything that is beneficial to that country and to those people. It is a good example of people using a worldwide reputation to assist in the development of their country. That is what "The Gathering" is intended to do. I do not think that it is some sort of —

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: I will; I am not sure how many minutes I have.

Mrs D Kelly: You have 10 minutes.

Mr A Maginness: I have 10 minutes; I will give way.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Member for giving way. I agree entirely with the analogy that he has drawn with Israel, except that, in this case, we are talking about a Government south of the border who set forward an agenda and a programme without consultation with the Government in Northern Ireland. They have a competing agenda for tourism. It is not complementary, as the Minister clearly set out.

Mr A Maginness: I will take the Member's second point first. It is not a competing agenda. If we attract tourists to Ireland as a whole, North or South, it is of benefit to the whole country — to the whole island of Ireland. Politics should not come into it. We should not be little Irelanders, and nor should we be little Ulster people.

We should be embracing the whole expanse of this island to advance the interests of all our people, irrespective of North and South. That is what I believe was intended by the Irish Government. You might have a point about the lack of consultation. I just do not know —

Mr Humphrey: One day.

Mr A Maginness: Hold on. I do not know the full circumstances behind that or the full background to it. If there was not proper consultation between the Irish Government and the Executive, that is regrettable, but let us move on from that position. Let us not hoke over the ashes. Let us move forward and see whether some benefit can be derived from working co-operatively with the Southern Government on what I think is a very interesting, novel and dynamic idea. As I said, it has been very beneficial to the Israeli people. Let us use the idea to benefit all our people. I do not think that politics should be involved in this, and, coming from the SDLP, I say most sincerely that we did not intend that this be seen as a partisan motion. I would like colleagues, particularly those on the unionist Benches, to take that on board and to accept our bona fides on that assertion.

The Minister is quite right to say that "The Gathering" is not just about tourism. It is also about investment and about taking advantage —

Mr S Anderson: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: Yes, of course.

Mr S Anderson: I thank the Member for giving way. I was here at the beginning of the debate. Do you agree that, at the outset, Mrs Kelly set the wrong tone in the way in which she presented the motion?

Mr A Maginness: I was here for her speech. I cannot give you that speech verbatim, but I could not see anything in it that is antipathetic to what I have said.

I repeat that "The Gathering" idea is a good idea for all of us, North and South. There is no political agenda involved. Everyone benefits, and it is worth trying. We have done remarkably well, and I give credit to the Minister for the development of tourism in Northern Ireland and particularly for where we have got to in 2012. I believe that this will be a most successful year, and I and my party fully support it. We support the fact that money, effort and time have been invested. We support Tourism Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. We support all the efforts that have been made by a whole combination of people who have given great leadership to the tourism industry throughout Northern Ireland. We do not want to see that damaged. We want to see it developed and advanced, and we want to see people investing, creating jobs and making money. That is what tourism is all about.

There is huge potential in Northern Ireland for tourism, but you cannot just view tourism in Northern Ireland in isolation from the rest of Ireland, because people from outside view

Ireland as one holiday destination. They do not distinguish between Northern Ireland and the South. They just see us as Irish people. We may have peculiarities, and, from time to time, we may not get on with one another, but, by and large, they like us. That is very important. The natural charms of north Antrim travel widely throughout the world. The natural charms of the people of south Armagh are the same, and people love our warmth and friendship. They may think us a little eccentric at times when it comes to our politics, but they do like our hospitality and our tourism offering.

Mr Byrne: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: Very quickly.

Mr Byrne: Tourism is largely an economic exercise. Does the Member agree that, whether we like it or not, more international flights come into Dublin, Cork, Shannon and Knock airports than we have operating at Belfast International Airport? The key question is: how do we capture a greater percentage of those who come into the Republic through the tour operators and get them onto our route up here?

Mr A Maginness: I agree entirely, and I am sure that even the Minister will agree. If we can get people to come to this island and move northwards from the South, that will be of benefit to us; and if we can get more people to come to Belfast International Airport or to other airports in Northern Ireland and move southwards, that will be of benefit. Let us concentrate on working together with the southern jurisdiction to develop what we have.

This island has something very special to offer; its environment, people, culture and music make it a world leader. However, we must develop that infrastructure and develop the ways and means of attracting people to this island; there is no reason for us to put political obstacles in front of that. There is no reason for us to put Tourism Ireland in one place and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board in another. Let us work co-operatively, because tourism is, in my view, a non-competitive situation.

I hope that the Minister will reflect and perhaps rethink her stance. I know that she has taken a view on the matter, but there could be benefit in looking at it in a more relaxed way —

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

Mr A Maginness: — to move forward to embrace at least some elements of "The Gathering".

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 48; Noes 46.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Mr Chris Hazzard, 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, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mr Rogers.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to support and encourage Tourism Ireland's plans for "The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming" in 2013, which will promote Ireland as a tourism destination to 70 million people worldwide; and further calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to engage with the Irish Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to ensure that the benefit from these plans is derived on an all-island basis and that the Derry/Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 celebrations are included as an integral attraction.

Adjourned at 4.11 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 1 May 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Private Members' Business

Healthcare: Patient Safety

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 to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Ms P Bradley: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to put in place a robust strategy to promote patient safety across the health service.

As a former employee of our National Health Service, I am very proud of healthcare in Northern Ireland. I have seen at first hand the dedication and expertise of our staff as well as how hard they work to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland have access to the best healthcare they can provide. By tabling the motion, I do not mean to attack or demoralise our hard-working health service staff; rather, I intend to support them by giving them additional tools to allow them to continue providing this important service.

When anyone needs to access our health service, they do so in the belief that they will get the right treatment as quickly as possible in a safe and controlled environment and that it will be free at the point of delivery. Of course, the NHS is not free: everyone in this country contributes in some form to the cost of the NHS, and therefore everyone has an interest in ensuring that it performs to the very best of its ability.

The European Union defines quality healthcare as healthcare that is effective, safe and responds to the needs and preferences of patients. In Northern Ireland, our 10-year quality strategy has safety as one of its three main headings. That shows how seriously we in Northern Ireland take our responsibility for patient safety. It is entirely correct that safety should be at the top of the healthcare agenda. The role of safety is one of the cornerstone beliefs of anyone entering our medical professions, with the instruction to first do no harm at the centre.

It is important that we understand what we mean by "safe". Medicine is a practice that is driven by humans. Sadly, humans can and will make mistakes, which means that, in healthcare, there will always be some element of risk. Providing safe care involves placing an emphasis on providers to be proactive when identifying the risks and promoting strategies that will minimise those risks. That

will, in turn, promote reliability, reduce variation in the care provided and minimise harm to service users.

When we talk of patient harm, we cover a wide range of harm, from not enough attention by nursing staff to mistakes over missed medicine, to unnecessary surgery and, finally, to the most serious, which results in death. Therefore, it is important to remember that safety incidences can involve a wide range of factors, from infrastructure, training, treatment protocols, procedure and communication to simple administrative errors. Safety is the responsibility of all staff — clinical and non-clinical. When adverse events occur, the service providers should ensure that the maximum lessons are learned and procedures, where appropriate, implemented to reduce the risk of the incident recurring.

It is not just in the United Kingdom that the role of safety in healthcare has received prominence. A number of international studies have examined the area of patient care. Those studies put the rate of adverse events in acute care at between 2.7% and 16.6%. Even at the lower end of the scale, this is an issue of deep concern. In the 1990s, it was increasingly noted that the majority of harm inflicted on patients was not done deliberately, negligently or through serious incompetence but through competent clinicians working in inadequate systems. That was the central premise of landmark publications such as 'To Err Is Human'. That publication argued that attempts to improve patient safety should focus not on punishing individuals when errors occur but on moving away from a blame culture that encourages the covering-up of incidents and fails to identify underlying causes and to learn lessons that could prevent the repetition of such incidents. Thus, it is my belief that we need to ensure that any robust strategy includes an open, no-blame reporting culture.

It is worth remembering that harm does not occur only when the patient is in a hospital setting. Harm can be done when the patient is in the community attending many of the other services. The NHS is a multifaceted organisation, and there is always potential for harm to occur. Therefore, our approach to ensuring patient safety must also be multifaceted. As highlighted in the 'Safety First' document, there are four main components of an informed safety culture: a reporting culture, a just culture, a flexible culture and a learning culture. Any safety strategy must endeavour to ensure that those cultures are promoted in the strategy and are communicated to the personnel involved.

We should also look to learn from examples of best practice elsewhere in the UK. Where an adverse incident has occurred or has been prevented from happening, systems need to be in place to assist individuals and organisations

to learn from mistakes. In developing the safety strategy, we must also ensure that the voices of front line healthcare staff are listened to and actioned on. It is a sad fact that, often, the voices of those at the coalface are ignored in developing strategies, and yet that group of people has a rich insight into what needs to be done and what is actually happening. We ignore them at our peril.

Systems and procedures can go only so far, however, in reducing risk. We must also encourage individual patients to feel confident enough to question medical professionals and challenge them over issues such as hand-washing. In Northern Ireland, we have a reverence for the medical profession that is long-instilled in us. People need to take personal responsibility and be proactive about their care and the care of their loved ones. That should complement our safety strategy and provide another important interface to prevent mistakes. The health service must also, as a whole, communicate to patients when a mistake or near miss occurs. By doing so, we can encourage the free flow of information from both sides, promote the learning aspect and turn the negative into a positive. The empowerment of patients is provided for in our 'Quality 2020' paper.

Aside from the massive human costs of mistakes, the majority of which are, thankfully, no-harm or low-harm incidents, we must be aware that such incidents have an economic cost to our NHS. That takes financial resources away from patient care. It is a drain that we can work together to ensure is kept to a minimum. No country has yet succeeded in completely eradicating any risk of harm. In a time of austerity, it is right and just that we look at ways to reduce unnecessary spending without affecting front line services. By developing a robust safety strategy, we have the opportunity to do that.

Patient safety is a core domain of quality, and it demands a system-wide effort. It requires a range of actions and applies to all healthcare disciplines equally. We are not alone in trying to ensure patient safety. We must work to learn from other regions in the UK and other countries about how best to develop a strategy that will be practical, workable and will have an impact. International studies suggest that 10% of patients admitted to hospital will experience some form of harm associated with their admission. However, we should remember that not all that harm is preventable or serious. That notwithstanding, we must work tirelessly to ensure that preventable harm is prevented, regardless of the level of harm.

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 opportunity to address the House as the Chair of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety. I commend the proposer of the motion for securing this important debate.

The Committee has been very concerned, particularly over the past three months, about patient safety in our hospitals and in different aspects of our health service. Others will go into that. The reality is that people go to hospital because they are already vulnerable, sick, unwell, suffering from chronic illness at times or have been in an accident of some sort. When people go to hospital, they have a right to expect that they are in a safe environment and will not come into harm's way. However, as Paula outlined, that is, unfortunately, not always the case. Recently, there have been incidents of people going to A&E and not receiving the

care that they are entitled to. We are all aware of the tragic case of the man who died on a trolley in the Royal in early March. There have been other cases where people's health has deteriorated because they had to endure a long wait in A&E and could not get a bed.

The Committee has taken a proactive approach to the situation in A&Es, because we know that it is an issue that our constituents are worried about. On 22 March, the Committee undertook an official visit to the A&E at the Royal Hospital. We were all hugely impressed by the dedication and professionalism of all the medical staff we met. The nurses, doctors and support staff are all committed to sorting out the situation and have already put in place new measures to try to improve the flow of patients through A&E. However, we need a more joined-up approach across hospitals, particularly for discharge from wards, so that more beds are freed up for patients from A&E who need to be admitted.

The Minister announced the creation of an A&E improvement action group that will report to the health board. The Committee will take evidence from that group next month to see exactly what has been done to improve the situation. We have also commissioned a Research and Information Service paper on A&E waiting times and are holding an evidence session with the Department on the acute service budget for 2012-13.

The other issue of major concern with patient safety that the Committee has been dealing with is the pseudomonas outbreak at neonatal units. The Committee held a special meeting during recess and was briefed by Professor Troop on her interim report, which contained 15 recommendations. At our meeting tomorrow, we will consider a letter from the Minister detailing the update on those recommendations. We will all be very interested in that. The final report from Professor Troop will be published towards the end of May. In advance of that report, the Committee will visit the neonatal unit at the Royal to see conditions for ourselves.

The Committee wishes to see patient safety as the number-one priority and calls on the Minister, the Health and Social Care Board and the trusts to do all that they can to make that a reality.

10.45 am

Mr McCallister: I congratulate Ms Bradley on securing today's debate. In her opening remarks she set out the main themes of patient safety, the main concerns that people have across the board and how we identify the shortfalls when the system goes wrong. An important message to get out from the House is that, thankfully, most incidents are low-harm or not harmful at all.

As a general view, the fault in our hospitals is the fault of the systems; it is not the fault of the staff. Generally, when things go wrong, the system is to blame; it is no reflection on the high quality of the staff whom we have working across our health and social care system. Patients and families rightly expect a top-quality health service; that is what we all demand and want for our families and loved ones. We have to get the systems right because, ironically, people can be at more risk in hospital than at home. Later, Ms Ramsey, the Chair of the Committee, will speak about the tragic effects of the pseudomonas outbreak. We have also had issues with clostridium difficile across the hospital

sector, particularly in Antrim Area Hospital. Therefore, it is about looking at where the systems let us down.

As Ms Bradley rightly pointed out, it is about recording the issues, identifying problems and learning from them, whether in primary or secondary care or in the community. When things go wrong, it is important that the health service says that mistakes have been made and that we identify those mistakes quickly and change the system to take account of that. It is important to deal with those mistakes and empower patients to feel that they have a voice in the system and that things will change if they highlight where problems take place.

I agree that there is an economic cost to the health service when things go wrong. Thankfully, as has been said, most cases are lower risk, apart from the obvious awful example of pseudomonas, where the cost to families is immeasurable. None of us would ever want to be in that position. However, there is a cost to extended hospital stays, which is a major problem in the health service and a major strain on resources. That is why the risk has to be reduced.

I am under no illusion that we will ever eliminate risk totally. However, it is about managing and minimising risk, identifying problems quickly and dealing with them quickly and correctly, having a swift response and telling patients that there has been a mistake. Therefore, it is important to get the systems in place. Patients rightly expect the highest standard of care, as we all do. If we get the systems right, the staff will respond, because it is the systems that have traditionally let us down in that area.

Mr McDevitt: I join colleagues in thanking Ms Bradley for proposing the motion today. Before I address the substance of the motion, it is probably worth reflecting on whether the Assembly can be credible in its critique of the health service and health managers when it is so deficient in its own functioning at times. These are gravely serious issues, and I have huge sympathy for the Minister in the position he finds himself in as the political head of the health service in Northern Ireland. However, we come to the House with private Members' business. The only business today is private Members' business. In fact, since Easter, all the House has had has been private Members' business. When you hold that against our ability to do what we were sent here to do by the people — to legislate — many in positions of authority outside the political sphere can, unfortunately, point the finger back at us.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr McDevitt: Yes.

Mr Wells: There was a written response from the Minister yesterday about the potential legislation coming through from the Department. Can I guarantee the Member that, by the end of this calendar year, he will not be disappointed about the legislation that is coming forward?

Mr McDevitt: I wonder if that is a reply from the Minister who will introduce the legislation or from the Minister who is proposing to introduce the legislation.

The record stands for itself. We have had six Bills since we came back from the election. Three of them were Budget Bills, which were unavoidable; one was introduced by my colleague, the Minister of the Environment; and another was

introduced by the Minister for Social Development. That does not make us very credible when it comes to calling on others to up their game. I want to put on the record of the House my appeal to everyone in a position to influence these matters to up their game.

I move now to patient safety. It is undoubtedly the case that public incidents, such as the tragic death of an elderly man in the Royal Victoria A&E recently, undermine public confidence in the health service. They really drill down into public fears and apprehensions about the state of our health service. It is also worth noting that, in 2006, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety produced a report, 'Safety First: A Framework for Sustainable Improvement in the HPSS'. In that report, the Department talked about changing the health service's culture in order to create a culture in which safety could be prioritised. It identified several key characteristics of a culture that puts safety first:

"a reporting culture; a just culture; a flexible culture; and a learning culture."

The report goes on to say:

"A just culture is one that is seen to be open and fair to staff. Creating such a culture encourages the reporting of incidents, which is essential to the success of data collection and subsequent improvement in activity, systems, and care."

The report talks about an open and fair culture as one in which staff are not blamed, criticised or disciplined as a result of genuine slip-ups or mistakes that might have led to an incident. However, where serious misconduct or gross negligence has taken place and where there would be robust discipline, the report talks about determining the concept of blameworthiness and making sure that the organisation as a whole is able to learn from mistakes.

I would like to hold that report of 2006 up to recent experience in the health service. When there have been slip-ups and mistakes in the health service in recent times, what has followed has been witch-hunts. So, we need to ask ourselves whether the culture of the health service is undermining its ability to promote a safety-first culture. My appeal today is for people at every level in the health service to understand that a culture that is based on the principles outlined in that document would keep patients safer, promote active learning and not leave many health service professionals concerned about the consequences of reporting, internally or externally, which is their right and, many would argue, their duty.

I hope that from today's debate we are able to promote a culture based on —

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

Mr McDevitt: — those types of values.

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I think that Mr McDevitt was entitled to an extra minute.

Mr Speaker: I apologise to the Member. If he wants to continue, he can.

Mr McDevitt: No.

Mr Speaker: I realised that the Member was finished. He did not need the extra minute. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McCarthy: I also express my gratitude to the Members who tabled this important motion. The Alliance Party fully supports the motion, which talks about patient safety across the health service. We would also include safety for everyone engaged in providing a first-class health service throughout Northern Ireland, be that patients, staff, ambulance or fire crew or whoever. We fully support the zero tolerance initiative, outside and inside a hospital setting.

Concern has to be expressed about patient safety, given the huge cuts imposed by the Tory-led Government at Westminster, which, undoubtedly, will have a significant impact on all services provided by the National Health Service in Northern Ireland. Stern warnings have been issued. In September last year, it was reported that health chiefs admitted that:

"they will fail to meet a range of ... targets laid out to ensure patient safety and minimise suffering for ... the most vulnerable ... in society."

Indeed, there have been warnings from the trade union UNISON that lives are being or could be put at risk and that the public must be made aware of what is planned.

The motion calls for:

"a robust strategy to promote patient safety".

In November of last year, the Department issued a 10-year strategy to promote and improve quality in health and social care here at home. It comes under three headings: safety; effectiveness; and patient and client focus. We all acknowledge that providing health and social care is a complex, sophisticated and, indeed, increasingly technological service involving a diversity of people working together in multidisciplinary teams, providing this service day and night, all year round. They work through, in a compassionate and professional manner, an enormous volume of engagements each year, be it hospital admissions, patient appointments or consultations and so on with patients, families and carers at a time when they are in pain and suffering. For all those people, it is a fundamental expectation that the service they provide will be as safe as possible.

The unfortunate fact is, of course, that, in such a highly complex and stressful environment, things can go wrong. Thankfully, it is in only a tiny proportion of cases that mistakes are made. However, a high-quality healthcare service needs to protect and improve by learning from all such happenings and so minimising the chance of them happening again. There can never be room for complacency. Safety must always be an aspect of quality that needs to be guarded. Equally, a high-quality service should mean that the services provided are the right ones, at the right time and in the right place. In other words, they must be effective in dealing with patients' clinical and social needs. Just as importantly, services must have a clear patient and client focus. There is abundant evidence that such an approach delivers improved health and well-being outcomes. Patients are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect and must be fully involved in decisions affecting their treatment, care and support.

Patient safety must be at the forefront of this and any strategy. On behalf of the Alliance Party, I fully support the motion.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak on what is a very important matter for everyone in Northern Ireland. Patient safety must be the central priority across our health service. Now is the time to put in place a robust strategy to promote patient safety and ensure that it is the top priority.

Everyone in Northern Ireland rightly expects and deserves a high level of service, whether that is in a front line hospital setting, a community location or even their home. I welcome the work to date by the Health Minister, Edwin Poots, in prioritising the needs of patients. I trust that that important work will continue. I would add that the vast majority of complaints that we get from constituents are not about the standard of care in our health service but about getting into the system, delays, waiting lists and trolley waits. Those are the real issues that need to be addressed.

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

11.00 am

I welcome progress on the Quality 2020 strategy, and I trust it will lead to real advantages in our health service. The three significant themes of any strategy aimed at improving patient safety are quite rightly set out as safety, effectiveness and a focus on patients. I welcome the ambitious and positive strategic vision set out for Northern Ireland, which is that it should be seen as a leader for excellence internationally and, most importantly, by the people of Northern Ireland, who quite rightly deserve the high level of patient safety for which we strive.

Patient responsibility is an important issue. Patients also have to act responsibly. The abuse and overload of our A&Es by those who do not need treatment at such a location needs to be addressed. Attacks on our staff within hospitals must stop, and so, too, must failure to turn up for appointments. All those issues have a negative effect on patient safety and the quality of care.

We have many positives and strengths within our health service, not least one of our best assets, our staff, who provide an excellent service to our population and go about their work in a professional and dedicated manner. I know of many staff who make many personal sacrifices on a daily basis to help improve patients' lives and quality of care. In any strategy, staff have a key role to play in setting up and implementing changes and improvements. There is a need to ensure that staff are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to improve and implement changes in our health service. There is a feeling among staff that the system is too bureaucratic, with a top-heavy management structure in place. Staff need a sense of ownership and an improved sense of morale, and they need to become fully involved with any proposed changes. The provision and carrying out of health and social care is complex, and the reality is that it will never be fully error-free. However, there is always room for improvement, and we must ensure that any potential risk is kept to a minimum.

I welcome the commitment in the strategy to a person-centred approach; a fundamental approach that must be fully implemented. Quality is about patient satisfaction, and quality of care is about patient care, setting standards,

working to ensure compliance through quality systems, monitoring performance, and ensuring non-recurrence of issues that arise. Those are the basics of quality improvement, and it is important that standards continue to rise. We must strive to ensure quality of care.

An effective partnership and communication between those who receive care and those providing services must be in place. Improving communication can often be one of the most cost-effective, practical and effective measures that can help to improve patient safety and the quality of their care. We need to ensure that trust and confidence between patients, their families and staff are maintained and improved. I support the motion.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome the important motion before the Assembly.

Paula Bradley talked about hospitals being “a safe and controlled environment”. I suppose that a simple approach in considering that would be to ensure that people come out of hospital in better condition than when they went in. Unfortunately, that has not always been the case in recent times.

Many years ago, when I was relatively young, when you went into hospital, the first thing you smelt was disinfectant, so there was a perceived atmosphere of cleanliness and hygiene. At that time, obviously, there was a different regime, with matrons, etc. You had probably 10 people cleaning five wards, whereas now you have five people cleaning 10 wards. Presumably, that is because of reduced finances: we may be told different, but that seems generally to be the case.

As to what has been happening lately in relation to the implementation of the Compton review, we have been told that there will be streamlining and cutbacks in hospitals. Will that increase patient safety? If it does not improve patient safety, will management be held accountable? The incidences of patient safety and people who suffered particular injuries in hospital were alluded to, although with MRSA that has been a huge problem. In the Northern Health and Social Care Trust within the past few years, with clostridium difficile, a number of elderly people died. That needs to be addressed.

Paula Bradley talked about the health service being multifaceted. I want to raise a concern with the Minister, which is the issue of patients' safety within their own homes. Many of them are older people who have been discharged from hospital early and who need a very good support infrastructure in their homes. There are numerous safety risks for an elderly person, particularly one who has been ill and is in recovery.

One issue that needs to be addressed is malnutrition, because that affects more than one in three adults admitted to care homes and into hospital. For a lot of older people who live in their own homes, social isolation can result in disinterest in food, and immobility may lead to difficulties with shopping and preparing, cooking and eating food. Problems with incontinence may stop individuals from eating and drinking normally, and innocent medication can result in reduced appetites. These are all people who are suffering from particular illnesses and, at some time, may be admitted to hospital. However, obviously, the issue is to try to prevent that happening.

It has to be said that malnutrition is a significant burden on the health sector. The estimated expenditure on malnutrition-related disease in England, Scotland and Wales, and here in the North, in 2007 was thought to be in excess of £1.3 billion.

Many older people prefer to stay in their own homes within their communities, and meals on wheels are a positive measure to fulfil that ambition. Age NI recently highlighted that low-level services, such as meals on wheels, can enable older people to live independently and may prevent the development of significant health issues later in life.

Mr McCarthy: I am very grateful to the Member for giving way. Does he agree that great concern must be expressed about the recent lifting of the bar in relation to eligibility for meals on wheels? As a result, there is a huge reduction in the number of people receiving meals on wheels.

Mr Brady: I thank the Member for his intervention. Certainly, he raises a very important point. Many on the Health Committee have been out with the service and have seen at first hand how important it is. Meals on wheels provides not only a nutritious diet for older people but a safety and welfare check. In some instances, it is set up in conjunction with social services, and if the delivery person has concerns, people can be contacted immediately.

In four of the five health trusts, persons aged 85 and over were the largest cohort receiving meals on wheels at the end of March 2011. Those who carry out the service should be highly praised for the work they do, as should all staff in the health service. I do not think that what we are talking about in relation to patient safety is by any stretch of the imagination a criticism of the staff who do fantastic work in the conditions that they are sometimes forced to work in.

I commend the work being carried out to combat malnutrition, but not enough measures are being carried out to tackle the issue of patient safety in a community setting. I ask the Minister to treat patient safety as a priority, especially within the community setting, and to take a proactive approach in identifying and minimising such risks for patients.

Mr G Robinson: I congratulate my colleagues on bringing the motion to the House today. It would be unfair if I did not, first, thank and commend the dedicated staff of the health service for all the great work that they do, day in and day out, and remind people that although errors sometimes occur, staff are never praised enough when things go right, as they do on a daily basis, 99.99% of the time. I also condemn anyone who abuses the valued staff in our hospitals and A&E departments.

This is a debate that I welcome as I was involved in some patient safety issues in the last mandate, which were protracted and difficult to solve; a situation that will not, I believe, occur under the present Minister. I also believe that the tools required to achieve the patient safety on which the debate centres are already in place. They may need some adjustments, but they are there to be used. What we must have is strict enforcement. We can have handbooks and guidance notes up to our ears, but if their content is not implemented, there is no point in having them.

We have already seen this Minister act decisively when action needed to be taken. When the tragic loss of babies

to pseudomonas was discovered, he immediately ordered changes of equipment to prevent further loss of life. I believe that this Minister is the one to tackle the challenge head-on, and do so successfully. It should also be stated that money is not the only issue that can help us promote patient safety. It could well be that greater enforcement powers are needed and that trusts need to take a proactive stance when it comes to hand-washing or the use of hand-sanitising gels on wards by staff and visitors alike.

Patient safety is delivered on the wards of our hospitals, in people's homes and in specialist accommodation. Therefore, those areas are the front line in protecting patient safety. I firmly believe that the key to ensuring that we further minimise the small risk to patient safety lies in enforcement and ask that the Minister look especially at that area during his discussions on a patient safety strategy.

Mr Gardiner: I join others in expressing gratitude to Ms Bradley for securing this very worthwhile debate. It is for the benefit of all our people. Patient safety is a key consideration for the health service. I understand that as many as one in 10 of all people admitted to hospital suffers an adverse incident of one sort or another, such as falling out of bed or a cleanliness-related incident. It could also be an element of a surgical or post-operative procedure.

It is my understanding that the previous Health Minister, Michael McGimpsey, had taken steps to put in place a patient safety strategy, and I would be interested to know how that has worked out in practice. I am aware of findings that one trolley round in a hospital had been interrupted over 100 times by others calling it. It was decided that, in future, that round would not be interrupted for any reason.

Any patient safety policy needs to incorporate what are called "never events", which are things that should not happen. They include wrong site surgery; wrong implants; retained foreign objects after an operation; wrongly prepared high-risk injections and medication; maladministration of potassium-containing solutions, such as IV fluids; wrong route of administration of oral treatment; maladministration of insulin; suicide using non-collapsible rails; the escape of a transferred prisoner; falls from unrestricted windows; entrapment in bed rails; misplaced nasal or gastric tubes; administration of the wrong gas; failure to monitor and respond to oxygen saturation; misidentification of patients; severe scalding of patients; and maternal deaths after caesarean surgery.

That list serves to show how complex such a patient safety policy can be. It must be based on anticipated events. I say to the Minister that all those precautions have already been identified by the Royal College of Nursing as being essential parts of patient safety policy. The list grows longer each year.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Like others, I support the motion and thank its proposer for bringing the debate to the House today.

11.15 am

Upon hearing Mr Gardiner's list and the issues covered by colleagues in the House this morning, one could be forgiven for thinking that hospitals are not very safe places. So, from the outset, I want to commend the work of staff not just in our hospitals but in nursing homes and right across our healthcare system, because they do challenging and difficult

work daily to protect people in hospitals. Notwithstanding that, we recognise that there are very many issues with patient safety and that certain things could be done much better. Ms Ramsey covered, for example, the whole issue of A&E and what the Health Committee is doing to try to ensure that the safety of patients in A&E is better than it has been of late. Obviously, that issue has received quite a bit of attention in the media over the past weeks and months.

Mr Brady talked about nursing homes and emphasised the important issue of malnutrition. I welcome his raising of that issue, which has been highlighted a number of times in the House over the past decade. The fact is that many elderly and vulnerable patients who go into hospital suffer from malnourishment, so it is much more difficult for them to benefit from the treatments in hospital because their bodies are already so weak and starved. We in the House have also laboured the point about the whole area of prevention and about how the Minister should be looking at areas such as transport, particularly rural transport schemes, to help people to keep well and enjoy a better quality and much happier life, which keeps them out of the healthcare system and does not put a burden on the system.

To that end, I would like to talk briefly about the issue of osteoporosis, which was raised on the Floor of the House towards the end of last year, and about how effective treatments are not widely available at the moment, so our elderly population is not getting the benefit of them. We heard the staggering fact that if somebody over 70 breaks a hip, they have a one-in-10 chance of seeing the anniversary of that fall. Yet, if they are in a nursing home, their chances increase to four in 10. So, it goes up from 10% to 40% just by dint of the fact that they live in nursing home accommodation. That says something about the level of patient care and safety given to people in nursing homes. So, I think that we have to get a handle on the issues that show that people are not getting the proper level of care and support.

Another issue that has been highlighted in the media — I understand that there is an ongoing inquiry about this — is the amount of drugs given to patients, especially those going for an operation, and the appropriate amount of anaesthetic that someone can receive depending on their size and weight. There have been a number of cases recently where babies were not given the proper amount of drugs, with tragic and fatal consequences. Again, to bring the point back to the fact that healthcare workers work in a very difficult environment, a mistake can cost a life, and to that end, there has to be a robust patient safety strategy in place to protect the most vulnerable.

I recognise that staff support, peer support and proper supervision are important for people who work in our healthcare system. If somebody is in doubt, they should have the confidence to ask a colleague, be it in their own hospital or another hospital, and the ability to seek a second opinion and get reassurance that the decision they are taking and the pathway they have chosen is the correct one for a patient. It is hugely important that staff know that there is a team of people around them to help them to come to the right decision. Equally, we need to give people the confidence to say something if they see a colleague administering medicine in a bad way or making the wrong decisions for patients.

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

Ms Gildernew: Whistleblowers should be protected and given the ability to point out mistakes, when they are made, in order to protect patient safety.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What I had been about to say has largely been covered, but I will reiterate my party's support for the motion. It is very important that we put patient safety to the forefront of the Health Department's thoughts. Obviously, a lot of the direction and thoughts of the Department have of late been, and will be increasingly, focused on reducing expenditure because of the Budget that this Assembly passed last year. However, it is vital that when these efficiencies are being sought, patient care is not compromised in any way.

I congratulate the proposers for the timeliness of the motion in the wake of some highly publicised and very tragic incidents over the past couple of months, many of which could have been avoided had there been greater emphasis on public safety. I also echo the sentiments that some of the contributors to the debate have expressed about health servants and the huge and important role that they play. The Assembly must do everything that it can to support them in their role.

Mr Allister: It is good to have an opportunity to discuss something that is much more relevant to our constituents than some of the business that we discussed, for example, yesterday in this House, when, as time fillers, we ranged far and wide into excepted and foreign matters and all sorts of things, so it is good to return to an issue that is germane to the —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Perhaps the Member would practise it now and talk on the motion. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Allister: Yes, I am just setting the scene, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is good to have an opportunity to talk about something that is germane to our constituents.

Of course, by its very nature, when things go wrong in our health service we all hear about it. Equally however, when, on the vast bulk of occasions, things go as they should, we never think about it and we rarely hear about it. Therefore, it is right to record our appreciation and respect for the staff who keep our health service ticking over adequately and functioning, in the main, successfully.

Mr Wells: The Member raises a valid point. Two weeks ago, the Southern Health and Social Care Trust won the award for the best telemedicine service in the United Kingdom, beating scores of trusts throughout England, Scotland and Wales. The Minister, quite rightly, held a reception in the Long Gallery to mark that tremendous performance, which got about one inch of media coverage. That was a good news story, but, sadly, the media were not interested in it. The media are only interested, as the Member said, in the occasional event when things go wrong.

Mr Allister: I am not entirely going to join in on media-bashing, because as politicians we all use the media in our own ways, but it is a legitimate point that when the health service works as it should, very often none of us has anything to say. When things go wrong, of course, we all have lots to say. Nevertheless, the staff are there for the good times and the bad times, and we appreciate all that they do.

I wanted to focus, in the couple of minutes that I have, on an issue that has not yet been mentioned in the debate.

When a patient has recourse to the health service, we are not just talking about their care when they get to hospital and in the hospital — we all know about rising waiting times and all that — but, very often, when patients avail themselves of the emergency services, about the time that elapses between the call to the ambulance and when it arrives and takes them to the hospital.

The Minister will be aware of a reply that he gave to me a few weeks ago about the downtime of ambulances and how we had, in some of our hospitals in the sample month of February, very unacceptable downtimes — the time that passes from when the patient arrives until he or she is handed over to the professional staff in the hospital. In one case, the downtime was five hours and 26 minutes — a staggering period — from when an ambulance arrived at the Ulster Hospital until it was free to leave again.

In a number of cases, it took two hours or three hours, which is utterly unacceptable. My purpose in making that point is my concern for the patient in such a situation. During that time, the patient has not been handed over to the nursing and healthcare staff in a hospital. What about the patient's safety at that time? That, equally, has to be a radical concern for us all. Therefore, when the Minister responds to the debate, will he be able to tell us whether steps have been taken and guidelines are in place to expedite the handover period for patients? The answer that I was given covers all eventualities. It could cover the unlikely situation of an ambulance breaking down until it leaves a site again, but it is quite clear from the volume that if 30% of ambulance downtimes at the Royal Victoria Hospital and the Ulster Hospital were taking more than 45 minutes, it has, patently, to involve lengthy delays for patients being held until they are handed over, whether in the corridor or elsewhere. I trust that in responding to this debate on the concept of safety, the Minister might be able to reassure us that steps are being taken to address that issue.

This might be the first debate since the matter arose, so when the Minister responds, might he have the stature to apologise publicly to the Member for Strangford Mr McCarthy for the quite appalling and unparliamentary terms that were used to him in a previous debate?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The Member has really gone well off the motion.

Mr Allister: I am still on a point that troubles many in the House, which is that a public apology should be made for what was publicly said.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member knows well that the Speaker has already dealt with the matter, and I regret that it has been raised again.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I have listened with considerable interest, and I welcome the opportunity to respond to this important motion and, indeed, to the important issues that Members raised. From my first day as Minister, I have made it clear that the underlying objective for me and, I believe, all the people who work in our health and social care system is to protect and improve the quality of those services. That means that services must be safe, effective and focused on patients and clients, who must, rightly, be at the heart of everything we do. For that reason, I launched my Department's quality strategy, Quality 2020, in November

last year, a copy of which can be accessed in the Assembly Library or on my Department's website.

Mr McDevitt raised the issue of the business that we conduct in the House and the current lack of legislation in the early part of this Assembly mandate. If we were to compare our business in the first term with that of Scotland or Wales, we would find that they are not in a much different position with legislation. Legislation often takes around a year to come through, and Members should reflect on that. This year, we introduced strategies for mental health, nutrition, allied health, maternity, obesity, and investment, and this quality strategy, Quality 2020. The strategies are not just pieces of paper but important documents that set clear guidelines for people who work in our system. We expect those people to adhere to the guidelines, which should not be taken lightly or treated as some frivolous kind of business. They are serious elements of business, and we need to respect that. In the previous mandate, as Minister of the Environment, I think that I introduced eight pieces of legislation in the space of two years. That will not be happening in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, because it is not that type of Department. We will focus more strongly on strategies as a way forward.

Quality 2020 builds on the work of the past 10 years, and its purpose is to create a new strategic framework and a plan of action that will help to promote and improve quality in health and social care services.

Mr Gardiner said that the previous Minister had launched a number of initiatives on patient safety. One of those was the safety forum that was launched in 2007, and that has had a significant beneficial impact over time.

11.30 am

We want to present a clear vision for the future in which the health and social care system aspires to be recognised internationally, but especially by the people in Northern Ireland, as a leader for excellence in health and social care. That is a huge challenge, because we can see that we have more and more work to do. We have an older population, and we have many new medical devices and new drugs that will prolong people's lives. That is a good thing, but it applies greater pressure to our system, and our budgets are largely flatlining. So, in all of that, we have huge challenges to meet to enable us to deliver on the demands that are expected of us. We have to be innovative and assertive in how we go about our business to achieve that.

We recognise that, over the next 10 years, we will have major challenges, but we also recognise that many opportunities lie ahead, and we should ensure that we are ready to deal effectively with the challenges and opportunities in order to protect and improve quality. This is the vehicle through which I plan to progress priority work to further promote high quality in health and social care in Northern Ireland.

It is important to note that Quality 2020 defines quality for health and social care by three key components: safety, effectiveness and patient focus. In particular, Quality 2020 builds on our achievements in assuring patient safety over recent years, including embedding robust clinical and social care governance practices and procedures through which health and social care bodies are accountable for continuously improving the quality of their services and safeguarding high standards of care by creating an

environment in which excellence in clinical and social care can flourish. That also includes creating an informed, open and fair safety culture across the health and social care system, raising awareness of risk, sharing learning, implementing change, ensuring compliance with recognised best practice, and involving and communicating with the public. It also includes establishing links with a number of external agencies as a source of expertise, such as the National Patient Safety Agency and the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, and the establishment of local agencies to provide assurance and spread best practice, such as through the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority or the Health and Social Care (HSC) Safety Forum.

It is recognised internationally that healthcare is not as safe as it should or, indeed, could be. Frankly, unintended harm and unnecessary deaths are too frequent an outcome in all healthcare systems, and Northern Ireland is not an exception in that regard. There are many factors that impact on the safety of care, including organisational leadership, governance systems, policies and processes, the work environment, team communication, task complexity and patient characteristics as well as the knowledge, skills and motivation of staff. Given the multiplicity of those factors, it is well established in research that most of the unintended harm and unnecessary deaths are due to a combination of circumstances within a system rather than the failings of a single individual.

It is essential to recognise that the vast majority of patients experience care that is safe and of a very high quality. Indeed, two million people are treated each year in Northern Ireland. Obviously, people are being treated more than once because that is a greater number than our population. However, the fact is that, on occasions, very often in very complex and stressful environments, things will go wrong for a variety of reasons. While that only applies in a tiny proportion of cases, for those patients involved, any harm is traumatic. So, for us to deliver a high-quality health and social care service, it is absolutely vital that we learn from those occasions and apply consistency, minimise risk and, where possible, eradicate that. There can never be room for complacency. Safety will always be the component of quality that needs to be guarded as foremost and continually improved.

Quality 2020 seeks to support existing patient safety arrangements established in HSC, which are already delivering quality improvements. The strategy aims to transform the culture. That means creating a new, dynamic culture that is ever more willing to embrace change, innovation and new thinking that can contribute to a safer and more effective service. It also aims to strengthen the workforce. We want to equip those who work in the health and social care system, including the volunteers and carers — they are very important people in the system — with the skills and knowledge they will need to deliver safe, effective services.

We want to measure the improvements. That means improving outcomes measures to ensure the delivery of continuous improvement. We want to raise the standards to produce a coherent framework of robust and meaningful standards against which performance can be assessed. Benchmarking is vital. We want to integrate the care, to build on Northern Ireland's integrated health and social care

system and develop integrated pathways of care for patients and clients to improve the quality of experience for them.

I have recently approved the implementation plan for Quality 2020 and am happy to share that with Members, particularly the Health Committee. Its implementation will lead to various initiatives, including those focused on patient safety, supporting the many initiatives of the health service organisations in the work that they undertake in seeking to fulfil the statutory duty of quality. My officials will now commence the establishment of the management structures and delivery mechanisms, which will be led by the Chief Medical Officer, with the first meeting of the steering group being scheduled within the coming weeks.

The implementation plan identified a number of projects that need to be initiated immediately and progressively over the first three years, with one, in particular, focused immediately on managing implementation and compliance with safety alerts. Thereafter, triennial reviews will reassess priorities in order to protect the integrity of the strategy and to continue protecting and improving quality, including safety of services.

I am heartened by the correspondence that I receive from members of the public, indicating that they are receiving good quality care. When they listen to some of the stuff that goes out in the media, a lot of them will put pen to paper and pass on the message about what really happens in our health and social care system. I want to pay tribute to the excellent staff that we have for the hard work that they engage in and for the fact that they deliver, day and daily, for tens of thousands of people across Northern Ireland. We need to give them the appropriate recognition for the work that they engage in in a safe way. We want to ensure that we support them in doing that.

Mr Allister raised the issue of ambulance downtimes. He referred to a particular circumstance in the Ulster Hospital, where the ambulance downtime was five hours and 26 minutes. I understand that, at that time, the norovirus was present in the Ulster Hospital for around two weeks and that the hospital was under exceptional pressure, which it dealt with and overcame in due course. That was a very difficult period that it had to deal with at that point. For individuals, remaining in the care of paramedics is remaining in the care of people who are skilled at a particular task. Should that person's condition deteriorate, paramedics will avail themselves of other services and, indeed, other staff within the hospital to ensure that patient safety is upheld.

We need to develop and alter the system to ensure that there is a better flow of patients through our hospitals. Patients should not arrive at the accident and emergency department and be pushed through the system; rather, a flow should already exist, and accident and emergency departments should not have to wait as long to get people into the main-stay wards, where appropriate.

I am also of the view that our emergency departments should have the best staff with the best diagnostic equipment at the front door of the hospital, because I believe that that can substantially change the number of inappropriate admissions to hospital and ensure that we can move forward. To do that, we will need to have consultants on emergency departments at those critical times. Therefore, people who want a multiplicity of emergency departments

manned by junior doctors across the country will not be able to achieve that.

In concluding, I am strongly committed to the principle of protecting and improving the quality of health and social care services, especially safety. As a key component of quality, patient safety has been and continues to be a priority for me and all those working in the health and social care system. I am convinced that Quality 2020 is a robust strategy that will play a major role in protecting and improving the quality, especially the safety, of health and social care services for the people of Northern Ireland over the next 10 years.

Finally, I thank those who tabled the motion, and I am grateful for the helpful comments that were made during the debate. I assure Members that all the points that were raised will be addressed as part of the implementation of Quality 2020. In that way, the people of Northern Ireland should know that no effort will be spared in ensuring that our health services will be of the highest possible quality, thus safe, effective and focused on patients and clients. I am convinced that, by that means, we can truly become a leader for excellence in health and social care.

Mr Wells: Mr Deputy Speaker, 1 May 2012 will go down as "Health Day" in the Assembly. In addition to this debate, we have the debate on pseudomonas later and questions to the Department of Health. Indeed, three important health events are going on in this Building. We have a pain summit in Room 115, a multiple sclerosis reception and one of our leading consultants, Dr Morrow, is to receive a justified award at 5.00 pm. Given that today is just an insight into what is going on, it indicates the intensity of the workload in the Health Department.

I am disappointed that, with the exception of Mr Robinson and Mr Allister, to a large extent, this debate has been a case of the Health Committee talking to itself. Health is an important Department, and it is responsible for 40% of the expenditure of the Northern Ireland block grant and employs 70,000 people. So, it disappoints me that the only Members who showed interest in a debate about such an important Department are, with one or two exceptions, Health Committee members. As an Assembly, we need to address that issue. This was an opportunity for those without the insight of the Health Committee to express their concerns and make other comments about this issue, but that did not happen.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. He will be delighted to know that not only are a number of MLAs here interested, but, above his head in the Public Gallery, a class from Drumlins Integrated Primary School in Ballynahinch is listening to his contribution.

Mr Wells: That is an extremely important group of people, because many of their parents would have votes in South Down. Therefore, I will be extremely pleasant to Drumlins Integrated Primary School —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that you do not make reference to people in the Public Gallery. A little bit, OK, but do not prolong it.

Mr Wells: Mr Deputy Speaker, of course I did not instigate that particular transgression.

I congratulate North Belfast Member Paula Bradley for raising this issue in the Assembly. She made the important point that most of what are called accidents arise from consultants, surgeons or other health professionals making genuinely honest mistakes. Given the huge numbers who pass through our hospitals and clinics in Northern Ireland, it is inevitable that mistakes are occasionally made or that proper action leads to unexpected outcomes. I was quite surprised by Mrs Bradley's comment that 10% of all patients will suffer some form of harm, albeit that much of it will not be serious. There was also an indication that 2% of instances can be something about which to be very concerned.

The Chair of the Committee — I believe that she has been anointed permanent Chair, and I congratulate her on her appointment — raised the issue of the Committee's work on pseudomonas. The Committee took that extremely seriously and regards it as an absolute priority.

She pointed out, quite rightly, that the Committee responded immediately to the Minister's request to return during the Easter recess to deal with an extremely serious issue in the health service.

11.45 am

John McCallister raised the point that systems and not people tend to be the problem. Indeed, systems and structures, rather than surgeons and staff, are the concern as far as health safety is concerned.

Mr McDevitt: I thank Mr Wells for giving way. Of course, there is an issue with systems and structures, but there is also an underlying cultural issue. That issue was identified in 2006, and we need to keep it at the front of our minds when debating this issue. The culture in the health service needs to be open and allow self-critique, honest critique and, occasionally, whistle-blowing, without the fear of persecution or prejudice.

Mr Wells: Yes; and Mr McCallister made that important point in his speech. He said that we require total openness and that, when the system, the structure or the culture goes wrong and something is amiss, there must be a willingness to come forward and honestly admit that a mistake has been made so that we can learn from it. I totally agree with him on that point.

Mr McDevitt spoke next, and I welcome him back to the Health Committee. He made a positive contribution in his previous sojourn on the Committee when I was Chairman, and I look forward to his future contributions. That is particularly so as he is a representative for South Belfast, where such a large and significant proportion of the health service estate is positioned.

Mr McDevitt said that he was disappointed with the lack of legislation. I hope that my interjection to him and the point the Minister made about the sheer mass of documents, strategies and consultation papers that come from the Department have eased his disappointment. I suspect that, if he recalls his previous time on the Committee, he will be looking forward to an extremely busy time during his new sojourn on the Committee. In my opinion, the Health Committee reflects the work of the busiest Department in the Executive, and I have never heard anyone on the Committee complaining about a lack of documents, strategies or written material coming before us. Indeed,

I suspect that many of us complain that the workload is intense. However, having said that, Mr McDevitt made a positive contribution to the Health Committee previously and I welcome him back.

Mr McDevitt also asked for openness and fairness to staff, and I think that we all accept that. Having dealt with many of these issues over the past three years and with what are called serious adverse incidents, I very rarely found that staff members had gone in with the purpose or intention of doing something wrong, that they were lazy or did not pay attention to detail. Time and again it was genuine human error, and you have to accept that those things will happen. We cannot avoid risk, but we must manage it and stand up and find out where we went wrong and how we can improve things.

Kieran McCarthy was the next Member who spoke, and I have to be very careful about saying anything critical about him. However, as he often does, he lambasted the Department. I am sure that, in the village of Kircubbin, Mr McCarthy is a very pleasant and likeable man. Mr McCarthy blamed the cuts. Mr McCarthy, am I wrong in thinking that the Alliance Party is affiliated to the Liberal Democrats in GB? Is it not therefore in the coalition of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrat Party? Therefore, when you criticise the coalition Government, you are, to some extent, criticising your bedfellows in the Liberal Democrats, unless I am totally wrong about that relationship.

Like many other Members, Mr McCarthy raised the 10-year strategy and said that it is based on safety, effectiveness and a client focus. The Minister went further and explained exactly what he proposes to do with the outworkings of that strategy.

Gordon Dunne also raised the 10-year strategy and welcomed the progress that has been made. I think that he made a very interesting and novel point. He said that responsibility is on not only the health clinicians, the Minister, the trusts and the boards; it is also on the patients. I was alarmed at a recent question for written answer about the incidents of alcohol abuse in hospitals. Indeed, the Minister has statistics that reveal that 30% of the patients who report to Altnagelvin Hospital are under the influence of alcohol. That is placing an intolerable burden on staff, particularly those who work in A&E departments at night and at weekends. There is a responsibility on the general public — the 1.8 million of us who use the health service in Northern Ireland — to act responsibly and to not place intolerable burdens on those who are trying desperately to look after us from the cradle to the grave. Why, I wonder, are we having difficulty getting junior doctors to work in A&Es at night and at weekends, when one in every three patients they encounter — indeed, on a Saturday night, it is probably a lot more — is under the influence of drink and abusive?

Just yesterday, another written answer — I do read the copious written answers that the Minister provides — highlighted the sheer extent of resources being allocated for security staff in our hospitals, particularly the Belfast big three. Money is effectively being used to prevent patients from attacking or abusing hospital staff, and that is a waste. I found the statistics provided yesterday quite frightening.

Mickey Brady brought up the issue of looking at the whole health service, not just A&E. He was absolutely right to take

us back to the fact that there is much more to consider than simply what happens under the surgeon's knife, as it were. He raised the issues of cutbacks in meals on wheels and malnutrition in hospitals. He mentioned the shocking statistic that one in three people over a certain age is malnourished.

George Robinson, quite rightly, highlighted the swift action taken by the Minister in dealing with recent incidents affecting patient safety. We all remember, for instance, the Minister initiating the Troop review. Within three months it had reported back, and we will get the full report on 31 May. That is in stark contrast to other ongoing inquiries that were initiated by previous Ministers, took years even to get going and could take a decade to report. Therefore, effective, quick action has been taken. Indeed, when there was clearly an issue of patient safety in the Belfast Trust, the Minister came in very quickly and enforced special measures on it.

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

Mr Wells: I thank all Members who took part in this useful debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to put in place a robust strategy to promote patient safety across the health service.

Hospitals: Pseudomonas Incidents in Neonatal Units

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 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.

Ms S Ramsey: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the recent interim report on pseudomonas incidents in neonatal units and its recommendation that the development of the new regional neonatal intensive care unit should be expedited as soon as possible; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to bring forward a time frame for the completion of the new regional women and children's hospital.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. At the outset, I want to take the opportunity to thank the Business Committee for selecting the motion. On the back of the motion we have just discussed, it is important that we are moving on to this one. I know we were talking about patient safety, but a lot of Members talked about pseudomonas and its impact.

This time last year, probably none of us — well, maybe one or two — nor the majority of the people outside had ever heard of pseudomonas or realised the impact that it could have on the most vulnerable in intensive care units, and especially on babies in neonatal units. Now, everybody knows the word “pseudomonas” and, sadly, the impact that it can have — none more so than the families who lost babies to the outbreak in neonatal units. I think that I speak for everybody in the Chamber when I say that our thoughts and prayers remain with those families, who still suffer today.

I welcome the interim report. When the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee was making his winding-up speech on the previous debate, he outlined the time frame for the interim report on the pseudomonas outbreak. The Committee had a special meeting during the Easter recess. The Minister and I spoke about that and thought it important for the Committee, rather than leaving the matter for two weeks, to come together to look at Professor Troop's findings. It is sad that it took the death of a number of babies for us to get to that point.

The interim report's 15 recommendations should be implemented as soon as possible. Indeed, recommendation 15 refers to the development of a new regional neonatal intensive care unit at the Royal.

In his press release dated 4 April, and in our conversation at the Committee on the same day, the Minister said that he intended to implement all the recommendations of the interim report of the pseudomonas review, which was published that day. He said:

“The Interim Report contains 15 recommendations. ... A number of these can be implemented immediately, and will be.”

I welcome that. He said he had asked his Department to develop an action plan with a timetable for taking forward

the recommendations that require a significant lead-in time or investment.

I welcome the Minister's commitment to ensuring that the lessons from the pseudomonas outbreak are learned and to implementing as quickly as possible those 15 recommendations. However, the last bit about lead-in time panics me a bit, because when we talk about the new women and children's hospital, we are talking about maternity services in Belfast and maternity services and neonatal services across the region.

It was in the early 1990s that it became clear that radical change was needed for maternity services, not only at Belfast City Hospital but at the Royal. Everybody knew that the buildings at that time were inadequate and that the services were split between two hospitals. In June 2003, it was announced that the new regional hospital for women and children would be sited at the Royal. In 2005, it was reported that funding for the design of the new building, which would apparently lead to one of the best maternity facilities in the world, was available. So, there are a number of questions going back to that time. Was that funding made available? What happened to that funding? Where is the state-of-the-art facility?

In 2008, the then Health Minister stated that the facility would not be built for another seven years. In December 2011, Minister Poots stated that the women's hospital would be open in 2014. At that time, he said that the condition of the children's hospital was an absolute disgrace. I agree with the Minister on that.

The children's hospital will be delivered, we are told, as a separate project to the new women and children's hospital and will be delivered in phases. However, considering the state of the children's hospital, and considering the debate we just had on patient safety, we need to know where the plans are.

I do not want to be completely negative. I take the opportunity to welcome the funding of over £150 million for the critical care building at the Royal, and the £30 million for the maternity hospital. However, again, I cannot comprehend the rationale for delivering the children's hospital as a separate project if we are saying that the current facility is an absolute disgrace. The women and children's hospital has always been viewed as one project.

I will throw something into the mix. Two years ago, I was doing a bit of research on women's health for a community and voluntary group that I am a member of. On the day I was doing that research, a statement was put out by the World Health Organization that shocked me, and I hope it does not relate to here. The statement said that women are still dying in the world because men are in charge. I am concerned about why we are waiting years and years for a women and children's facility to be built and completed.

My party colleague Paul Maskey and I met representatives from the Belfast Trust at the end of last week. Although it is a regional facility, it is in our constituency, and, as constituency MLAs, we are keen to ensure that the Belfast Trust plays its part. Although I am concerned that the plans are not coming together as one project, I was impressed with the presentation from the representatives of the Belfast Trust, because I could not comprehend or get clear in my mind how the work could be done in phases. We saw

the plans for the maternity unit going into the critical care unit, the new maternity unit being built and the neonatal unit being there and linking up to the children's hospital. However, if we do the work in phases, I am concerned that once we complete the maternity unit and the neonatal unit, the children's hospital could end up somewhere else.

12.00 pm

The Minister, in the previous debate, said that we needed to embrace change and have new thinking and innovation. Everybody in the Assembly and our community is well aware of the downturn and the economic recession. Everybody is well aware of the difficulty that the construction industry has faced and is well aware of the difficulties that young people who are in an apprentice scheme have in getting a placement. If we want radical, new thinking and innovation, why do the Executive, through you, Minister, not start conversations with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), so that they are part of ensuring that the project is delivered? That would kick-start the construction industry; it would allow our young people to get onto apprenticeship schemes; and it would mean that it is not always the Health Department that has to foot the bill. To ensure that the project is started and completed, I suggest that a conversation takes place in the Executive about how other Ministers can play their part and ensure that we have a collective approach so that the problem is not always left at your door. DETI, DEL and others can play their part. We will end up with the new state-of-the-art women and children's hospital that has been promised for over 20 years.

Mr Wells: At the outset, it is appropriate to echo the concerns and sympathy of others to those who have lost babies in these tragic circumstances. The loss of any baby during pregnancy or shortly after birth is a dreadfully traumatising event for parents, but to lose a child and subsequently discover that something could have been done that would have saved the life of that prematurely born baby makes the grief even greater and more difficult to bear. I pay tribute to the families and the couples involved for the resolve and courage that they have shown. If nothing else comes out of this debate and the whole investigation of the pseudomonas incident, if we can ensure that no other families in Northern Ireland have to go through that trauma, some good will have come out of what has been a tragic situation.

As Members will recall, there was a pseudomonas incident in Altnagelvin hospital in Londonderry. That led to the issuing of an internal memo on 22 December by the Chief Medical Officer. That document has been made available to members of the Health Committee, and I have read it many times. Perhaps it is my naivety, but, in my opinion, that document did not indicate the gravity of the situation that had developed. Fundamentally, the document did not mention that a child had died. That is an absolutely essential piece of information that should have been in that memo.

Unfortunately, the memo was issued three days before Christmas. Now, we are all human, and, on 22 December, my thoughts were not on health policy or the actions of the Minister or the health trusts. On 22 December, the thoughts of most folk in Northern Ireland are on Christmas, presents for the children and family get-togethers. Although it is has been refuted by the Department, it is inevitable that, in some instances, that memo sat in an in tray for action after

Christmas. That would have been entirely understandable but not justified. There is no evidence that, following that alert, much action was taken in some parts of the health trust estate.

Sadly, to compound matters, it took several days after the deaths in the Royal for it to be announced that the infection had been detected in the last two metres of the plumbing system in the hospital. When, with hindsight, one reads all the documentation on pseudomonas, it is blindingly obvious to even a layperson like me that, in the vast majority of cases, that is where pseudomonas infections occur. A very similar set of circumstances emerged in Turkey, of all places. A report was issued that indicated that, if pseudomonas arises, the most obvious place to check is the last section of the plumbing. So I was a bit surprised that it took so long before it was known exactly what had happened.

The delay in the health service estate contrasts with the very swift action of the Minister. The Minister immediately grabbed hold of the extremely worrying situation and appointed Professor Troop and her team to look into it. I urge Members to look at the make-up of that team: it really was an extremely experienced and professional group of people with expertise on the issue. The time frame was that we would have an interim report between January and May — that has already been issued — and the full report by 31 May. The full report will deal with who knew what and when and what happened and will trace the paper trail in the whole unfortunate incident. We must congratulate the Minister on moving so quickly on this and on his commitment that the 15 interim recommendations made by Professor Troop will be initiated immediately. Practices that were clearly causing concern, such as using tap water to wash babies' nappies and using the water supply to defrost donated breast milk, were stopped immediately.

I had the privilege of visiting Craigavon Area Hospital's neonatal unit two weeks ago along with the chair of the Southern Trust, and I saw the actions being taken there.

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

Mr Wells: That unit is certainly taking Troop very seriously, and I am sure that that is happening throughout the trust.

Mr McCallister: At the outset, I want to echo my colleagues' words of sympathy. I can imagine nothing worse than what parents and families are going through after the loss of a very young baby. It must be almost unbearable. Those families are in all our thoughts and prayers, and they will need prayers and support for many weeks and years to come.

Mr Wells talked us through the time frame. The timing of the memo was unfortunate, as we were coming up to the Christmas break. He is right to point out that many people focus on that break and that can lead to lapses. The debate is timely as it comes after the patient safety debate. Listening to Mr Wells's speech, I was struck by the thought that these incidents were a case in point: the system let families down very badly. The system was not quite in place and so could not detect quickly that this was a major problem. The documentation was not there to inform us that there had been a death in Altnagelvin. Those were failings in the system. As an Assembly and a Committee, we have to ensure that the system is got right, so that this does not happen again. A proper system can prevent an issue from spreading when time is very much of the essence.

Those issues have to be resolved, and I am encouraged by the fact that the Minister will implement the report's recommendations.

Ms Ramsey talked through some of the history of getting to this stage, including the delays and setbacks with the women and children's hospital over 20 years, a period in which maybe four or five different political parties have held the office of Minister. We are all supportive of finding a resolution. Progress has been made. Ms Ramsey said that she was not that keen for the two projects to be separated, with work ongoing at the children's end. I look forward to the Minister's response to hear what he has to say and where we are going on the project. Will it be delivered, even if it is some years off? Are we absolutely committing ourselves to delivering on this much-needed project? We all accept that, with the economic downturn, there are huge constraints on budgets, but are we going to buy into the project as an Assembly, accept the recommendations of the report and set ourselves the target of delivering on this and lifting the standards in how we look after women and children in our society? That is something that we all support. So, we have to get the systems in place.

It is a dreadfully painful lesson for the health service and for the families to have to learn, at a very high cost. However, we have to put in place a better system to make sure that we identify problems such as pseudomonas early, look for knowledge and expertise around the world and put that in place quickly, respond to it quickly and get on top of the situation as fast as is humanly possible to minimise the absolutely appalling losses that families across Northern Ireland suffered earlier this year.

Mr McDevitt: I join colleagues in expressing my sympathies and those of the SDLP again to the families who continue to live through such an incredibly distressful and tragic period of their lives. It is also important to acknowledge our solidarity with the front line staff and other carers who will undoubtedly live with the legacy of those events for a long time.

I welcome the fact that the second phase of Professor Troop's inquiry will focus, to some extent, on the families' experience during this time. I hope that their voice is heard loudly and clearly in Professor Troop's final report. Often, we do not pay enough attention to that voice in the system, and we should always listen carefully to it.

I wish to put on record an acknowledgement of the way in which the Department responded to the crisis, once it became clear that it was a crisis of considerable magnitude. It was refreshing to see Professor Troop's team's ability to respond quickly with an interim report and relatively quickly with a final report. It will undoubtedly play a considerable role in mitigating the potential reputational impact of events like this on the health service, and I think that is worthy of note today.

I thank Mr Wells for welcoming me back to the Health Committee. When I was reading myself into some of the details of these matters over the past couple of weeks, it struck me that Professor Troop identified a couple of different types of issue in her interim report. There are issues of practice and fundamental issues such as the fact that there is still not a regional network in place. One recommendation reads:

"The review team considers that the arrangements for the provision of neonatal care would be greatly strengthened by the establishment of a formal neonatal network."

That obviously makes one worried and makes one want to think about the great opportunities that might have been missed over recent years for the lack of a network. Also, Professor Troop notes in her interim report that

"The network should ensure that neonatal resources across the region are utilised to best effect and that units are working to common policies and procedures."

That is an issue that arises time and time again in her interim report. I hope that the Minister, in his response to today's debate, will have some good news for us with regard to progress on such matters. It does not strike me that it would cost a huge amount of money to get a network in place. It would probably require a fair bit of time and a lot of determination. Generally speaking, time and determination can be found even when money is scarce.

The interim report's findings around the lack of a consistent approach in respect of the declaration of the outbreak are worrying. The report states:

"The review team has concluded that there was no agreed approach across neonatal units in place for the declaration of outbreaks. Environmental sampling including testing of water for pseudomonas was not carried out prior to the confirmation of the outbreaks in Altnagelvin or RJMS."

Again, that is a recommendation or issue that could be addressed without the need for extra money. It just requires determination, doggedness and resolution on behalf of the system.

12.15 pm

There is a similar recommendation around the lack of agreed surveillance procedures for pseudomonas. I wonder if the Minister, in his summation, might talk more generally about surveillance around microbial infection in neonatal units. I am no clinician, but, although we are talking about pseudomonas today, I suspect that the general rule around best practice would apply to general surveillance for microbes, particularly those that could cause infection in neonatal units. What urgent steps are being taken to address those?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr McDevitt: Finally and in the last few seconds, I join those who acknowledge the need for the new facility. One of clearest things the report says is that the current facilities in the Royal are not adequate and make isolation very difficult.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Members for bringing what I consider to be one of the most important issues before the Assembly this morning. However, I consider the wording of the motion to be much too weak. It says that the Assembly:

"notes with concern the recent interim report on pseudomonas".

We are speaking about the loss of four innocent infants' lives. Surely, "concern" should be replaced by "shock, horror and disgust". We are talking about something that ought

never to have happened. The interim report is a factual account of what took place in our hospitals, and it is a damning indictment, highlighting neglect, incompetence and plain tardiness in reacting to a very serious set of circumstances.

I am glad to have the Minister responsible for health in the Chamber this afternoon. I sincerely hope that, when he rises to respond to the debate, rather than trading insults with any Member, he will accept his responsibilities and admit to the serious failures that resulted in the shocking death of four innocent babies. I hope that he does not hide behind the as yet unpublished second part of Professor Troop's report.

Like others, I acknowledge the absolute heartbreak of the parents who have lost their much-loved babies after they contracted pseudomonas. We should never forget their anguish and must do everything in our power to ensure that no other families have to endure such devastating suffering and loss. We offer our deepest sympathy and support to those families at this awful time. I also pay tribute to the families who have come forward to speak to the review team. They have shown immense courage in their efforts to help ensure the safety of other infants in neonatal units.

As has been said, the review team has made 15 recommendations. It is imperative that all recommendations are addressed as soon as possible, particularly recommendation 15 about the provision of the new regional neonatal intensive care unit at the Royal Jubilee Maternity Service.

It cannot be emphasised enough that the lives of vulnerable newborn babies depend on the recommendations being expedited efficiently and effectively, with all stakeholders being fully engaged and informed in the process. The action plan being developed by the Department, which shows the timetable to take forward the recommendations, must, at all times, be transparent and open both to discussion and to hearing the concerns of all those affected.

Overall, it is clear from the 15 recommendations that the standardisation of all protocols relating to infection control in neonatal units is of paramount importance. There should be appropriate regional guidance for all protocols. There should be independent audits, and all organisations and units across Northern Ireland must be completely co-ordinated. In particular, a regional neonatal network must formally be established across Northern Ireland.

It is of the greatest importance that we draw immediate attention to the fact that the review team has made it clear that the design of the Royal Jubilee maternity unit does not help the staff carry out good principles of infection prevention and control. That is unacceptable. We have read that the unit does not have the right facilities for isolation; that there is limited space for circulation in the intensive care units; and that the distance between cots and sluice rooms is likely to have contributed to the use of hand washing sinks to dispose of water after cleaning babies and, thus, potentially, to the spread of contamination in taps. We have read that the water pipes are old — I understand that the unit was built in the early 1930s. Finally, we have read that the roof of the building was leaking. That is horrifying. We, as public representatives, expect staff to take care of the most vulnerable newborn babies in these outrageous conditions: shame on those in charge.

There was good feedback from the staff on their dedication to the care of their patients. They cannot be expected —

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

Mr McCarthy: They cannot be expected to cope with the appalling condition of the physical environment in the current unit. The Troop report clearly indicated —

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

Mr McCarthy: — that, had those in charge acted sooner —

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

Mr McCarthy: — some of those young lives could have been saved.

Ms P Bradley: I support the motion. In doing so, I thank the Members who tabled such an important motion. I also extend my sympathy and condolences to the families whose babies tragically lost their life due to this infection. The pseudomonas outbreak in our neonatal units has come at a huge human cost. All we can do now for the families is try to ensure that whatever lessons can be learned are learned.

As we know from Members who spoke previously, the interim report highlighted 15 changes and lessons that can reduce the chance of bacteria getting a hold in such a way ever again. The material state of our buildings and their fixtures and fittings had an impact on the spread of the bacteria and how difficult it was to control. The report highlights the daily difficulties encountered by staff as they go about their duty of ensuring that the most vulnerable of patients get the best possible care. The behaviour and attentiveness of staff was never called into question. We have some of the very best people working in what have come to light as being less than ideal conditions. Their attitude and dedication is something that we, as a community and society, should be grateful for. The conditions that we ask them to work under in the Royal Jubilee neonatal unit are not something we should be entirely proud of.

The promise of a new neonatal intensive care unit has been in front of us for some time. We know that we cannot produce a hospital overnight. The majority of the problems experienced at the Royal Jubilee have been caused by, among other things, the closure of other units while capacity was not being met at the Royal site. I welcome the fact that the new women's hospital project is under way. When complete, that will hopefully reduce the pressures on our hard-working, dedicated staff and mean that, once again, we can be content with the conditions that we ask our staff to work under.

I commend the Minister for acting so swiftly in commissioning reports on what we did well during the pseudomonas outbreak and, of course, what we did not quite so well and the lessons that we can learn. The report might not have always made easy reading for the Minister or, indeed, the Committee, but it has definitely focused attention on what we need to focus on to ensure that we continue to provide the best possible care for the most vulnerable in our hospitals.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am pleased to be part of the team that tabled the motion. Like others in the House, I would like to take the opportunity to extend my deepest sympathy and

condolences to the families of the babies who died as a result of the pseudomonas outbreak. Their grief and pain are ongoing. They have been through the loss of a baby, and the loss of a child is something that I do not believe any parent ever gets over.

This is a very shocking issue, not least because information was not as forthcoming as we wanted it to be. I first learned of the pseudomonas outbreak from the media on the evening of 19 January. Staff, management and the Minister were trying to ascertain what the source of the infection was over that weekend and in subsequent days. Then, there was much scrutiny of the memo sent on 22 December and the warnings imparted to health professionals as a result of it.

Members will understand that I will not be as sycophantic as Mr Wells. He and I had a meeting with the Minister on 24 January. I was quite shocked, when I left his room and came down to the Chamber for the statement, to find that Raymond McCartney was able to furnish me with more information than I had heard from the Minister because he had been in contact with the family in Derry who had lost their baby in Altnagelvin Area Hospital. At that stage, it was very clear that the source of the outbreak had been identified as the taps, yet that was not made clear to me or to the Deputy Chair of the Health Committee. That is a worry.

We are not here seeking someone to blame, but it is hugely important that the lessons in the Troop report are learnt. I welcome the Minister's statement that he will implement all 15 recommendations. Every assurance must be given that this can never happen again and that families and very vulnerable babies will be protected.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Ms Gildernew: No, I will not.

The issue of pseudomonas and the gravity of the situation over those weeks has not been helped by my dealings with people who have been before the Health Committee talking about those very vulnerable children. We know that the babies in the neonatal unit were cared for extremely well by staff, in very poor conditions at times. Much has been said already about that. We recognise the huge amount of work that staff do on a 24-hour basis to help those small children in their fight for life. However, I have been disappointed at times by the attitude of health professionals to women who have suffered loss. I was told recently that the mother of a stillborn baby had been told that her pregnancy was "unsuccessful". How that is a compassionate way to say "Your baby has died" is beyond me. Much needs to be done to protect and respect people who are bringing children into this world and have to receive devastating news such as that. Ms Ramsey's quotation to the effect that women are still dying in the world because men are in charge should be extended to babies as well. When we had people from the Department talking to the Committee about group B strep, I was horrified by comments made by some of those present on behalf of the Department and by some of the very disparaging comments made about women during that evidence session.

There is much to be learned, not just about the pseudomonas issue itself but about how women who are bereft and have lost a baby during pregnancy or in a neonatal unit are treated. On that point, the new regional women and children's hospital is a huge priority for the House. It is a

regional issue. It affects every Member, because all our constituents will be treated, at one time or another, at that unit. It is well over a decade since I learned of the urgency of that need, and it is very disappointing that, at this point, the women and children's hospital has not been completed. I urge the Minister to do everything he can to ensure that the hospital is built and that our women and children have the standard of care to which they are absolutely entitled.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time. This debate will resume after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Mr Gordon Dunne.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.29 pm.

2.00 pm

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

Oral Answers to Questions

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Eating Disorders

1. **Mr Rogers** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are currently available in Northern Ireland for treatment associated with eating disorders. (AQO 1837/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Congratulations on getting the number one question.

Research shows that the best long-term outcomes for people with an eating disorder are achieved when they are cared for in the community, close to family and other social support networks. Eating disorder services are, therefore, provided through a stepped care approach, which ranges from early detection and intervention to community-based treatment to specialist inpatient provision. The aim is to provide treatment in the community and to prevent hospital admissions. There are separate eating disorder services for adults, children and adolescents, provided by specialist community-based teams in four health and social care trusts. The Belfast Trust provides those services for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, and those teams include consultant psychiatrists, eating therapists and dietitians.

Adult inpatient treatment is facilitated in existing hospitals, with in-reach support provided by specialist community-based eating disorder teams. That ensures a continuum of care when patients are discharged. Inpatient care for children and adolescents with eating disorders is provided at Beechcroft, the regional child and adolescent mental health inpatient unit, which has a consultant who specialises in the treatment of eating disorders.

Mr Rogers: Thank you, Minister, for your response. Will you detail the cost of referring patients from Northern Ireland to other jurisdictions for treatment associated with eating disorders?

Mr Poots: The cost is significant when families have to go to other jurisdictions, not just the cost of the facility and the charge that is laid on the Northern Ireland health service but the cost of flying other family members over and keeping them close to the location for visits, and so forth.

Since 2005, £2 million has been invested in the development of community-based eating disorder services — £1 million in 2005-06, £500,000 in 2007 and £500,000 in 2008. Since 2010, inpatient eating disorder capacity has been provided in each trust area, each of which has one to two beds. Those are managed by specially trained medical psychiatric staff, supported on an in-reach basis

by staff from the community-based eating disorder teams. That provides a seamless service, which is key to achieving the best long-term outcomes for patients. Aside from that, there has been interest from the private sector in developing facilities in Northern Ireland, and discussions have been ongoing with health and social care (HSC) in that regard.

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Minister so far for his answer. What services are available to assist the families, friends and carers of those who suffer from an eating disorder?

Mr Poots: Families, friends and carers are essential in the process, so when young people in particular are referred to clinics not in Northern Ireland, we will support families by providing travel costs and, indeed, accommodation, and so forth, when they are providing support for the family.

Often, that will be once every two weeks. However, it depends on the advice from the specialist as to how often they will allow the individual to see their family, because at times when there are particular problems, the medical advice is that, perhaps, fewer visits are appropriate; whereas at other times, they are looking for more visits. We work very closely with the experts on that issue.

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Following on from the previous supplementary questions, what has the pattern of the number of referrals outside Northern Ireland for the treatment of eating disorders been in recent years?

Mr Poots: Given the size of the population in Northern Ireland, it would be difficult to sustain a specialist unit here, as such a facility would have a relatively small inpatient client base. In the current economic climate, we will not tie up money directly with the development of such a unit, but, as I indicated, the private sector has expressed an interest and has been in discussions with HSC about the number of clients that would be provided for.

It is for clinicians to decide whether individual patients might benefit from care in a specialist eating disorder unit outside Northern Ireland, but the indications are that, over the past number of years, there has been a reduction in extra-contractual referrals to other jurisdictions. That trend is expected to continue as we develop local expertise in the management of complex conditions. That is something that we wish to continue with.

Mr McCallister: The Minister talked about the private sector, so would he be willing to purchase services from that sector if there were problems with waiting lists? Will he indicate whether we have problems with waiting lists and times?

Mr Poots: HSC has been having that discussion with the private sector to establish how many beds HSC would be buying from it if such a unit were established.

We are doing that already, as we are sending young people who suffer from anorexia, and so on, to other parts of the UK, and we are buying those services off the private sector there. So, I would welcome the opportunity to engage in doing that in Northern Ireland.

Special Educational Needs: Autism

2. **Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has had with the

Minister of Education in relation to the reform of the special education needs system, particularly in relation to services for children with autism. (AQO 1838/11-15)

Mr Poots: The outcome of the special educational needs (SEN) and inclusion review creates further opportunities and, indeed, highlights a pressing need for education and health and social care services to work more closely together for the benefit of our more vulnerable children, including those on the autistic spectrum.

I have met the Minister of Education twice to discuss a number of areas where there is potential to improve services and outcomes for children by working together more closely. Our officials are meeting regularly to discuss the possible impact of the SEN review and to explore the potential for a more joined-up approach to service provision for the vulnerable groups of children, specifically where autism is concerned. I discussed our progress on this with Minister O'Dowd on 17 April, and my Department is leading on the development of a whole-life, cross-departmental strategy for people with autism, which is to be published in May 2013.

All Departments, in particular the Department of Education, and the education and library boards are playing a full and positive role in the development of that strategy. I welcome that.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for his answer, and, again, he has clearly shown that there is a great sense of urgency here. Will he offer some further information about autism having an A* SEN rating, given that 80% of parents of autistic children have said that the lack of support has harmed their children's social and communication skills and 65% have said that a lack of support has affected their children's mental health?

Mr Poots: I need to be careful that I do not cross the Education Minister's boundaries. The outcome of the SEN review has identified the need to work more closely together for the benefit of our vulnerable children. So, I am making it clear to the House today that I want to see the barriers between education and health removed when it comes to the well-being of our community, whether it is for autism or anything else. We will continue to work on that.

My officials meet regularly with their Department of Education counterparts to address the issues that were raised by the SEN review. In our meeting on 17 April this year to discuss a range of issues pertaining to both Departments, it was agreed that our common purpose would always be to ensure the maximum benefit for all our children in their health, safety and social well-being, as well as to maximise their opportunities for development, learning and achieving full potential. We discussed the development of the autism strategy at that meeting, and I welcomed the Department of Education's full engagement with our work.

We will continue to work together as Departments to identify common sense solutions to all the issues that were raised so that we can better use our shared resources to provide better outcomes for our children.

Mr Dunne: Like the Minister, we welcome the progress that has been made on the autism strategy. Will he give us some details on how the voluntary sector will be involved in the development of the strategy?

Mr Poots: The voluntary sector is represented on the autism strategy project board by Arlene Cassidy from Autism NI, Derek Doherty from Autism Network NI, Alan Hanna from Autism Initiatives NI, Shirelle Stewart from the National Autistic Society in Northern Ireland, and Monica Wilson from Disability Action.

As members of the project board, the voluntary sector representatives are required to make decisions and drive the work to develop the autism strategy and action plan; work collaboratively with other members of the project board; contribute to the development of the autism strategy and action plan; promote interdepartmental co-operation; raise awareness about autism; and encourage more integrated services for people with autism and their families and carers. So, representatives of the voluntary sector do have a significant role to play. To date, they have played an essential role in facilitating the pre-consultation engagement events and documenting and reporting on the feedback from those events to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety core team. They have also issued the pre-consultation online questionnaire to stakeholders.

I have recently decided that the autism strategy project board should establish a research committee, and I have written to Arlene Cassidy, chief executive of Autism NI, to invite her to take up the role of chairperson. Mrs Cassidy replied on 30 April, accepting the invitation.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Minister assure the House that there will be adequate day care provision for young adults with special needs who are leaving school this summer?

Mr Poots: That is and has been a very challenging situation for very many years. I am not sure precisely what the Member means by “adequate day care provision”. If he is asking whether it will be available five days a week, I very much suspect that that will not be the case. We face a huge challenge. A lot of people with learning disabilities are living considerably longer, which I welcome. Consequently, they are spending a considerably longer time at many of the facilities. I recognise that a pressure exists there, and we need to work together with the community to identify the best way forward. I know that good work is being done in many local communities to address that, and I encourage more such work to take place in order to help us achieve solutions in the sector.

Social Care

3. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the need to reform social care provision. (AQO 1839/11-15)

Mr Poots: In Northern Ireland, like the rest of the UK and Europe, social care provision is coming under pressure for a range of reasons, such as an ageing population, people's increased expectations and the difficult financial climate. Therefore, I have embarked on a three-stage process of reform intended to establish the future direction and funding of adult social care here.

The first stage will be the development of a discussion document, setting out the challenges that the system is facing and aiming to facilitate a public debate around the future of adult social care. I hope to launch the document before the Assembly recess. It will be followed by an

extensive consultation phase aimed at giving the people of Northern Ireland the opportunity to respond with their views.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister for his reply to my question. In December's statement, the Minister said:

“we need to stop doing things that do not work, challenge out-of-date practices”. — [Official Report, Bound Volume 69, p304, col 1].

Five months later, has the Minister identified those out-of-date social care practices? If so, what has he done about them?

Mr Poots: Very clearly, we produced the ‘Transforming Your Care’ document five months ago. The quote was made at that time, and the position has not changed. Over the past number of months, considerable work has been done to develop integrated care partnerships and population plans. A timescale has been set for the delivery of those plans. That will allow us, with the best available evidence, to take the health and social care system forward. It will enable us to challenge those things that are past their sell-by date. We may get criticism for that on occasions and some of the decisions that we will take may be challenged inside and outside this House, but we need to focus clearly on delivering better outcomes in the health and social care system. That can only be done by challenging outmoded practices.

2.15 pm

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Will the review of social care address the financial implications, whether for their homes or their bank accounts, for people who are going into care?

Mr Poots: The Dilnot review was carried out across the UK. We will be putting out our own consultation on these issues to identify the public's views. For example, Northern Ireland is at a considerable advantage over the rest of the UK. Sometimes, we hide the good things that we do, but those people who receive care in their homes do so free of charge in Northern Ireland, which is not the case in England and Wales. Some people will challenge us as to why wealthy people, for example, receive carers on a regular basis. Those are hugely sensitive issues, but, nonetheless, they have to be opened up for discussion so that we can identify how we wish to continue.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann. Comhairle Ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí den Aire cá mhéad airgead a bheidh de dhíth agus ar fáil leis an straitéis a chur i bhfeidhm. In the Minister's estimation, how much money will be needed and available to implement the strategy?

Mr Poots: As regards the money that is needed and the money that is available, we operate the health and social care system on a finite budget with an infinite demand. The money that is needed will greatly outweigh the money that we have, and that would be the case whether I added £1 billion or £2 billion or, probably, even if I added the entire Northern Ireland Executive Budget. That is the reality of the circumstances in which we live.

The amount of money that we get is not as important as how we spend it. We need to spend every penny wisely. We cannot afford to have waste in the system, but unfortunately it exists. Sometimes, Members will bring things to my attention, and, to be quite honest, I welcome that because I

do not know about everything that goes on in the healthcare system. We need to work together as an Assembly to get the best value for money from the resources that we put into our health and social care system.

Causeway Hospital: Accident and Emergency

4. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his long-term plans for the future of the accident and emergency unit at the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine. (AQO 1840/11-15)

Mr Poots: I want to acknowledge the dedication and commitment of the staff who provide emergency care at the Causeway Hospital. I recognise that all emergency departments, including the one at the Causeway Hospital, are under pressure as a result of demand and the increasing complexity and acuity of care.

A whole-systems approach is necessary if we are to provide safe and sustainable services in the longer term, not just for people in the Causeway area but for the whole population of Northern Ireland. This will be taken forward through a programme of reform, which will be informed by Transforming Your Care. In implementing Transforming Your Care, safety and quality of service provision are my first concern, and work is under way to develop population plans that will require local engagement. Any proposals for a major reconfiguration of services will be subject to full public consultation.

Mr Dallat: I have listened carefully to the Minister. Will he assure the House that Coleraine will continue to have an accident and emergency provision that is worthy of the name, and that the Causeway Hospital does not become the last of the name?

Mr Poots: The population plans are being worked up by the trusts and the commissioning bodies. It is important that what is put to me is a sustainable model for the future. The easiest thing for me to do as a Minister would be to indicate that I will not alter anything in the Causeway Hospital, only for some of the royal colleges to withdraw their services six months, one year or two years down the line and for everyone to cry in horror. I would rather make a decision that will allow us to have a sustainable model of care for the Causeway Hospital. I believe that a sustainable model of care will include an emergency department, and I look forward to seeing the trust's proposals in due course. I will be quite happy to challenge the proposals where I do not think that they will meet the needs of the population that is covered by the Northern Trust.

Mr Campbell: The Minister will be aware of meetings that MPs and MLAs have had not only with him but with senior members of the trust and other professionals in the area. Can he outline what the Northern Trust must do over the next few weeks to ensure a continuation of a safe, sustainable, 24/7 accident and emergency service at the Causeway Hospital?

Mr Poots: First, we should not accept poor or substandard performance. A model of care for the Causeway Hospital that is built on having some substandard facility would not be acceptable to the people who access those services. For example, I have stated that 12-hour breaches should occur only on the rarest of occasions, and I expect a report on why each of those breaches has occurred. I also want

to see an improvement against the target that is related to 95% of patients in A&E being discharged or admitted within four hours. The Causeway Hospital has stood up very well against those types of figures.

On the matter of identifying what is a sustainable model, we need doctors with the skills base to deal with the eventualities that will arise at that hospital. Therefore, we cannot support a service where junior doctors deal with life-critical issues. We need to ensure that we have doctors who have the requisite skills to deal with the particular problems that will come to an emergency department. Obviously, the Royal Victoria Hospital is our major trauma hospital, and many people will go directly to that facility. Indeed, where stents are to be applied where people have had heart attacks, they will probably go directly to one of our major hospitals. The Causeway Hospital still provides a whole range of services, such as thrombolysis for stroke patients and many other key services. It is important to ensure that those can be maintained by having the appropriate skills base, and I will need assurances on that.

Mr Allister: The Minister has not brought much assurance to those who suspect that there is a plan to close the A&E at Coleraine. Indeed, I am not sure whether he or I should be more concerned, but I find myself on the same page as the MP for North Antrim, Ian Paisley, who, this week, said in Westminster —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question, please.

Mr Allister: — that the Causeway Hospital is going to close. If an MP from the Minister's party finds no reassurance in what he says and does not believe the assurances that it may not close, why should anyone else think otherwise?

Mr Poots: I note that the Member quoted from a certain publication, which, of course, does not always get things right. As the Member well knows, the MP for North Antrim participated in a debate relating to the European working time directive. He highlighted the problem that the European working time directive creates by not allowing doctors, who previously were allowed to do so, to come into Northern Ireland to support services in the Causeway Hospital. I greatly appreciate the fact that the Member of Parliament for North Antrim is putting up a very vigorous campaign very regularly. In fact, he tortures me about the Causeway Hospital. If the Member of this House for North Antrim were in as regular contact, perhaps more would be done for the residents in that area.

Health: Working-class Communities

5. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what additional action his Department can take to promote and improve the health of people within working-class communities, such as the Kilcooley estate in Bangor. (AQO 1841/11-15)

Mr Poots: More than 60% of health-improvement activities funded or undertaken by the Public Health Agency (PHA) are targeted in disadvantaged communities to specific target groups. The PHA, trusts and others are working with other sectors and with disadvantaged communities, such as Kilcooley, to invest in building capacity and in the design and delivery of programmes to improve health and well-being.

Improving health and well-being and reducing health inequalities will continue to be a key priority for my Department, and I have committed in the Programme for Government to increasing the overall percentage of the allocation to public health. However, health and well-being are influenced by a whole range of inter-related socio-economic and environmental factors in daily life, which are often referred to as the social detriments.

My Department and the health and social care system cannot tackle those issues on their own. Therefore, I have been meeting other Executive Ministers to discuss how we can work together to address the detriments of health that are within the Department's remit. The new cross-departmental public health framework that is being developed for consultation will seek to reinvigorate cross-departmental collaborative action to improve the health and well-being of the working class and the most disadvantaged in our society, and the emphasis will be on community involvement in the design and delivery of programmes based on local need.

Mr Easton: Does the Minister agree that it is vital that we improve health outcomes for working-class communities across Northern Ireland, not just in Kilcooley, and that we need a joined-up approach in government to make sure that that happens?

Mr Poots: Absolutely. I have indicated to the House on a number of occasions that people who live within a very short distance of one another can live for nine years less because they come from a poorer community or one that has greater levels of deprivation. We need to address that; we do not need to find it acceptable. Health and well-being are influenced by a whole range of inter-related socio-economic and environmental influences, and we need to work together on those. The new cross-departmental public health framework that is being developed for consultation will help us to reinvigorate cross-departmental collaborative action to improve health and well-being and to tackle disadvantage. The emphasis will be on community involvement in the design and delivery of programmes based on local need.

I am wholly convinced that the wrong start in life will lead to poor educational outcomes, which will lead to poor employment prospects, all of which will lead to health inequalities. There is a vicious cycle that needs to be broken, and we all have a role to tackle that together and to make a difference for people in disadvantaged communities.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Has the Minister given any thought to the impact that benefit cuts under so-called welfare reform will have on communities such as Kilcooley? Undoubtedly, they will cause more deprivation and more health problems.

Mr Poots: Debt is a problem for many people in our working-class communities. The social services assist many people in those circumstances, but many find themselves in great difficulties and fall into the grip of loan sharks, who are among the most despicable who operate in our communities. Indeed, my ministerial colleague highlighted yesterday the issue of loan sharks who charge interest rates of up to 2,500%. Fortunately, as advertised by people in the House, those no longer exist. In addition, moneys from the Department for Social Development's neighbourhood renewal scheme have been requested for areas to address

community issues. We can assist communities to come together and work closely and can help people to identify different ways of doing things to help them not to fall into the grip of loan sharks and get into debt in the first instance.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister's Department prioritise areas of social disadvantage when funding programmes such as for sexual health, where there appears to be a direct correlation between social disadvantage and teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections?

2.30 pm

Mr Poots: The Public Health Agency will be seeking to direct money more closely to areas of disadvantage. Members need to remember and reflect on the fact that that can best be done on the basis of good knowledge. If local communities develop clear facts about real life situations — poor educational outcomes, high proportions of teenage pregnancies, high proportions of young mothers who smoke during pregnancy, and so on — those will encourage us to carry out more work in such areas. Those factors will be prevalent in many communities, so there will be a huge challenge for us. We need to make a difference, and we must work on the issue.

Justice

County Courts: Judges

1. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Justice, given the proposed increase in the County Courts' jurisdiction, whether consideration has been given to increasing the current complement of County Court judges. (AQO 1852/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The number of County Court judges is a matter for the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission (NIJAC) to determine, in agreement with my Department. My Department has written to the commission to notify it of the proposals to increase the jurisdiction of County Courts and the district judges' court. I understand that the issue is under consideration by the commission. My Department will fully consider the matter before changes to the jurisdictions are brought into operation.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his reply. I emphasise to him that an increasing burden is being put on County Courts, which has to be carried by the judges. Will the Minister report to the Assembly as soon as possible about any discussions he has had with NIJAC on an increase in complement? Will he also consult the judges on the issue?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Maginness for his question. When the Department receives something from NIJAC, consultation will be necessary, and I give a commitment to keep at least the Committee for Justice informed, which is probably the best way to inform the Assembly. There are significant issues about balancing the workload, looking at the caseload across the court system and ensuring the best possible system to speed up justice, which we have spoken about so often in the Chamber.

Mr Kinahan: Do we know, or will we know in the near future, the cost estimates for those changes?

Mr Ford: Mr Kinahan has asked the inevitable question. In the absence of a specific business case that has been worked through, it is not possible to estimate the costings. The Member correctly highlights the fact that we need to ensure that we provide a justice system that we can pay for, as well as a system that delivers for all of us.

Fines: Imprisonment

2. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Justice whether there has been an increase over recent months in the number of people who have been imprisoned for the non-payment of fines. (AQO 1853/11-15)

Mr Ford: Imprisonment for fine default is a major challenge for my Department that I am determined to tackle. We need to ensure that only those who need to go to prison do so. In recent trends in fine default receptions, the second half of 2011 actually saw a 5% reduction when compared with the first half of the year. Early figures for 2012, however, show a slight increase. There were 632 receptions into custody for non-payment of a fine in the first quarter of 2012, compared with an average of 544 receptions per quarter across 2011. Although that does not represent a marked increase, the justice system cannot continue to send people to prison for not paying fines.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response. Has he any plans to end the unnecessary and outdated practice of imprisoning people for non-payment of fines?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Boylan for that supplementary question. I most certainly do have plans. We can all agree that sending people to prison for a few days for non-payment of a fine is a fairly pointless exercise. Indeed, in Dublin on Friday, I was told about people being taken to Mountjoy prison, staying there for a few minutes while the paperwork was done and then being discharged, which clearly achieves nothing. That is why we have instituted arrangements to remind people about having to pay fines, which has resulted in a reduction of 25% or 30% in the number of warrants being issued. That is why, in Newry court, which should be of particular interest to somebody from Newry and Armagh, we have under way the pilot of supervised activity orders. Over 80 supervised activity orders have been made and seven or eight of them have been implemented already. That is a key example of how we are making people do constructive community service rather than go to prison for non-payment of a fine.

We are looking at the wider possibility of how we might introduce a civilian enforcement model, which would require introducing primary legislation here, but would remove from police the burden of chasing fine non-payers and, perhaps, enable a more flexible way of dealing with the offence. We need to look at the full range of options, learning lessons from other jurisdictions that are seeking to move away from the notion that people who default on relatively minor fines go to jail when, otherwise, they would not go near jail.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister give his assessment of how successful the pilot scheme has been, and when we might see it rolled out in other parts of the North?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Durkan for his question, but I am reticent about giving an assessment of a scheme that has

been in operation only since January this year. What is clear, however, is the very fact that a small number of these orders have already been implemented shows that we are keeping a small number of people out of jail for fine default. We will need to ensure that we do the proper research. Work is ongoing with the judiciary and the probation service to identify a second area, after Newry, in which we can roll out the pilot. I hope that that will not be a prelude to Members jumping up all over the House and suggesting their constituency, which tends to happen when we talk about pilot projects. We certainly need to look at how it would work in another area, so that we see what the benefits are and how we could make the scheme operational across Northern Ireland as fast as possible.

Lord Morrow: The Minister intimated the scheme is in relation to sending people to prison. Is that because our prisons are full, it is too costly, or is it because community service is a better way of ensuring that a person does not have a criminal record?

Mr Ford: I thank Lord Morrow for the question. It is of course the case that we know that our prisons are too full. It is also undoubtedly the case that sending fine defaulters to prison for a few days — particularly given the administrative costs and burden of managing that — is far too costly. However, it is not the case that giving somebody a supervised activity order means that they do not get a criminal record. They do a supervised activity order because they have a criminal conviction. It is just the same as receiving a community service order in the first place. It does not suggest that they do not have a record; it suggests that they are disposed of in a more productive and useful way.

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships

3. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the process undertaken to establish the new policing and community safety partnerships. (AQO 1854/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department and the Policing Board are working closely to ensure that we have effective partnerships up and running as soon as possible, and I anticipate that the first meetings will be held later this month. As we work towards fully operational partnerships, we have already made a number of significant achievements. They include commencing the provisions in the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 that create policing and community safety partnerships (PCSPs); the confirmation of a budget for 2012-13 of £5.8 million, provided jointly by my Department and the Policing Board; the appointment of political members and nearly all the independent members across all PCSPs and, indeed, the four Belfast district partnerships; positive engagement with those bodies likely to be formally designated to the partnerships; and the establishment of transitional arrangements to ensure continuity of provision until the partnerships can develop and roll out their own plans.

I look forward to seeing the progress of the partnerships over the coming months. In working towards common goals and co-operating to achieve them, PCSPs will be able to make a real difference on the ground, ensuring that local issues are dealt with and communities have a real opportunity to shape policing and community safety in their areas.

Mr Gardiner: How much has the recruitment process to establish the new policing and community safety partnerships cost?

Mr Ford: I am afraid that I cannot answer the Member's question. He seems to be pursuing me on the same lines as his colleague Mr Kinahan did earlier. The recruitment process is run by the Policing Board and not my Department, and it has responsibility for its administration and cost. I know that it was anticipated that the recruitment exercise that has just been completed would cost significantly less than the one that was carried out last year. However, Mr Gardiner may wish to write to the Policing Board to get the full details.

Mr Lyttle: What does the Minister see as the potential benefits of the policing and community safety partnerships when they are up and running?

Mr Ford: The key issue that we identified in the House — we went through it in great detail as we went through the Bill — was the previously problematic separation between community safety partnerships and district policing partnerships. The Police Service is a partner organisation as well as one that needs to be held to account. The new model gives the opportunity to provide that different way and to integrate the work of the two organisations, so as to avoid the previous duplication that saw similar groups meeting to discuss similar issues at different meetings. The opportunity to bring together councillors, independent members and representatives of the other statutory organisations with an interest in policing and community safety gives us a much better opportunity to plan for the future and to address problems as they arise. The policing and community safety partnerships will also provide the local delivery mechanisms that we need in order to provide what has been highlighted as the key objective: local people producing local solutions to local problems.

Courts: Televised Proceedings

4. **Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Justice if there are any plans to follow the practice adopted in Scotland and allow part of court proceedings to be televised if all parties are in agreement. (AQO 1855/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I stated in my response to an earlier question for oral answer on this matter, filming in courts in Northern Ireland is prohibited by the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 1945 and the Contempt of Court Act 1981. I am aware of the position in Scotland in relation to filming and of the decision last year by the Justice Secretary in England and Wales to relax the ban on filming in that jurisdiction, initially for judgments in the Court of Appeal and, potentially, later in the Crown Court.

Although I have no immediate plans to lift the ban on filming in courts in Northern Ireland, I have asked my Department to monitor the implementation of the proposals in England and Wales and to consider experiences in Scotland and elsewhere. That will allow me to consider whether there are any lessons to be learned and whether a similar move should be made here.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. Will he pay particular attention to the impact of filming in

courts on victims of crime in the review and process of monitoring that he has outlined?

Mr Ford: Undoubtedly, Mr McCallister has raised a key point and one that I have emphasised previously. The important issues are to see that justice is done, that justice is seen to be done and that the interests of victims and witnesses, especially vulnerable witnesses, are protected in any way in which courts are run. That is why we have instituted arrangements to provide better protection and support for vulnerable witnesses, including the opportunity to give evidence by video link and the segregation of victims and vulnerable witnesses in court buildings. We would have to take those interests into account as key priorities in anything that we did in that area.

It is noticeable that the other local jurisdictions are merely looking at the issue of televising judgements. Those of us who witnessed the scenes of a court hearing in Norway on the news in recent days would see particular difficulties in extending the use of cameras to that sort of level.

Mr Weir: As someone who is not persuaded by the merits of filming in court, will the Member tell me what particular objections the Department has about televising court proceedings?

Mr Ford: I would be interested to hear the views of Mr Weir and other sceptics. I must confess that, as I look at what is happening elsewhere, I am probably more on the sceptic end than the enthusiast end. Clearly, it is not just an issue of what the Department and Minister think. We must consider the views of those who run the court system; the judiciary and the lawyers who appear before them; and organisations that support vulnerable witnesses, such as Victim Support and the NSPCC. We must ensure that we get a proper take on what is needed and what is best for Northern Ireland, as opposed to rushing into something that looks like a knee-jerk following of the route on which England and Wales appear to have embarked.

2.45 pm

Mr Rogers: Have there been any requests from broadcasters to televise court proceedings?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Rogers for his question and welcome him to questions on justice. If, in the future, he remains so amenable, in comparison with other Members, I will be greatly pleased. To the best of my knowledge, there have been no requests, simply because the current legislation does not permit such filming. I am not sure that broadcasters have even suggested that we move in the same direction as Scotland, or England and Wales. However, we anticipate that they might take an interest in Northern Ireland when they look at what is happening elsewhere.

Magilligan Prison

5. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the plans to rebuild Magilligan prison. (AQO 1856/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are no plans to rebuild Magilligan prison. An outline estate strategy sets out proposals for the development of the prison estate over the next 10 years. These include proposals for the creation of a new medium-security male prison to be located centrally, which would enable the eventual decommissioning of Magilligan prison

on a phased basis. I hope to launch a public consultation on the outline estate strategy soon. Any proposals will, of course, be tested through the usual business case and consultation processes.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his reply. Does he agree that there are many good reasons why Magilligan prison should stay in the north-west? Not least of those is the area's high unemployment, but the prison also delivers excellent rehabilitation programmes.

Mr Ford: I appreciate that Mr Dallat has a constituency interest in the issue. Of course, I expect Members to make such points on the basis of constituency interests or the interests of groups whom they seek to represent. My view is that I must ensure that the estate strategy that we develop meets the needs of the whole of Northern Ireland in a way that helps to promote and maximise our aim of reducing reoffending and provides appropriate, affordable services. On that basis, I acknowledge Mr Dallat's point about the good work being done in Magilligan. However, the prison does that good work in facilities that are not fit for purpose: temporary buildings, Nissen huts, and, in the case of some workshops, rehabilitated farm buildings. Those are not circumstances in which we should provide modern services to rehabilitate offenders, so we must seek to ensure that we have proper facilities elsewhere. However, as the proposals will be out for consultation, it will be up to individuals to make whatever case they wish for how the prison estate should be developed. The issue is how we develop the prison estate; it is not a Magilligan issue. We need to ensure that we move forward in a way that best meets our outlined aim of reducing reoffending.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. The Minister will be aware that his officials were before the Committee last week. Again, I make the point that all of the review of the prison estate must be in the context of wider prison reform. The debate should not be reduced to Magilligan, or not Magilligan. In much the same way, if there is a need for a centrally located prison, the Department should not be pointing to Maghaberry as its site.

Mr Ford: I thank Mr McCartney for that point, and it is a pleasure when the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee speaks as such and not as an MLA for Foyle. As we set in train the changes needed to provide a suitable prison estate for the future, we need to look at difficult issues and take account of the full range of issues that Mr McCartney highlighted.

Mr G Robinson: Does the Minister agree that a failure to rebuild Magilligan prison will mean that his legacy as Justice Minister will be the wiping out of approximately 400 jobs and the decimation of the economy of Limavady and the surrounding area?

Mr Ford: Again, I expect Mr Robinson to speak as an MLA for East Londonderry, but that is not the line that I have to take. I do not see how moving a facility from A to B is wiping out jobs or decimating the economy when the great majority of those employed at Magilligan do not live in Limavady, as he seems to suggest.

The key issue is what the needs of Northern Ireland are and how we best meet those needs for everyone in Northern Ireland, not the narrow local interests of one particular area.

Individuals clearly wish to represent their constituency. I have to take a view as to what is best for the justice system for the years ahead.

Mr McClarty: Can the Minister give me an estimate of the cost of rebuilding Magilligan prison on its present site compared to that of a newbuild on a different site and the relocation of prisoners and officers?

Mr Ford: The answer to that reasonable question on the finances is that I cannot give Mr McClarty the detailed costing at this stage, because, for example, we do not know the detailed costing of building a new prison. However, I do know that the amount of building that is required means that it would not be simple to do it on the Magilligan prison site, even if it was the best location.

We are talking about a current prison that has substandard accommodation. It is full of residential blocks that have extremely substandard accommodation for workshops and offices. For example, in the Foyleview unit, which houses prisoners who are out working in the community towards the end of their sentences in semi-open conditions, the occupants are living in temporary buildings. None of that is suitable for a modern prison estate, which is why there has to be substantial rebuilding wherever the location might be.

As I said earlier, the opportunity is there for Members to make their comments as the consultation is carried through. The Prison Service and I will have to judge the overall best balance for Northern Ireland.

Maghaberry Prison: Security

6. **Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Justice what action his Department is taking to ensure the safety of prison staff following the recent attack by prisoners on officers in HMP Maghaberry. (AQO 1857/11-15)

Mr Ford: The safety and security of the staff working in our prisons is a priority for me and for the management of the Prison Service. In the past three years, the number of recorded assaults by prisoners on staff has more than halved. Nonetheless, there is no room for complacency.

In the most recent incident, staff were able to respond to and manage the incident swiftly and successfully, and no serious injuries were sustained. However, assaults on prison staff, the police, healthcare workers or teachers cannot be tolerated, and I know that Members will join me in condemning this assault and extending best wishes to the staff involved.

Tensions are often a fact of life in a prison setting. On this occasion, staff were able to use their training and skills to manage the situation in a professional manner and bring it to a successful resolution. It is worth noting that although around 30 other prisoners were in the immediate vicinity, none of them joined in the assault. In fact, two prisoners provided assistance to a third member of staff who lost consciousness afterwards.

Mr Givan: What assessment is carried out when it comes to the ratio of staff to prisoners? I ask that because, only for the 30 other prisoners not engaging in this incident, we could have been talking about something a lot more grave. Given that the governor of Maghaberry, Governor Maguire, is now the acting director of operations and there is an

acting governor at Maghaberry, is the Minister content with the situation and can he give an assurance that the senior management of Maghaberry prison are able to ensure the safety of the staff who work there?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Givan for his question, although I suspect that the latter part of it intrudes on one that one of his colleagues wishes to ask.

There was a consultation on the issue of staff central profiling. The Prison Officers' Association (POA) declined to participate in that. Subsequently, POA committees were given the opportunity to comment on the final reports and the proposed staff profiles, but they did not submit written comments.

The governor and senior staff from the different prisons have visited areas of the prison and discussed with staff the issue of management. We have ratios of officers to staff on the landings that are largely comparable with and in many cases are higher — more staff per prisoner — than in our neighbouring jurisdictions. Therefore, there is not a significant issue in that regard. In the past three years, despite an increase in the number of prisoners, the number of such incidents has gone down from 19 to 17 to eight. That is an indication that good work is being done by prison staff and management in dynamic security to ensure that such incidents do not happen with any regularity.

Mr Hussey: The Minister made reference to the reducing number of incidents. How many prison officers have been injured on duty in the past year, and how many have had to retire as a result of injury on duty?

Mr Ford: I do not have the detailed figures that Mr Hussey asks for, although I can write to him with the details of the total number of injured staff. It should be noted that of the three staff involved in that incident, none was injured seriously. Two have returned to work, although I believe that one has taken some further time off. It is clear that although many of the incidents that we are talking about may be difficult and not particularly pleasant, they are not that serious in respect of how staff are treated by prisoners. By and large, they have been managed very successfully.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí sin. I am relieved to hear that none of the staff was seriously injured in any of those attacks. You, Minister, outlined that some other prisoners became involved to restrain the level of activity and attacks that were continuing. Will you give us assurances that those non-involved prisoners will not be adversely affected as a consequence of what happened, which was totally beyond their control?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr McGlone for that comment. It is not entirely accurate to say that other prisoners restrained those who were engaged in the attack. However, other prisoners provided care for a member of staff who collapsed shortly after the incident. It is my intention to ensure that those who were not part of the difficulty and who did not contribute in any way to the injuries to prison officers should not suffer in any way for it. There are issues that need to be looked at carefully in managing the relationships on a landing immediately after such an incident.

Prisons: Full-body Searches

7. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the introduction of body scanning equipment to replace full-body searches in prisons. (AQO 1858/11-15)

12. **Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on his efforts to establish an alternative to full-body searches in prisons. (AQO 1863/11-15)

Mr Ford: With permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will take questions 7 and 12 together. As Members will know, the Prison Service recently conducted a review of full-body imaging scanners for potential use in Northern Ireland prisons. On the basis of that review, and as previously announced, I intend to initiate a pilot of full-body imaging scanners. A range of technologies is available, and the pilot will focus on two of them: transmission X-ray and millimetre wave, with a view to assessing their suitability for use in Northern Ireland's prisons.

Transmission X-ray scanners have not yet been approved for use in UK prisons, and authorisation must be obtained under the Justification of Practices Involving Ionising Radiation Regulations 2004. An application for use in a prison setting is under way in HMP Holme House, although that process will take some months to complete. I am, therefore, examining whether there would be benefit in commencing a separate application in respect of prisons in Northern Ireland. The use of millimetre wave scanners does not require the same level of approval. The Prison Service will, therefore, be able to commence a pilot of those scanners sooner than the pilot of the transmission X-ray scanners. I intend to provide the Justice Committee with further detail on the necessary steps for the piloting of those scanners later this week.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Thank you for your answer, Minister. I sense a note of progress in it. When will the pilot scheme be introduced?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Lynch for that comment, although I wish that he had sensed a bit more than a note of progress; it is an indication that we are definitely looking at how we can make progress as fast as possible with both technologies and consider their suitability for use in our prisons. I cannot give him a detailed timetable at this stage for how things will proceed, as the transmission X-ray scanners require a validation process that could take some months.

3.00 pm

As I said in my initial answer, the millimetre wave scanners could be moved somewhere more quickly. However, even that will require the acquisition of equipment, training of staff and provision of a suitable area for the scanning to be carried out. I intend to report to the Committee with as much detail as possible this week, which will enable Members to see what the options are.

Mr S Anderson: I thank the Minister for his response. Can the Minister justify permitting and facilitating a group of republican separated prisoners on protest, who make up a micro-percentage of the HMP population in Northern Ireland, to dictate prison security policy to suit themselves with their demand for the introduction of body-scanning equipment?

Mr Ford: No, I cannot, because that is absolutely not what is happening. For the benefit of Mr Anderson and other Members, what we are looking at is a way of avoiding the necessity for full-body searching for all prisoners in all three institutions in Northern Ireland. Full-body searching is not a pleasant process for either those who have to carry it out or those on whom it is carried out. There are technological alternatives that appear to have the potential to be at least as good as full-body searching in identifying attempts to smuggle contraband, which is why we are seeking to look at them.

We are looking at technological alternatives and their potential use for all prisoners in all three prisons. This is not an issue for one group of prisoners; it is an issue for the entire Northern Ireland Prison Service. I believe that all staff and all prisoners would benefit from ensuring that we have safety and security in our prisons in a way that is less demeaning than it currently is for both staff and prisoners.

Private Members' Business

Hospitals: Pseudomonas Incidents in Neonatal Units

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes with concern the recent interim report on pseudomonas incidents in neonatal units and its recommendation that the development of the new regional neonatal intensive care unit should be expedited as soon as possible; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to bring forward a time frame for the completion of the new regional women and children's hospital. — [Ms S Ramsey.]

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak on an important and timely issue. The recent pseudomonas incidents in our hospitals were very regrettable. I wish to pass on my sympathies at this traumatic time to all the families who tragically lost loved ones. Given the severity of the outbreak, it is vital that steps were taken swiftly and measures put in place to ensure that the risk of further outbreaks was kept to a minimum.

When the outbreak was first discovered at Altnagelvin in December 2011, three babies were confirmed to be infected. One baby tragically died. The second confirmed outbreak was in the Belfast Trust in January 2012, and there were three further deaths. Screening of babies was then carried out across the Province and confirmed that other babies in other units had pseudomonas in their skin.

As part of the risk management processes, on 22 December 2011, the Chief Medical Officer issued a directive to all trust chief executives and senior officials detailing the necessary course of action to manage the risk from pseudomonas and legionella and emphasising that a team approach should be used for reviews of schemes to identify potential risk areas. The letter also referred to a previous letter from the deputy secretary of health estates dated 1 July 2011, which further detailed how water systems and potential infection risks should be managed. Chief executives of all trusts were asked to provide a statement of assurance that systems were put in place by 31 August 2011.

The main concern relating to the letter of 22 December was the fact that it was written on the Thursday prior to Christmas Day, when most people were on the wind-down to Christmas. The letter should have been marked as an urgent priority, given the serious nature of its contents and the tragic consequences relating to the need to manage the risk of pseudomonas in all trusts.

The findings of Professor Pat Troop's independent Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) report, which was quite rightly initiated and prioritised by our Health Minister, Edwin Poots, have been very valuable and useful in highlighting the risk areas relating to the pseudomonas outbreaks in the various hospitals throughout Northern Ireland. The 15 recommendations will go some way to addressing risk management.

One of the key issues identified in the report and in various Health Committee discussions is that the bacteria causing pseudomonas is found in stagnant water, usually in the last 2 metres of the pipework that comes before the water

taps. The risk has been somewhat compounded by the introduction of thermostatic mixing valves, with water at the tap at 41°C. In other countries, hot water is circulated at 70°C. I believe that an engineering solution to mitigate the risk should be progressed as a priority to ensure the safety of all high-risk patients in our health service.

We look forward to the publication of the final report, which is due shortly, and I trust that it will lead to further improvements on the issue.

This recent outbreak has highlighted the need to have modern, fit-for-purpose accommodation that meets the modern-day needs of our population. The new regional women and children's hospital should continue to be a priority for our Minister, and I trust that we will see further investment and improvement in our healthcare infrastructure. I support the motion.

Mr Gardiner: At the outset, I would like to say that the preventable deaths of infants, which occurred as a result of the pseudomonas outbreak, were an appalling and unintended outcome. I believe that more should have been done to deal with the cause of the infection, which was identified in December 2011 as being the hospital taps.

When a meeting of the Health Committee considered the pseudomonas issue on 4 April, I used the opportunity to ask the expert present, Dr Michael Kelsey of the independent review team, to explain exactly where the cause of the problem was located. He told me that the infection tended to be found in the last 2 metres of the water distribution system. He said that that was due to a number of factors, one of which was the switch to infrared-operated solenoid taps, which were brought in widely and which use thermostatic mixer valves to avoid scalding. So, the infection arose as an unintended consequence of an attempt to solve another problem, which was the scalding of people's hands when the water was too hot. Dr Kelsey said that it seemed that the new solenoid taps appeared to support the growth of pseudomonas, whereas the old-fashioned, lever-type, simpler taps that had fewer plastics and fewer residual volumes with bits of stagnant water left in the supply pipe were less likely to support pseudomonas. It is shocking that something that was designed to solve another problem had such a terrible outcome. The problem is international, and it has also been widely reported elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

When I questioned Professor Troop and her team more closely, it emerged that, on 4 April, not all the taps had been changed. Although I received some reassurance that babies were now safe because they were being bathed in sterile water — a solution that is now happening right across the United Kingdom — I was still unimpressed that such a simple an operation as changing some taps could take so long.

Apparently, although the manufacturers have been approached by the United Kingdom Health Department and have been asked to design a safer tap, an engineering solution has still to be found. We can take some comfort that sterile water is being used with babies in the meantime. However, I am concerned that solutions to so many problems in the health service appear to take so long. I believe that we now need to focus on speedier outcomes to problems that we experience.

Ms Brown: I rise to speak on the motion as a member of the Health Committee. As many of the Members who have

spoken already have done, I want to pass on my sympathies to the families of those who have lost loved ones, especially ones so very young. I also pay tribute to the staff of the neonatal units. For all of their experience, they must have found the circumstances and subsequent tragedy to be very distressing.

The interim report on pseudomonas incidents in neonatal units and its recommendations, which were published at the beginning of April this year, will provide little or no comfort to those who have lost loved ones in the cases looked at. However, the rest of us must do all that we can to ensure that no other parents go through a similar ordeal because of pseudomonas.

A first step in that learning process has begun with the review by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority. Professor Troop, who headed the review, reported that the measures had been put in place in order to reduce the risk of the spread of infection. It is encouraging that, to date, there have been no further cases of this particular infection, but, of course, we cannot be complacent.

Earlier today, we discussed a motion on patient safety within the health and social care service here in Northern Ireland, and this motion is not entirely unrelated, as we know from the findings in the report and its recommendations.

In her report, Professor Troop detailed that the likely cause of the spread of infection originated from contaminated tap water. Unfortunately, something so seemingly innocuous had a devastating impact. No matter how mundane or seemingly routine, we must ensure that even the most non-technical aspects of healthcare are subject to stringent inspection and review. The safety of patients when in the care of the health service is paramount, and I am pleased that the Minister acted to review the outbreak of this infection and the circumstances that led to the death of the babies.

Recommendation 15 of the interim report, to which the motion refers, states that the development of the new regional neonatal intensive care unit at the Royal Jubilee Maternity Service should be expedited as soon as possible. I, of course, accept that recommendation. As the Minister has advised the Health Committee, he intends to implement all of the recommendations contained in the interim report. I look forward to hearing how that particular recommendation will be progressed.

On 15 December 2011, the Minister announced the beginning of work to the new critical care building at the Royal Victoria Hospital, which includes postnatal beds and a maternity outpatient unit. The rest of the maternity unit is scheduled to be completed by 2014. I hope that the building of the new maternity unit, which is to include the new regional neonatal intensive care unit, is completed earlier, but I recognise that that is dependent on a number of factors, including available budgetary funds and other building commitments on the Royal Victoria Hospital site. However, all those constraints should not stop us from pressing on urgently. This is too important an issue to do otherwise.

Mr Allister: There is no doubt that these incidents caused great distress when they occurred, above all, of course, to the families, but also to many people who have small children or grandchildren. Those people will have thought of the turmoil brought to those families and of the very great

loss that they all suffered. Naturally, therefore, people have been asking questions and looking for answers. Of course, we still do not have all the answers. I trust that by the time the final report is published at the end of May, we will have many of the outstanding answers that we await, because that is imperative if lessons are to be learnt from this. Sometimes, even the holding of an inquiry, necessary as it is, becomes a shield to hold off the answering of questions or, indeed, the asking of questions. That is not always an entirely healthy situation.

With regard to fundamental questions, there is one tangential issue, in a sense. We, or, at least, I, do not even know when the Minister first heard about the outbreak of pseudomonas. I asked him that question in the House when he made one of his statements on the issue, and he did not provide an answer. I then submitted a question for written answer to the same effect, on when he became aware of the outbreak, and I got an answer that did not tell me. The Minister answered:

"I was made aware of a pseudomonas outbreak in Altnagelvin Area Hospital by my Department in a submission of 13 December 2011."

That tells me when the submission was compiled; it does not tell me when he received it or when he became acquainted with the issues. We then had the scenario that it took the following nine days to get a letter out to the other trusts; a letter that many have properly criticised as being in itself inadequate by not referring to the severity of the situation. If that letter arrived in and about the 22 December, no one seems to yet know what then happened to it, where it sat, when it was acted upon or when the first action, if any, was taken on the foot of it. Did it, as some speculate, languish in an in tray over Christmas, or was it actually acted upon? When it was seen that it was inadequate in its content, were further steps taken to plug those gaps?

3.15 pm

Then, there is the issue of the questions that arise about the adequacy of the cleaning operations in our hospitals. I did get an answer from the Minister to a question in respect of that. I asked whether, in the standard process used to check hospital hygiene standards, microbiological tests were routinely carried out as part of that process. In other words, were those tests carried out to identify the presence of bacteria? I must say that the answer to that was disappointing:

"Microbiological testing is not routinely carried out by Trusts but is carried out where an infection outbreak is suspected or confirmed."

Therefore, it is not done until you are aware of the probable existence of an infection. Why is that? Has that changed? Will that change? Is there a cause to change that? Do we not need to be carrying out microbiological testing to make sure that bacteria that give rise to these outbreaks are not already present? Should that not be done on a routine basis? Will that now be done? Those are some of the questions that I think need to be answered.

I did ask the Minister a series of other questions for written answer, none of which were answered, on the premise that an independent review was under way. I trust that that

review does answer those questions and, if not, that he will. There are many, many issues still unanswered. Those issues are still very important for the families affected, for the whole community and for the future.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I welcome the opportunity to hear the views of MLAs on this motion and, indeed, respond to it. I thank the proposers of the motion for raising the two important issues.

The motion refers to the recent pseudomonas outbreaks. The death of a baby is obviously devastating for those families involved, and, indeed, for the entire family of people who have babies in the neonatal units across Northern Ireland. In those circumstances, when you have a child who is unwell, people become closely unified and quite bonded. I know that many people felt great pain as a result of that. For me, having to deal with these circumstances and deal directly with the families involved has been the worst experience of my political life. Indeed, telling people that the death of their baby was perhaps avoidable was one of the hardest tasks I have ever had to fulfil. I trust that I do not have to do it again.

Initially, we commissioned an independent review so that we could have answers as quickly as possible. Mr Allister is right, in as far as, sometimes, inquiries can be put up as blockages. People say, "Oh, we have asked for a public inquiry; how long will that take?" We currently have one that stretches back 17 years; those families have been looking for answers for 17 years. I do not think that that would have been acceptable. So, yes, I did introduce an independent inquiry through the Troop review team. The team came back quickly; I gave them a short time frame in which to respond. They have responded, and made 15 recommendations. The team are bringing forward a further report. I encourage Mr Allister, for example, if he has unanswered questions, to put them to the Troop review team, and it will seek to respond to all the things that are relevant and will add value to the overall report. I encourage anyone who has an interest in this subject to make their opinions known to the Troop review team, pose questions to it, seek to ascertain all the answers to their issues and ensure that, as far as possible, we can mitigate the circumstances in order to prevent this happening again.

The interim report was produced publicly on 4 April and it contained 15 recommendations. I accept all the recommendations. Five of them have already been fulfilled. The majority of them will be fulfilled by the end of the month, and work will continue on a smaller number of them to ensure that we bring them to fruition as quickly as possible. Some will require a longer lead-in time, and I will deal with that.

We need to consider the best way forward for neonatal care and high risk, and the governance of all that is very important. I have met the chair and the chief executive of the Belfast Trust to discuss the interim findings. I have put in place measures to strengthen governance in that instance. So, I look forward to the second report from Professor Troop's team, and I will consider its findings with the same diligence and speed that I considered those of the interim report.

The regional women's hospital has been supported by the Assembly, and I consider it a priority. I strongly refute the

idea that women die because of men in power. I think it a totally sexist and unacceptable remark. Sadly, women die and, sadly, on occasions, the powers that be let them down. Sadly, that is the case for men as well. People die and the powers that be let them down. Let us be realistic about this. I care very passionately about the people who I serve, and I do not see any difference between men and women in their health needs. We need to respond to them equally.

Ms S Ramsey: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Poots: Yes; I certainly will.

Ms S Ramsey: I made the comment. If the Minister remembers, he will know that I said that, hopefully, it was not the issue here. I was quoting a press release from the World Health Organization. It said that, sadly, women are still dying in the world because men are in charge.

Mr Poots: I say very clearly that it is not because of this particular man. This particular man happens to care very passionately about people in Northern Ireland receiving the best possible care, whether men, women or children. I will seek to ensure that that is the case.

As to the regional women's hospital, in any event, we have a revised project for the critical-care building. Along with the new maternity building, it will permit the completion of the new maternity facilities within the current Budget period. The new facilities have been designed to allow for the required clinical linkages with the children's hospital. Some of those things have been planned for quite some time and, even if I desired to change them, it would probably delay the process considerably. It has been planned for some time that it should be done in this particular way. The element within the critical-care building will be completed by November 2012 and operational by the summer of 2013. The plan for the new maternity building is that it will be completed by December 2015. I have indicated that, if it is possible, we should try to tighten the timescale and deliver it sooner. However, in all honesty, given that we are in the second quarter of 2012, I suspect that, with the best will in the world, if we take any time off the schedule, it will be months; it certainly will not be years. However, I am putting pressure on to ensure that the work is completed as quickly as possible.

The maternity project will have three floors of the critical-care centre and the new purpose-built maternity hospital. The critical-care centre will contain two floors of postnatal, single-room accommodation, that is, 58 rooms, and a maternity outpatient centre. The new maternity hospital element will contain a delivery suite, a midwife-led unit, theatres, an antenatal ward, and neonatology and ancillary accommodation. It will connect to the critical-care centre via a two-storey link bridge. The design team for the new maternity project will be formally appointed, I suspect, within days, if it is not already appointed, and it will make progress on the design of the new building. An enabling works contract to prepare the site for the new maternity building is being prepared, to be commenced on site in July, after the builders' holiday break. That will include the demolition of the existing education building, the realignment of site roads and the diversion of existing services. It is planned to commence the main contract works on site in the second quarter of 2013.

In relation to the children's hospital; the competition for the selection of the design team for the maternity project

including site master planning, which identified the optimum location for the proposed children's hospital and how it interfaced with the new maternity building; the critical-care building; and the services and supplies distribution tunnels on the site, the trust has been asked to submit a business case to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) by October 2012. The children's hospital can be procured either through capital funding, using the existing design team framework and the contractor framework, which will be established under the maternity project, or through a revenue-based PFI route, using competitive dialogue process.

The estimated timescales for the procurement route are six months for business case approval; around 18 months for the stage involving design, planning, approval, tender and so forth; and a construction period of around 30 months, giving a total of four and a half years. If that can be pulled forward, I would be very happy to do that. If the project is done by PFI it may take longer, but if that is the only way of delivering it, we will have to consider that.

The total cost of the children's hospital would be around £180 million, including the enabling works. The current capital profile does not permit that level of construction of a new children's hospital in the current Budget period. However, I am looking to be innovative about this, to see whether we can secure the funding to deliver it, because I see it as a priority. We are operating our regional children's hospital in very poor conditions indeed; conditions that I do not believe are acceptable in the medium-to-long term.

We have secured funding of £3 million in 2013-14 and £9 million in 2014-15 to commence the project. In order to expedite the project more quickly than currently planned, I would require at this stage another £30 million to £40 million in my capital budget during this Budget period. So, you can be sure that I will be lobbying the Finance Minister to see whether we can identify any other sources of income to ensure that we can move this forward.

The detail and design of the new children's hospital will be dependent on the outcome of the upcoming paediatric services review. Work will shortly begin on scoping the breadth of the review and on its associated timing. That is certainly something that we will want to do.

I will now respond to questions raised by a number of Members. Mr McDevitt asked for an overview of surveillance systems, which is a perfectly reasonable question. The response is somewhat long, so I hope that you will bear with me.

Public health surveillance is a continuous process that involves the collection, analysis and interpretation of data. That data is then disseminated to policymakers, healthcare professionals and other professionals. The primary purpose of the communicable disease surveillance is to produce timely information for action, and the control of communicable diseases involves not only doctors and nurses but individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds, including water engineers and environmental health officers.

Epidemiological surveillance requires a systematic collection of data, and that is done mainly by making use of data that are generated locally and collected centrally; for example, the reporting by medical microbiologists of laboratory-confirmed infections. The Public Health Agency (PHA)

receives data from several sources, primarily clinicians, hospital laboratories, consultants in communicable disease control and environmental health officers. Surveillance includes arrangements to fulfil statutory requirements in relation to notifiable diseases, of which there are currently 35. In Northern Ireland we are fortunate to have a tradition of voluntary central reporting of laboratory-confirmed infections, and the PHA routinely publishes data on notifiable diseases, vaccination coverage, avian influenza, brucellosis, gastrointestinal infections, hepatitis, healthcare-associated infections, meningococcal diseases, sexually transmitted infections and TB.

That information is published on the agency's website.

3.30 pm

With regard to pseudomonas, surveillance has been in place since 2000 for bloodstream infections caused by a range of strains of the bacterium. Data on colonisations are not routinely collected at present. The independent review has recommended the establishment of surveillance arrangements for pseudomonas for augmented care settings, including neonatal care, and I have accepted all the recommendations in the interim report. The PHA is working with the Department and trusts to implement this recommendation by the end of October.

Other Members covered a range of issues. I think we covered quite a lot of them in the statement that was made. I encourage Members that should they have issues of particular interest or wish to make representations on behalf of constituents, they do so. I believe that the work that has been done thus far by the Troop review team will be used in Northern Ireland, other parts of the United Kingdom and, indeed, in the Republic of Ireland in how we can do things better.

In the interim, for example, while the new hospital is being built, we have to look seriously at the existing facilities over the next three years. Troop made recommendations, and we will seek to respond by having the appropriate separation, and so forth, within our neonatal wards and by ensuring that the facilities meet the needs safely in that intervening period.

So, I encourage Members to contribute, because the quality of the report will be subject to the input received. I am very grateful that many of the families have already got involved in developing the report and assisting in providing information. I know it is very tough and very hard for them to do that and we greatly appreciate what they have done thus far.

Again, I thank the Members for bringing forward this motion, and it is one that I am very content with and add my support to.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome and support the motion, and I welcome the Minister's presence for the debate. I also welcome the recent interim report and its findings, although it is deeply saddening that such a report had to be carried out due to the death of four babies. I also offer my sympathy to the families affected, and the wider family circles.

The Minister and most Members alluded to the 15 recommendations. It is encouraging that the Minister indicated that those should be implemented as soon as possible. In relation to the motion, however, it is also clear from the pseudomonas report that there is a need for a

women and children's hospital. There seems to have been an outstandingly long delay, particularly when that was first mooted going back a number of years and, more recently, in 2005, when funding was, apparently, to be available.

I will go through some of the issues that Members raised. My colleague Sue Ramsey talked about pseudomonas being virtually unheard of previously, and the effects that it would have. Sympathy was also offered to the families. She welcomed the interim report and the 15 recommendations. She talked about the importance of having a women and children's hospital as a regional unit. She quoted the World Health Organization on how women are still dying in the world because men are in charge. She did, I think, qualify that, and the Minister also qualified that it was not his fault. Nevertheless, it was a World Health Organization quote and may have some veracity.

She talked about radical thinking, and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) being part of the project process to ensure that the women and children's hospital could become a reality. The Minister did not allude to that in his speech, so maybe that is something he will consider even though he did not mention it.

Jim Wells talked about sympathy for the affected families. He said that something might have been done to save a premature baby. We need to ensure that this does not happen again. He talked about the incident in Altnagelvin and the document from the Chief Medical Officer in December 2012. Not enough was done to deal with the incident and its implications. There was no evidence that such action was taken in parts of the health service estate. He mentioned an incident in Turkey that involved plumbing and said that the last section of plumbing should have been checked. He referred to Professor Troop's interim report and to her team, saying that they were a very professional group of people. He was strangely fulsome in his praise of the Minister — maybe that is not so strange — and how he has since dealt with the situation.

John McCallister expressed sympathy for the families. He talked about the time frame and the memo that was issued. He said that the debate was timely, following the earlier debate on patient safety. He said that no system is in place to detect the seriousness of issues and that time is of the essence in such cases. He spoke about the need for a women and children's hospital and supported a resolution to that. He asked the Minister to deliver on this project. He also said that systems need to be in place, it had been a painful lesson for the health service and a high cost was involved.

Conall McDevitt expressed sympathy for the families. He talked about solidarity with staff and Professor Troop's final report, which will deal with families' experiences and be an acknowledgement of how the Department reacted. He spoke about the interim and final reports and the absence of a regional network and said that he looked forward to the Minister's response. He talked about the lack of a consistent approach and surveillance. He also mentioned the need for surveillance for microbial infection and acknowledges the need for a new facility.

Kieran McCarthy expressed sympathy for the families. He said that it was a damning indictment of neglect. He said

that he was glad that the Minister was in the Chamber and hoped that he would accept his responsibilities. He acknowledged the heartbreak of parents and paid tribute to the families who spoke to the review team. He talked about the 15 recommendations in the interim report.

Paula Bradley also extended her sympathy and said that we should try to ensure that lessons are learned for the sake of the families. She talked about the 15 recommendations in Professor Troop's interim report. She rightly praised staff and talked about the working conditions that they have to endure: we should not be proud of those. She welcomed the fact that the new women's hospital project is under way. Again, strangely, she commended the Minister and talked about the interim report's attention being focused in the proper area.

Michelle Gildernew expressed sympathy and talked about the shocking and concerning issue. She said that information may not have been as forthcoming as it should have been. She said that she first heard of the outbreak on 19 January 2012 and talked about the December warnings and the lack of information from the Minister. The source of the outbreak was identified as taps. She welcomed the Minister's statement about implementing the 15 recommendations. She said that the babies had been very well cared for by staff and was disappointed by the attitude of some health professionals. She gave the example of a pregnant woman who lost a baby and how that was dealt with. She also talked about the attitude of some of the professionals, and I concur with that, given the presentation that the Committee received about group B strep.

Gordon Dunne said that it was an important and timely issue, which it is. He expressed sympathy and spoke of the severity of the outbreak. He said that it was vital that steps were taken to limit the outbreak and talked about the screening carried out on the other babies who were affected. He spoke about the directive that was issued on 22 December and the identification of potential risk areas. He mentioned a letter that was issued on 1 July 2011 that stated that systems must in place by 31 August 2011. He also spoke about the usefulness of Professor Troop's interim report.

Sam Gardiner spoke about the preventable deaths of infants and said that this was an appalling outcome. He talked about the review team being questioned about the factors that caused the outbreak, as well as the unintended consequence of the solving of one problem leading to the creation of another. He said that sensor taps were installed to prevent one problem, but, as we were told, they caused another.

Pam Brown expressed her sympathy and paid tribute to staff. She spoke about the interim report and the recommendations, and she said that those were of little or no comfort to the parents affected. She talked about the measures being put in place and said that although no further cases had been reported, we cannot be complacent.

Jim Allister said that the incident caused great distress to many people and talked about the turmoil for the families concerned; he said that we still do not know all the answers and that it is imperative that the final report at the end of May answer questions. He talked about fundamental questions, such as when the Minister first heard of the

outbreak, and said that he had not got satisfactory answers to his questions. He asked whether the letter that was sent out had languished in an in-tray over the Christmas period. He talked about the adequacy of cleaning in hospitals and asked whether microbiological tests were carried out routinely. In answer to the question, we learned that such tests are not done routinely until there is evidence of an outbreak.

The Minister welcomed the opportunity to hear MLAs' views; he again expressed sympathy to those affected by the babies' deaths. He said that dealing with those circumstances was the worst experience of his political life. He said that he commissioned an independent review to get answers quickly and that the team responded quickly. He encouraged Mr Allister to put any unanswered questions to the review team.

The Minister accepts all 15 recommendations, which is welcome, and said that the majority of them will be implemented by the end of this month. He said that measures will be put in place to strengthen governance and that developing a women and children's regional hospital is a priority. He said that he did not necessarily agree with the quote about women in particular. He talked about the new maternity facility that is to be completed and about how it will have linkages with the children's hospital.

The new maternity building is to be completed by 2015, but he said that he will expedite that if possible. He gave some details of the new building and the logistics involved. He said that he will try to be innovative in order to secure funding and that another £30 million to £40 million will be required in the current Budget period. He talked about the paediatric services review and gave details of the complexities of health surveillance and reiterated that all the recommendations in the interim report will be accepted.

Again, I stress that he did not mention the point about DETI and DEL, which my colleague Sue Ramsey raised. However, perhaps he will come back to us on it.

I welcome and support the debate. I think that everyone who contributed offered something constructive.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the recent interim report on pseudomonas incidents in neonatal units and its recommendation that the development of the new regional neonatal intensive care unit should be expedited as soon as possible; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to bring forward a time frame for the completion of the new regional women and children's hospital.

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Annadale Flats, South Belfast

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic for debate will have 15 minutes. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately seven minutes.

Mr McGimpsey: Today, I raise the issue of Annadale flats. The flats, for those who are not aware, are in South Belfast, close to the River Lagan and the Ormeau Road. There are 202 flats in the development, which was constructed by Belfast Corporation in the 1950s. Indeed, it has been a very successful development, because a number of the original residents who moved in in the late 1950s are still there. The issue, however, is that there are periods when such developments, although properly built and looked after, require major investment and refurbishment to make them fit for purpose and habitable.

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

I am pleased to see the Minister here and am grateful to him for coming to the debate. It is important to say that when the flats were handed over to the Housing Executive, it attempted to fulfil its statutory obligation as a good landlord to its tenants by ensuring that they were kept in a reasonable state of repair and that defects were properly attended to, as they should be. However, there have been issues with getting the Housing Executive on site and getting it to spend moneys as required. Nevertheless, the flats have been rewired, and new kitchens and double-glazed windows have been put in throughout the complex; issues with heating have also been addressed. There was a pilot scheme for 24 flats, whereby the exterior fabric of the building was completely refurbished, including new pitched roofs. One of the difficulties is that the flats were constructed with flat roofs covered in three-ply felt, which are now long past their useful life and need to be replaced urgently. The roofs are the main issue, although there are ongoing issues around the proper maintenance of the communal areas, and many of the bathrooms are the original ones dating back to the 1950s. Clearly, those issues need to be addressed.

3.45 pm

The first thing that you need to do as a good landlord is to make sure that your property is wind and watertight. If rain is getting in and the roof is leaking, and if water is getting in through ceilings and electrical fittings, and so on, the flats will deteriorate, the building will deteriorate, and it will eventually be lost unless, as a good landlord, you properly maintain your property. The residents of a number of the flats have continually to use basins and buckets to catch the drips of water, which is the issue that I am talking about today.

The flat roofs are long past their sell-by date. I speak as someone who spent a long part of my career as a builder, primarily of residential properties, and I well know the issues

around flat roofs, particularly those that were built in that period. The Housing Executive needs to begin an urgent re-roofing scheme for the flats along the lines of the work that has been done for the 24 flats in the pilot scheme.

The flats need sloped roofs that are felted, tiled or slated, with properly constructed rafters and trusses. That allows water to run out of the building rather than into the building, as happens with a flat roof. With a proper pitched roof, the water can run down internal drainage to external gullies. Currently, as water falls on the flat roof, some of it makes its way down into the flats. That is dangerous when it comes into contact with live electrical wires and fittings, and it is also liable to bring down ceilings.

There is also the issue of tenants not being able to get their flats dried out. The flats are cold because there are problems with insulation; I will talk about that in a minute. Cold and damp flats, as we are all aware, are a recipe for poor health. As I said, a number of the residents in the scheme are elderly people who have lived there for many years, and they are vulnerable to cold-related conditions.

The situation is easy to rectify. The Housing Executive agrees that the re-roofing scheme needs to happen. I have written to the Minister for Social Development and he has replied, saying that he wants to do it and plans to do so, if the money is available. I understand that qualification with regard to future investment, but I am saying that if these roofs are not attended to immediately this summer — the summer being the best time to roof any building — the flats will not stand to endure another winter and we may be liable for an awful lot more than the cost of new roofs. Ceilings are liable to come down into the flats as a result of water ingress. That is why I am appealing today for the roof refurbishments to be put in hand immediately and urgently. The residents cannot wait; they cannot endure another winter.

The refurbishments will allow for proper insulation to be installed in the roof spaces. The flats have no insulation and are extremely cold. The double glazing has helped, but much more work needs to be done. In this day and age, we know that heat loss through an uninsulated roof is one of the prime ways to lose heat in any building or development. If we can get a proper insulation scheme installed, we can warm up the units.

Other investment is required. Bathrooms need to be replaced and communal areas, going back decades, need to be properly refurbished so that callers can access the flats without coming across some of the obstacles that they are likely to find in the halls, such as the lack of light bulbs, which is particularly a problem in winter.

The main cry from the residents of the 202 flats, all of which are fully occupied, is that we get the roof fixed and stop the water coming in. Based on my experience, it is my opinion that it is no longer possible to repair and patch the flat roof. It has been patched and repaired until it can take no more repairs. It has to be replaced, and the simplest, cheapest, most effective and best way of protecting the Housing Executive's very considerable investment in this area is by having proper pitched roofs. Those pitched roofs will solve an awful lot of the problems, and as I said, they will lead on to a much better quality of life and a much better environment for the families who live in this community.

That is my appeal. It is urgent. We need to get this done quickly, and I appeal to the Minister to treat it as an urgent repair rather than as planned maintenance. Hopefully, the capital will come along, because we are now past the position where we can wait any longer. I do not believe that these flat roofs will take us through next winter.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Michael for bringing the matter to the attention of the Assembly. I do not want to rehearse all the points that the Member made, but we should remind ourselves of the point that he alluded to that, over the past number of years, a lot of very good work has been on the flats.

The 202 flats were built around 1953, and, thankfully, they are all occupied. Indeed, I understand that there is a quite considerable waiting list of people who wish to move in. That was not the case a number of years ago, but, thankfully, because of the improvement to the broader environment of the area and the general improvement of the flats, there is a greater demand for people to reside there. That guarantees their long-term well-being in the context of the proper refurbishment that might be required. That demand comes quite considerably from the broader ethnic minority communities in South Belfast, and we all know that quite a number live in what is, nowadays, a very diverse constituency, which is a good and healthy thing.

Again, we should remind ourselves that, in recent years, there have been kitchen replacements, window replacements and replacement of central heating with gas heating. I have spoken with the Housing Executive on its plans to carry out further health and safety work on fire doors, and I think that smoke and heat detectors have been wired. All of that is to the good.

I am surprised to hear the Member say that, in some of the flats, water is dripping through virtually as we speak, so I am keen to hear the Minister's response on that point. Having talked to the Housing Executive about that, I understand that, later in the year, work is due to be done on the roofs, and we would all welcome an upgrade and, in fact, any upgrade to any dwelling, particularly in the social housing sector. I thank the Member for bringing the issue to the attention of the Assembly on behalf of the constituents of South Belfast, and I look forward to the Minister's response. I encourage the Minister to try to ensure that the necessary finance will be there to bring the flats up to highest standards, which the tenants quite rightly deserve.

Dr McDonnell: Similarly, I thank my colleague Michael McGimpsey for bringing the issue to the Floor of the House. I am very familiar with the issue because, over the years, as a GP, I visited many of these flats, rendering help or medical attention to the elderly residents who live there. In recent years, my constituency office has been working with the residents, and we have visited the homes to see at first hand the damage that is repeatedly caused by persistent leaks in the roofs.

Some people have said, and I am sure that you have heard it repeated, that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. However, that is a fitting description of what appears to be happening here. The persistent and continuing internal damage to the Annadale apartments over the years could have been prevented if the flat roofs that are in such

poor condition had been replaced with pitched roofs. That has already been well outlined. An attempt was made some years ago to replace the roofs on two of the blocks with pitched roofs. That has been relatively successful, but the rest were never included. The Housing Executive acknowledges that, and, indeed, it was its intention to do all the flats at the time. However, somehow or other, the programme did not happen, and temporary repairs have been carried out to the flat roofs again and again. Although that may be worthwhile or useful in the very short term, it has failed to address a long-term problem, because the flat roofs are not working and, generally, do not work.

I have a lot of sympathy for the staff in the Housing Executive who are trying to deal with this. They are still grasping for reasons to justify why they cannot do the sensible thing and get on with this. As a result, the rational argument against flat roofs has turned into a very unnecessary pitched battle between the residents and the Housing Executive. As I said, I have sympathy with the Housing Executive officials who work at the front line. Indeed, I want to put on record that my office has always found them as efficient as possible in responding to the issues that we raise on behalf of people in the community. I believe that the will is there among the staff to refurbish and renovate the flats if the opportunity and finance arises. However, we are told that the resources to carry that out are simply not there. That argument, dare I say it, just like the roofs, falls flat on its face.

Vast sums of money appear to have been spent over the years on ad hoc repairs and on patching up the roofs. To my mind, that is the equivalent of putting a sticking plaster on a broken leg and hoping that it will be all right on the night. When they saw that this will be a long-term problem, surely the Housing Executive and the Department for Social Development should have found the resources to make a one-off investment to replace the flat roofs, thus saving the public purse thousands of pounds in ongoing repeated remedial work.

I commend the Minister for rolling out the double glazing scheme for Housing Executive properties that are in need of it. It has gone some way to keeping vulnerable people warm — I should maybe say “less cold” — and to reduce their energy bills. However, in spite of that, in Annadale, the bills keep mounting because of the damp and because property has been damaged and destroyed by roofing that just does not work. I know that capital funding is a finite resource and that, year on year, there are more and more demands on it. However, the money must be found and found soon for the people of Annadale if we are to avoid a situation where the Department for Social Development wastes further public money trying, in effect, to reinvent a square wheel.

The press and public have complained of late about the quality of business coming before this House. I contend that this item should never have troubled this Chamber, but not because it is not important. It is important, and people on the ground know that I am deeply concerned about the mess in Annadale flats. However, the solution is so glaringly obvious and so comparatively simple that it should have been sorted out as part of an operational policy long ago, before my colleague had to raise it in this House.

It is not a complex problem. It is not an insoluble problem. I beg the Minister to look at the capital budget, to look to his

current and planned projects and see where some money can be found to undertake that one project in that one area and, in so doing, save his Department a considerable sum of money in the future by no longer having to undertake costly running repairs that, in effect, achieve nothing.

4.00 pm

Ms Lo: I, too, thank Michael McGimpsey for bringing the matter to the House. I am aware that the Housing Executive has carried out a number of renovation schemes in recent years in the Annadale flats, such as PVC double glazing and new kitchen installations. I also welcome the upcoming work on the communal areas, which will introduce new fire doors and make general amenity improvements. However, I have also had constituents contacting me over the past five to six years, particularly those living on the top floors, who have had continuous problems with leaking roofs, which have ruined internal painting and decoration work. In some cases, that has led to the collapse of ceilings. That has obviously impacted on the residents' enjoyment of their homes, and has, at times, been very distressing and caused significant anxiety for those residents and their families.

In fact, the Housing Executive secured a capital fund of approximately £8 million in 2005-06 to carry out work, including external rendering and new pitched roofs. It is a pity that the scheme was only carried out on one block of flats, leaving the remaining blocks with flat felt roofs. I believe that the money was actually returned to the central pot and never used. Those felt roofs are causing a lot of difficulties for the tenants through leaking, and are impacting on their quality of life. Although the Housing Executive anticipates re-felting the roofs of the worst two blocks in October this year through its renovation stream or maintenance stream, it would be more worthwhile in the long run if the Department could allocate some capital funding to have the roofs pitched rather than re-felted.

I appreciate that the planned maintenance works and the efforts of the Housing Executive are making an impact to address the tenants' problems, but it is perhaps not cost-effective or time-effective to schedule remedial works when proper long-term renovation is badly needed. I recognise the tough economic times we are in, and I am very aware that it is perhaps unrealistic to hope that the same amount of capital can be found that was available five or six years ago. However, I think it makes fiscal sense for the Department to find the capital funding for pitched roofs so that it can be dealt with once and for all, rather than patching things up to be replaced in later years.

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I thank the Member for bringing this issue to the Chamber, as well as other Members who contributed to the debate. I welcome the opportunity to respond and, indeed, to clarify some of the issues that have been raised this afternoon. I will, of course, try to address all of the points that Members have raised, but I assure you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that I will study the Hansard report and if I have left any questions unanswered, I will write directly to the Members concerned.

There are a total of 202 flats in Annadale, 145 of which are still owned by the Housing Executive, so around three quarters of them are Housing Executive properties and one quarter are owned by others. The flats are in three-storey blocks, apart from one small block of four, which is

a two-storey block. All ground floor flats are two-bedroom. The upper floors are a mixture of two-bedroom and three-bedroom flats. They were, as has been said, built in 1953 and, despite what some may have you think, are in a good state of repair, as evidenced by the fact that all of them are occupied. Indeed, there is a substantial waiting list of people who want to live there.

In 2007, all the flats received new PVC window frames when double glazing was installed. More recently, a kitchen replacement scheme was undertaken, with complete kitchen replacement works delivered, including mechanical extraction fans. Previous works included the installation of hardwired smoke and heat detectors and the replacement of solid fuel heating with natural gas. Therefore, as I said, these flats are in good repair and have undergone significant work in recent years.

However, it is not just about what has been done in the past to update the flats. Later this year, each flat will benefit from the provision of new fire doors to enhance the blocks' fire safety and offer greater protection to tenants. A reroofing scheme to replace the existing flat-roof covering will also start later this year. This follows on from work that was undertaken on two of the smaller blocks a few years ago, when the entire roof structures were replaced. Although the reroofing of the remainder of the blocks on that scale is not needed, it will, nevertheless, improve the thermal comfort of the blocks and help residents to keep their heating costs to a minimum, which is something of a priority for us. I am pleased to outline all of that by way of demonstrating our support for residents in these flats. Clearly, residents are happy with what we have been doing, as they are literally queuing up to get into these much-sought-after flats.

Let me now address the issues that some Members raised about the resources that are available to maintain existing homes. From my first day in office, I made it clear that I would put as much emphasis and support into maintaining existing homes as I would into building new ones. We must not just build more homes; we must improve and protect the ones that we already have.

Whilst we all know that the last Budget from Westminster reduced the capital funding that we relied on to deliver some of our more significant housing improvement schemes, that is not to say that we have sat back and simply done nothing for tenants whose homes need improving. This year, I made £171 million in revenue funding available to the Housing Executive to maintain and improve its stock. That represents an increase of nearly £30 million from the year before I took up office. That increased funding is being used to improve more homes than before, with increased levels of kitchen, heating and other improvement schemes started last year alone. The work to reroof the Annadale flats will be funded from this increased revenue funding.

For homes that require more extensive work — usually referred to as multi-element improvement works — I have already asked the Housing Executive to bring forward a programme that could see such homes improved. So, even though, as I said earlier, our capital budget has been reduced for bigger housing improvement schemes, I am still determined to find a way to fund those much-needed improvements. I will be happy to come back to the Chamber at a later date to advise Members further on that.

I will pick up on a couple of points that Members made. Michael McGimpsey referred to water dripping into flats. I can only say that the Housing Executive has not made me aware of that, but I will contact it to ascertain the extent of the problem. If any temporary repairs are necessary until the roof is replaced later this year, we will ensure that they are undertaken urgently.

Anna Lo referred to “patching up” roofs. Any work, other than something of a temporary nature such as I have just referred to, and certainly the work to be undertaken in the latter part of this year, will be anything other than “patching up”. We intend to do a proper job on them. It is certainly not something that you would dismiss just as “patching up”. A proper job will be done to make the roofs watertight.

Alasdair McDonnell said that the flat roofs should have been sorted out long ago, and the money should have been found for it. The issue has been around for some time — I think from 1953. My predecessors were in a somewhat better position than I am as regards funding, although we have been able to redirect money towards improvement schemes. It was not possible to take the work forward in the past and, although we now face financial constraints, I indicated that we will undertake work, and the reroofing scheme is programmed to begin in October of this year. It will be a revenue scheme, which will replace the existing flat roof covering with a high-performance felt covering. A high-quality job will be undertaken and the work will be lasting. I can understand the appeal of installing a pitched roof. However, we face a situation in which many other Housing Executive blocks of accommodation across the province have flat roofs. The important thing is not whether a roof is flat or pitched, but whether it is of good quality and watertight and will last. Those are the key issues, and I am assured that the work that will be undertaken later this year will be of good quality and watertight and will last. That is why I referred to the installation of a high-performance felt covering.

I hope that Members will appreciate that, in what I have said, I have demonstrated my commitment to the Annadale flats. I also hope that they will accept that the work that is proposed to be undertaken later this year will ensure that the flats are totally watertight, warmer and better for the residents, and that it will be a lasting job.

I thank all those Members who took part in the debate. I hope that it has been useful in underlining my commitment to improving the homes of the residents of the Annadale flats and all residents across the Housing Executive estate, whether that is through the installation of double glazing or new heating systems, the replacement of kitchens or the carrying out of other necessary improvements.

Adjourned at 4.12 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 8 May 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Under section 52C of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, there is a statutory duty in respect of North/South ministerial meetings for a Minister to report as soon as is reasonably practicable to the Assembly. There was such a meeting in institutional format back on 27 April. This is the second week since that meeting that the Assembly has sat. Why has there been no reporting back to the Assembly on that North/South ministerial meeting? That reporting mechanism is something that gives some semblance of accountability in respect of North/South matters.

Mr Speaker: I hear the Member's point of order. There are two issues there. This is a matter for the Executive and for Ministers in the Executive. I assure the Member that I always encourage Ministers to come to the House, when possible, to deliver statements. This is a matter for the Executive. That is where that rests, but I still encourage Ministers, as far as is possible, to come to the House to deliver statements. I see statements as a further method of holding the Executive and Ministers to account, because they give Members the opportunity to contribute and ask questions.

Committee Membership

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

Resolved:

That Mr Chris Hazzard be appointed as a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development and as a member of the Committee for the Environment. — [Ms J McCann.]

Executive Committee Business

Pensions Bill: Final Stage

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

That the Pensions Bill [NIA 3/11-15] do now pass.

The Pensions Bill represents a major step towards ensuring the sustainability of the pensions system. Some provisions have generated considerable debate, so it is appropriate that I comment briefly on the main proposals.

Members are aware that the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and I are required to seek to secure single systems of social security across the United Kingdom. Members are also aware of the economic imperatives underpinning the principle of parity, not least the special funding arrangements that allow us to run the social security system in Northern Ireland. The Bill is a parity measure and corresponds to the Westminster Pensions Act 2011. It contains measures relating to, first, the state pension; secondly, automatic enrolment into workplace pensions; and, thirdly, indexation and revaluation of occupational pension schemes and pension compensation and the operation of the pension protection fund. Many of the proposals are minor and technical, and I will not labour them.

The most contentious matter is, I believe, the increases to state pension age and the implications for state pension and other benefits. That has been the main bone of contention during debates in the House and at Committee Stage. Under existing legislation, the state pension age for women will equalise with men's at 65 by April 2020 and then increase for men and women to 66 by April 2026. Official projections of average life expectancy have been revised upwards since those changes were legislated for. Projections made in 2008 by the Office for National Statistics indicate that men and women reaching the age of 66 in 2026 are expected to live, on average, one and a half years longer than was projected when the timetable was set. In the light of that, the Westminster Government concluded that the timetable for increasing state pension age was unsustainable. The Pensions Act 2011 introduced a revised timetable in Great Britain, providing for the increase to 66 to be brought forward to October 2020. As a consequence, the pace of equalising pension ages for women and men at 65 will accelerate from 2016 so that women have the same state pension age as men by November 2018, instead of April 2020. The increase in state pension age to 66 must be applied to men and women at the same time to ensure

compatibility with directive 79/7/EEC. The increases to state pension age will mean increases in the qualifying age for state pension credit and the winter fuel payment. The upper age limit for receipt of working-age benefits such as jobseeker's allowance and employment and support allowance will also increase.

The Bill introduces a corresponding timetable for Northern Ireland. Although increases in life expectancy are to be welcomed, additional years spent in retirement mean additional financial pressures on state pension funding. The problem is not simply one of increased longevity. Individuals do not have their own pension pot building up in the national insurance fund. The reality is that today's contributions pay for today's pensions, and the proportion of pensioners relative to the total population is increasing. In 1955, there were roughly four people of working age for every pensioner. That figure stands at around three today and is expected to reduce to around two by 2060. Expenditure on state retirement pension in Northern Ireland in 2010-11 was more than £1.6 billion — over £32 million a week. The Northern Ireland national insurance fund is topped up annually by a subvention from the Great Britain fund, and non-contributory and income-related benefits are funded from general taxation.

It is important to remember that the funding arrangements for social security are unique. They operate outside the Barnett formula and are based on actual need. In effect, our benefit costs are fully funded. That funding stream is predicated specifically on the maintenance of parity. Any additional costs arising from a breach of parity would have to be met from the Northern Ireland block. The statement of funding principles provides for funding to be reviewed if parity is breached. Apart from benefit costs, we would be liable for costs incurred by the Department for Work and Pensions in making the IT changes necessary to maintain different state pension ages for Great Britain and Northern Ireland, assuming that that is possible, along with any additional administrative costs.

A number of, no doubt, well-intentioned amendments tabled at Consideration Stage were aimed at relieving the impact on people in Northern Ireland. They were not accepted, primarily on grounds of cost and the maintenance of parity. Nevertheless, they reflect the concerns felt by Members about the increases in state pension age. I share those concerns and have raised them directly with Iain Duncan Smith.

During the debate, Mr McDevitt referred to the fact that my party colleagues supported similar amendments tabled at Westminster and asked why I argued the contrary in this House. However, as Mr Dickson rightly stated, Northern Ireland simply cannot afford to break parity on this issue, and the proper time and place to seek to effect change is during debate at Westminster. I am not alone in this view. The point was also made by Margaret Ritchie during Assembly Question Time on 2 February 2009:

"I call on those who criticise parity legislation in social security to address the draft legislation when it is processed in Westminster." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 37, p166, col 1].

I must emphasise that Members who believe that we should push the boundaries of parity are playing a very dangerous game. Much has been made of differences in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy across the United

Kingdom. I have pointed out that, in the period from 2008 to 2010, average life expectancy for a man aged 65 in Northern Ireland was 17.4 years. That compared with 17.7 years in Wales, 18.2 years in England and 16.8 years in Scotland. Therefore, life expectancy here was broadly similar to that in Wales, marginally lower than that in England and higher than the figure in Scotland. The same is true for women, for whom life expectancy at 65 was 20.2 years in Northern Ireland, 20.3 years in Wales, 20.8 years in England but only 19.3 years in Scotland.

Some Members have argued that there is not necessarily a correlation between living longer and having good health to enjoy old age. We all accept that, but it is true that, in general, people are staying fitter for longer. It is certainly true that parts of Great Britain have worse health-related problems than we do. Again, I pose this question: could we really expect taxpayers in Great Britain with lower life expectancy than people here to continue to fund our benefit system, if they have to work longer before they get their pension?

I did, however, support an amendment placing a duty on my Department to lay a report before the Assembly on the impact of socio-economic background on retirement pension. That amendment was accepted by the House at Further Consideration Stage, and I hope that the report will prove a useful tool in future debates.

In an ideal world, no one would want to increase state pension age. However, I believe that there is a general acceptance that changes are inevitable. The proposed changes will keep the state pension sustainable by ensuring that those who benefit from increased life expectancy share the additional cost.

Another contentious issue, which was the subject of an amendment tabled at Further Consideration Stage, concerned consequential amendments to several pieces of existing pensions legislation following the Westminster Government's decision to use the consumer price index rather than the retail price index as the measure of inflation for benefits and pension purposes. That amendment was rejected by the House, but it is important to ensure that there has been no misunderstanding. The Bill is not the vehicle that implements the Government's decision to use the CPI; that decision was implemented as far back as 2010. The Bill makes consequential amendments to some relatively minor provisions to ensure that the decision to use the CPI is applied consistently across occupational pension schemes. It amends, for example, some largely peripheral references in existing legislation and ensures that schemes that wish to continue operating by the RPI can do so. My Department has no power to set different revaluation percentages for Northern Ireland. It merely has the power to prescribe the percentages determined by the Secretary of State for Great Britain.

10.45 am

The Bill also abolishes payable uprated contracted-out deduction increments. Those are paid to people who postponed taking their occupational pension and earned increments on their guaranteed minimum pension. They compensate for the fact that occupational pension schemes are required to uprate GMP increments only after 1988 and only up to a 3% maximum. The average payment is around

£1.17 per week, and any award already in payment will be unaffected.

It was perhaps inevitable that the focus would fall largely on the changes to state pension age, but we must not overlook the fact that the Bill contains some important changes to provisions relating to automatic enrolment in workplace pensions. They follow an independent review set up to examine the scope of the automatic enrolment policy. Recommendations were made to ease the burden that employers face in complying with the legislation, while maintaining the key aim of ensuring that low to moderate earners are able to save for retirement. The measures are designed to ensure that automatic enrolment will work successfully to give as many people as possible the chance of a better income in retirement.

A number of technical amendments are made to legislation governing the operation of the pension protection fund. They reflect experience gained in operating the fund since April 2005 and will reduce unnecessary bureaucracy.

I trust that Members are content with the broad thrust of the Bill. I am very aware that some provisions are difficult for us. As I have said before, ideally, none of us would want to increase state pension age, but I think that we all accept that changes are inevitable. With the Bill, we are helping to ensure the sustainability of our pension system. I thank the Chairman, the Committee for Social Development and Assembly Members for the positive manner in which they considered this important Bill, and I commend it to the House.

Mr Brady (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his comments. When the Committee was first presented with the Bill, it noted that the majority of clauses were extremely technical. I thank the departmental officials who attended every meeting of the Committee's consideration of the Bill and explained, as far as possible, in plain English what they entailed. I would like to think that we will continue with that approach as and when we consider the Welfare Reform Bill.

It is fair to say that the entire Committee shared concerns about the Bill, as became evident during our prelegislative scrutiny. During that time, it also became clear that there was significant pressure to take the Bill forward through accelerated passage. Indeed, the Minister came to the Committee to indicate that that was his intention. The Committee subsequently discussed how it would approach scrutiny of the Bill. We acknowledged that prelegislative scrutiny indicated, on the face of it, potential financial implications if parity with Great Britain was broken. However, the Bill's provisions were so diverse that the Committee believed that it could not have a full and detailed understanding of the potential to amend unless it proceeded with full scrutiny, as is its statutory responsibility. That said, the Committee did not want further to reduce the time that women in particular would have to plan for retirement, even though, in the scheme of things, any additional delay would have been minimal. Keeping in mind the time pressures, we set out to achieve that within the statutory time frame of 30 working days and not to seek an extension. Therefore, we scheduled additional meetings, and I thank my colleagues on the Committee for their dedication in helping to meet that deadline.

How society pays for pensions — state, public and private — is a matter of huge debate and concern. The reasons for the concern relate to the fact that people, on average, live longer and we have an ageing population. We are told that the current state pension scheme was not structured to deal with such a scenario. The British Government have decided to address the costs associated with the state pension in two ways: first, by equalising the state pension age for women and men; and, secondly, by increasing the state pension age. Those were the two fundamental issues that particularly taxed the Committee. Therefore, although I do not intend to go into much detail, it is worthwhile briefly mentioning them in the context of the Bill.

It is fair to say that clause 1, which relates to the equalisation and increase in state pension age provided most concern. Indeed, the Committee agreed, having taken a vote, that it was not content with clause 1 or the corresponding schedule 1 as drafted. One can argue that, in the interests of equality, the pension age of men and women should be the same, and the Committee recognises and accepts that. However, members' concerns about that related to when it takes effect. The legislation will bring forward the date at which women will have the same state retirement age as men to November 2018 instead of April 2020. The upshot of that — the Committee and other Members of the House expressed concern about this — is that roughly 7,000 women born between 6 April 1953 and 5 December 1953 will experience a delay in getting their pension of between two and 16 months. The Committee questioned departmental officials on the costs associated with keeping to the original timetable, and the Department informed the Committee that, if the revised timetable was not enacted, the cost to the block grant was estimated to be around £57 million between 2016-17 and 2018-19. We were also informed that there would be additional costs associated with administration, possible additional claims from people living outside the North and issues with not being able to piggyback on the DWP computer system.

The Committee raised the possibility of further transitional arrangements to delay the equalisation of the state pension age but was advised by the Department that it could not make the changes to increase the state pension age until the equalisation of the state pension age had occurred. The Department advised that, should the equalisation of the pension age be delayed until 2020, it could not begin to increase the pension age until after that. The Department advised the Committee that, in that scenario, it would cost around £155 million for the tax years between 2016-17 and 2019-2020.

I move now to the increase in state pension age. The current legislation also ensures that state pension age will increase to 66 for men and women by April 2026, to 67 by April 2036 and to 68 by April 2046. However, the Bill before us will mean that the increase to 66 will be brought forward to October 2020, six years earlier than was originally envisaged. The Department told the Committee that approximately 70,000 women and 69,000 men born between 6 December 1953 and 5 April 1960 would be affected by that change and would see their state pension age increase by up to 18 months. The reasons for the changes have already been touched on and include increasing life expectancy and an ageing population. However, some members of the Committee were of the view that, although, on average, people may be living

longer, they are not necessarily living a healthier life. That had not been taken into consideration in the development of the proposals. That was touched on by Members at Consideration Stage, and the Minister responded to my party's concerns at Further Consideration Stage by agreeing to provide a report on the impact of the changes every two years. That is an important development to ensure we know the effects of the legislation.

The submission received from Age NI stated that, generally, women in Great Britain can expect to have 65.2 years of disability-free life, but women in the North can expect only 62.5 years. The disability-free life expectancy for men in Great Britain is 63.2 years, but it is only 60.5 in the North. Therefore, people in lower socio-economic groups may be forced to work longer or spend more years on working-age benefits but then have fewer years of life and healthy life after reaching state pension age.

There were some knock-on effects, which I will address briefly. Although they are not in the Bill, the Committee questioned the Department on the associated impacts of the changes. There will be knock-on effects for winter fuel payments, for example. Members may be aware that the qualifying age for the winter fuel payments was originally established as 60 for women and 65 for men, in line with the state pension age and as long as they were in receipt of a qualifying benefit. Following a European Court decision, entitlement was established for persons aged 60 and over, regardless of a qualifying benefit. With the proposed equalisation of pension age for women, I am sure Members can see that that will result in payment of the winter fuel payment being delayed. Indeed, the Department estimates that around 124,000 would qualify one year later than they would under current rules and around 15,000 would qualify two years later than under current rules.

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

Fuel poverty rates in the North are well known. It is estimated that over 44% of households here are in fuel poverty, and that rises to just over 60% for older people, according to the NI house condition survey in 2009. The Committee was, therefore, very concerned that the proposed changes would exacerbate the situation and increase the number of pensioners in fuel poverty. The Department informed us that, where one member of a household has reached a qualifying age, the household will receive the full amount of the award. However, because the Department was unable to provide data on the age profiles of couples in households here, that did not provide a great deal of reassurance to the Committee.

The Committee was also concerned that eligibility for pension credit will increase in line with the state pension age. The Committee heard from stakeholders that that could contribute to pensioner poverty. The recent Budget announced by George Osborne made changes to the state pension and to tax arrangements for pensioners, and it could be argued whether or not those are positive. However, with regard to the benefits to which pensioners are entitled, we know that unclaimed pension credit is estimated to be between £1.2 million and £2.3 million a week, according to research commissioned by A2B on benefit uptake and presented in evidence to the Committee during its consideration of the Bill. I am sure that all Members would like to hear a commitment from the Minister that his

Department will redouble its efforts to ensure that all those entitled to claim pension credit do so.

The Committee raised other concerns during its consideration of the Bill that are detailed in the report. However, I have confined myself to the key issues. I thank officials from the Department and from our Committee who supported the Committee throughout the process.

I want to make a couple of comments as an MLA for Newry and Armagh. Obviously, the change in age is equalisation, but bringing the date forward to 2018 and then to 2020 is predicated on the notion that it gives people time to save. However, I argue strongly that, if people are on state benefit or on subsistence level by the Government's own admission, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to save. It is predicated on the notion that you live in an area in which you had reasonable employment and the ability and opportunity to save. In the case of the vast majority of people in the North who will be affected by the Bill, that is simply not the case.

Ms P Bradley: As a member of the Committee for Social Development, I welcome the opportunity to make a few comments at the Bill's Final Stage. Over the past few weeks, Members have had the opportunity to debate amendments and examine the practicalities and principles of the Bill.

The Bill will primarily do two things. First, it will equalise the pension age in line with the European directive. That aspect was not at all controversial, except for the desire that we could afford to equalise the age down to 60 rather than up to 65, as some members wished. Secondly, the Bill proposes to accelerate the timetable for the increase in pension age, which caused concern for many Members. We examined and debated the prospect of breaking parity, the cost to us economically, the changes that it would mean to our IT system and the legal implications for our region. The Minister made it clear that parity was not a pick-and-mix situation in which we could choose the best and leave out the less desirable. It was discovered that breaking parity was not a viable option. The amendment to review the effects of the Bill will go some way to ensure that the most vulnerable are protected.

We also examined closely the issue of later years poverty and what the Bill would mean for people who are at risk of that. It will ensure that benefits that are pension benefits will continue to be so and that, economically, we can afford to keep supporting the most vulnerable in our society. The provision for raising the age of benefits such as the winter fuel allowance will ensure that, when people access their state pension, they are not worse off. The extension of working-life benefits will ensure that, although people will continue to work for longer, they will not be worse off.

The Bill will ensure that people will continue to have access to a state pension for many years to come, even though it is at a later age than those who have access to it now. With that in mind and given our ageing population and what it will mean for the future, I support the Bill.

Mr Copeland: I acknowledge and accept the progress of the Bill. I thank the Minister for his concise dissection and explanation, which makes a subject that is, in many ways, complex considerably easier to understand, albeit from his point of view. I also pay acknowledgement to Mickey Kelly on behalf of the Chair of the Committee for Social Development

and welcome Mr Brady's assertion that, on this occasion, the use of plain English was of some use in addressing the issues raised.

The UK Pensions Act 2011 received Royal Assent on 3 November last year.

It became clear early on in the process that we could not meet an even remotely similar timescale. There was an inevitable lag in enacting the equivalent legislation, and a breach of parity, therefore, occurred to a degree during that time.

11.00 am

Even though Northern Ireland has the youngest population, it has the fastest growing total population of any region in the United Kingdom. However, that population growth has not been evenly spread, and, combined with a decline in mortality rates, the age profile of our population has gradually become older. Overall, it is estimated that changes to the state pension age will affect some 77,000 women and 69,000 men — a not inconsequential number of people. The Department estimates that equalising the state pension age by November 2018 could affect some 7,000 women living in Northern Ireland. It is a matter of regret for us all that they will now have less than the 15 years' preparation time recommended by the Turner commission before the changes take place. It is true to say that approximately £1.6 billion was spent on state pensions in Northern Ireland last year, and, just like many welfare payments, that money goes directly into the local economy.

A number of amendments were tabled: some were wise, in my view, and some were not. I pay particular tribute to the Minister for accepting, albeit at the second bite, an amendment that will, I feel, provide us with some sort of useful socially based information for future consideration.

The origins of welfare — the notion that the state has an obligation to its citizens and that, in some ways, citizens have a reciprocal obligation to the state — has its roots in the early part of the last century. At that time within living memory, children were put up chimneys and sent down coal mines, and women, who in some cases were the main breadwinners in certain cities in Northern Ireland, laboured long and hard in wet spinning rooms, destroying their feet, and in dry spinning rooms, destroying their lungs, only to go home to houses that were bereft of hot and cold running water, washing machines or any of the conveniences that now, thankfully, we can call upon. The change, when it took place, was based on a sense of social justice and economic affordability. We now have a situation where as a nation — I mean the United Kingdom — there are things that we would like to do and things that we acknowledge need to be done but that we cannot afford in the short term. This, in many ways, is a response to the changing age profile and the changing ability of the state to discharge such obligations.

I am somewhat minded to comment on the fact that were the Government a bank and had the citizens who will now be affected by this entered into a contract with them to pay so much for so many years so that they got a dividend in the form of a pension at the end of the period, they might consider that the policy had, in some ways, been mis-sold. As people are very well aware, there is a good deal of mis-selling coming home to roost with banks that sold employment protection.

As the Minister said, the issue is simple: is it or is it not a breach of parity? In the round, I accept the argument that we cannot expect our citizens to benefit disproportionately from citizens elsewhere, no matter how much we would wish it to be the case. As I said, we, therefore, acknowledge and accept the Bill's passage.

Mr Durkan: I echo the gratitude of the Minister and other Members to the departmental officials and, indeed, to the Committee for their endeavours through what has been an arduous and — dare I say it — complicated process. However, it is with a degree of regret that I oppose the passing of the Pensions Bill today. The regret stems from my belief that the Assembly, in rejecting amendments brought forward at earlier stages of the Bill, has missed an opportunity not only to reduce the negative impact that the legislation will have on so many of our citizens and, indeed, on society as a whole but to show that it is capable of challenging the shackles of parity in a mature and progressive fashion. We have failed to grasp that we, as legislators, have the ability but, more importantly, the duty to deliver for the citizens of the North, and, as a result, the Bill that we debate today barely differs from the Westminster Bill.

Throughout the process, the SDLP has challenged different clauses of the Bill — those that I believe will have a detrimental impact on our older people and, in particular, on women. Not only have we challenged, but I believe that we have put forward realistic, workable alternatives, and it is disappointing that some other parties have channelled their energies into dismissing such progressive arguments rather than into exploring those options. The Minister and others would have us and the public believe that there are no other options for the Assembly and ignore the idea that we can create those options. The fact that the Minister sought accelerated passage for the Bill was a reaffirmation of his reluctance even to consider challenging draconian measures being pushed across from London before imposing them on people here.

We in the SDLP do not exist in a bubble. We realise and accept the need for pension reform. We are not, however, satisfied with the revised time frame set out in the Bill or the apparent permanency of the change to indexation therein. I am also cognisant of the arguments in relation to parity and what a breach may constitute, but we need to test those arguments and test how far we can go. I do, however, agree with the Minister on the importance of fighting those battles in Westminster, too.

There have been instances when this Government and those of Scotland and Wales have breached parity with Westminster. That is what devolution means — having the power to legislate for our citizens in the context in which we operate. If this Assembly is actually to give meaning to devolution and, indeed, to democracy, we must engage in this debate and not simply roll over when a Minister tells us that it is not our fault and we cannot breach parity.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way, and I welcome his agreeing with the Minister's assertion that the battleground is at our national Parliament at Westminster. As he mentions parity, does the Member agree with the comments that his former leader, Margaret Ritchie, made to the House in February 2009, when she said that to break with parity would be a disaster for Northern Ireland?

Mr Durkan: In some circumstances, breach of parity could be disastrous, but we have to test where and how that would be the case. We have to see what flexibility exists, if any. If it does not exist, I will happily concede that it does not, but my party and I are not satisfied that we have channelled enough effort into exploring those alternative options.

Furthermore, it is unfair and misleading for some sections of the House to scaremonger that any breach of parity will ultimately result in hospital closures, etc, because the money must be found elsewhere from the block grant. The option of a breach has not been explored, let alone negotiated on. It is, I suspect, too late in this case, as I presume that the Bill will pass, but it is not too late for this debate. It is actually timely. With the Welfare Reform Bill looming, the Assembly needs to up its game and establish what we can make work here, economically and socially.

As I have said before, the SDLP supports the rationale behind the Bill. The equalisation of pension age is right and just. It is also commonsensical that an increase in life expectancy is reflected in an increase in pensionable age. However, we do have issues with the Bill and the impact it will have on so many people here due to the inability of some to work longer and the dearth of jobs for people of all ages. For a piece of legislation that hangs its hat on equality, it is remarkable that it contains such blatant inequalities. The SDLP has a core and fundamental principle of equality and agrees with the equalisation of pension age for men and women. However, forcing an expectant group of women of a certain age to change their lives, plans and futures without considering the challenges that that will create for them is a far cry from equality.

The time frame within which the pension expectations of those 7,000 women will be disrupted is purely a Tory money-saving exercise. It is designed to take more money from people and to give less out, and it is certainly not based on the needs of the individual. It is also harsh to force women to undergo two accelerations when men will face only one.

The Bill will throw the retirement plans of many into disarray. Previously stated timescales had indicated that there would be no changes until 2020. Therefore, women who have left their jobs in the belief that they could rely on receiving their pension on their sixty-fifth birthday may not have enough savings or resources on which to live for a year to 16 months. We have no guarantees that the goalposts will not be moved again, and moved often, and we have serious concerns about that.

Although some amendments were accepted in Westminster that mitigated some of the burden facing women, they do not go far enough, specifically for women who will be affected by the changes come 2018. The upper age limit for benefits has been extended to assist older people who cannot get work, but we must consider the wider impact that that has and the impression that it creates. Many older people who have worked their entire lives and paid into pension schemes simply do not want to go on benefits; they want what they are entitled to and what they have worked for. To force them to accept the changes without sufficient time to make adequate provision is unfair and illogical.

Using the extended benefit qualification as an option flies in the face of what the Assembly is professing to do, which is to cut down on welfare dependency. It would be

contradictory of us to accept such a move, as it would leave us going backwards and offers benefits as a lifestyle choice rather than as a short-term lifesaver.

Keeping older people trapped in a job when they may wish to retire will also have serious ramifications. Some people may no longer be able physically to do important jobs, whereas others may become disenchanted and demotivated through having to stay in work reluctantly, and that will undoubtedly affect their output. Furthermore, the longer that people have to stay in work, the fewer the opportunities that will exist for young, fresh, newly qualified people to enter the world of employment, and that will lead to an increase in the number of young people who have to leave these shores to seek work elsewhere. Instead of stabilising the economy, the measures could create a stagnant and disenfranchised workforce that will feel aggrieved at a Government who have once again put the working-class person at the bottom of their list of priorities.

It is accepted, but it should not be accepted by us, that we have a lower standard of living in Northern Ireland than in other regions on these islands. We have higher rates of poverty and disability. The Bill will automatically impact on a person's eligibility for the winter fuel payment and counteract our fight to eradicate fuel poverty. I acknowledge an amendment tabled by Mr Kelly — sorry, Mr Brady — on that, and we were glad to support it. People are being told to save for retirement, but the sad reality is that because so many people here live from hand to mouth, saving is beyond them.

Although there is no dispute that people are living longer, we need to ensure that they have a quality of life to match that quantity of years. At Further Consideration Stage, I proposed an amendment that would have enabled us to have the option of reviewing the move to index pensions by CPI rather than by RPI so that we are not bound to it in perpetuity. That move will ultimately devalue many pensions, including those of public sector workers, by up to 15%.

Although we will oppose the Bill's Final Stage, I ask the Assembly and the Minister to note that we do so not without having offered suggestions or alternatives. The SDLP's amendments would have ensured a fairer and more balanced Bill. They would have enabled the Assembly to demonstrate real understanding of and sympathy for the hardship faced by so many of our citizens. We have an opportunity only to mitigate slightly that hardship, but the Assembly has failed, or rather, neglected to do so. The Bill does not reflect the needs of the people of the North, and the lack of creativity and commitment from the Assembly has inevitably resulted in us letting down our constituents. We could have reached a compromise between the aims of the coalition Westminster Government and the needs of our people. So, it is more in sorrow than in regret that I concede that we have not done so. The SDLP opposes the passing of the Bill.

11.15 am

Mrs Cochrane: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Bill as it comes to the House for the final time. Much of the technical detail has already been raised by others, so I will keep my comments brief.

During the various stages of the Bill, the Alliance Party has made its position fairly clear. Due to an equality law ruling in the EU, the state pension age must be equalised

for men and women. Also, with an ageing population, we need to ensure that the pension system is structured in a way that ensures that promised incomes can be delivered in the future. We acknowledge that the Bill will raise the state pension age for men and women at a faster rate than was originally planned and that some changes were made at Westminster to ameliorate the situation for some men and women. Although those changes were positive, we are sympathetic to those who now find themselves with less time to prepare financially. My colleague Naomi Long MP fought against such aspects of the Bill at Westminster. I agree with a number of the points that Mark Durkan has made, but we need to be realistic with this issue. On the information that I have, Northern Ireland simply cannot afford to break parity on this and, therefore, I support the Bill.

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I want to take the opportunity to comment on a number of the issues that have been raised by Members during the discussion, which I thought was extremely constructive.

A number of points were raised by Mickey Brady. One was in regard to accelerated passage. I listened carefully to what he said. It is fair to say that the Committee acknowledged that the arguments for and against accelerated passage were finely balanced. I simply raised the issue at that point because accelerated passage would have had the benefit of giving people more time to prepare. On the other hand, the detrimental side to that is that accelerated passage does not give the opportunity to scrutinise the Bill as fully. There are pros and cons to that.

I turn to the issue of fuel poverty, which was mentioned, the change in the qualifying age for winter fuel payments and the impact of that on fuel poverty. The increase in the qualifying age for the winter fuel payment is simply a direct consequence of the increase in the state pension age. It is something that we are faced with and we can simply acknowledge that that is the fact of the matter.

My Department will continue to do all it can to ensure that people get the maximum benefit to which they are entitled. Members are aware that the Social Security Agency has a comprehensive approach to benefit uptake consisting of initiatives such as targeted exercises, mailshots and outreach. The purpose of the uptake programme is to encourage people to find out whether they are missing out on any benefits and to provide assistance. Since 2005, around 112,000 invitations have been issued to older people offering a benefit reassessment that looks at what they can gain in a range of other allowances and services. So, there are a number of things that we are doing in that regard to help older folk. If one member of a couple has reached the qualifying age for the winter fuel payment, that household will receive the full award. In April 2011, the Department launched the new fuel poverty strategy, entitled Warmer Healthier Homes, which takes forward energy brokering and the boiler replacement scheme and calls for action on the price of oil imports and on developing a range of initiatives to tackle fuel poverty. In a range of ways, we are seeking to do all that we can to address fuel poverty. We recognise that it is one of the most significant problems that people face in Northern Ireland.

Mrs Cochrane's comments were extremely constructive and helpful. I said earlier that it is an issue that is difficult for all

of us. We need to be responsible in our approach, and the comments that she made were very responsible.

The comments from Mark Durkan show that we are back very much on the same ground as we were before with the SDLP. I cannot get my head round it. The SDLP constantly says that we could do more and that it has great ideas of what could be done and how it should all be done differently. It seems that it is a desperate attempt by the SDLP to make itself different and relevant. Mark Durkan talked about the change from RPI to CPI. That was signed off in 2010 by an SDLP Minister. His party signed it off. If he wants to blame anybody, he should blame his colleagues — his party members — instead of pointing the finger of blame at everybody else. They missed the point. They missed the boat. They are the ones who signed it off. Put the blame where it lies: fairly and squarely with your former party leader, Margaret Ritchie. She signed it off. There are only four words in that sentence. Even Mark Durkan can surely understand a sentence with four words in it. It is a very simple sentence: she signed it off. I hope that that will settle the whole issue of RPI and CPI. Perhaps Mark Durkan will understand the simplicity of the issue: his party did it.

We will move on and look at some of the points that were made by Michael Copeland. He very rightly raised the complexity of parity. I fully acknowledge, as he said, that many of the provisions are highly technical and very complex. I certainly do not underestimate the challenge that the Committee had in examining the detail of some of the provisions. The Member rightly honed in on the fact that the central point in the Bill is parity. We have to face reality. I think that the majority of Members recognise not only the reality but the benefits of parity. We gain; we benefit. We are entitled to the same benefits as every other part of the United Kingdom but we are also bound by the same conditions.

All in all, we have had a useful discussion this morning. We have dealt with many difficult issues around the Bill. However, if we are responsible, sensible and honest about it, we will face up to the fact that we have no alternative but to pass the Bill today. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 77; Noes 13.

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Doherty, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Ms Gildernew, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Ó hOisín, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey,

Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Sheehan,
Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

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

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood,
Mrs D Kelly, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone,
Mrs McKeivitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Durkan and Mr P Ramsey.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Pensions Bill [NIA 3/11-15] do now pass.

Private Members' Business

Victims and Survivors

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 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 Nesbitt: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the significant number of victims and survivors who need appropriate help and support to enable them to deal with the legacy of the past; further recognises the important work of the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund in addressing the specific needs of victims and survivors; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to consider the implications of the European Parliament's proposed legal definition of a victim contained in its draft directive to establish minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you will notice that the motion is in three clauses: I will work through those in order. Perhaps, as an over-arching point for those who are wondering why we should have this debate at this time, the reason is simple: this is a critical time for our ability to service the needs of victims and survivors.

I could say that it is another critical time, because victims and survivors are certainly not short of false dawns. However, this is a critical time. Last Wednesday saw the official opening of the new Victims and Survivors Service. The remaining commissioners at the Commission for Victims and Survivors are coming to the end of their contracts, and change there seems inevitable. Meanwhile, the forum that will give victims a voice is finally, I understand, on its way.

11.45 am

The difficulty to date has been with timelines, which have been dogged by delay. The 10-year strategy from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) indicated that the Victims and Survivors Service, which opened last week, should have been up and running in June 2010. The forum, which we still await in its fully functioning format, was due to be established in September 2009. I recall from my time as one of the original commissioners at the Victims' Commission going on our first round of public meetings, which took us to the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) in north Belfast. There, a survivor by the name of Hugh Rowan sat patiently in his wheelchair observing and listening to events. As the meeting came to a close, he made his one, very telling comment, which was to encourage the commissioners to get on with setting up the forum. He had plenty to tell them, and time was not on his side. I regret to say that Hugh Rowan is no longer with us and that the forum has not been established.

It seems to me that four key bodies here represent a circle, or compass, with four key points on the needs of victims. OFMDFM sets the strategy and provides the funding. The Victims and Survivors Service administers and distributes those funds, commissioning services that are appropriate to individuals and groups. The Commission for Victims and

Survivors monitors, advises and generally champions the needs of victims. Finally, the forum should take the voice of victims right to the heart of the devolved Government.

A huge number of victims and survivors need appropriate help and support. Sometimes, it is estimated that the number of physically injured people runs at 40,000, although I understand that the WAVE Trauma Centre is about to produce a detailed report, which may give us a more accurate estimate. The number of people with psychological issues is, frankly, countless. It seems to me that, at times, when we deal with the legacy of our conflict, we focus on the dead at the expense of keeping a focus on the living injured and what we can do to make their lives a little easier. For example, the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) will review all deaths but no injuries. There is no dedicated mechanism for the many injured people who have questions about how they came to be a victim or a survivor.

The Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, which will be subsumed by the new Victims and Survivors Service, has been the only body offering dedicated support to individual victims and survivors, particularly those who did not wish to be part of a victims' group. It has given us over a decade of dedicated service as an independent company with charitable status. My party pays tribute to the staff and to the board of the memorial fund for all that it has done over those years. The board has been made up of volunteers who took no reward, not even mileage or any other expense, during their time servicing the needs of victims and survivors. I was struck by evidence that was given to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister recently by Dennis Licence, the chairman of the memorial fund. He said that it had yet to meet the two junior Ministers, who have responsibility for victims. I understand that that position changed last Wednesday at Millennium House, when Mr Licence was introduced to the two junior Ministers at the launch of the Victims and Survivors Service. However, that was a meet and greet rather than a substantive meeting about the way forward in this transitional period, when the memorial fund will be subsumed into the new service.

One of the great outstanding challenges is to reach out to what I call the hidden victims, the many victims who have never come forward to the memorial fund or joined a support group. It is a question of certainty about whether these people are simply unaware of the services that are available to them or whether they are aware but have made a decision that we could summarise as "Thanks, but no thanks". As the new, all-embracing service comes on stream, I hope that OFMDFM and the other parties that are involved in servicing needs will undertake as large an advertising, awareness and marketing campaign as they possibly can so that we can have certainty that all victims are aware of what is available to them and that they have simply made the decision that they do not wish to avail themselves of those services.

The third part of our motion refers to the European Parliament's proposed legal definition of a victim, contained in what is currently a draft directive concerned with establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime. Let me refer the House to the 2006 Order, which defines a victim as:

"(a) someone who is or has been physically or psychologically injured as a result of or in consequence

of a conflict-related incident; (b) someone who provides a substantial amount of care on a regular basis for an individual mentioned in paragraph (a); or (c) someone who has been bereaved as a result of or in consequence of a conflict-related incident."

Beyond that, with specific reference to psychological injury, it is someone injured as a result of:

"witnessing a conflict-related incident ... or providing medical or other emergency assistance to an individual in connection with a conflict-related incident."

We all know that that is a controversial and contested definition of a victim and survivor.

Do not take my word for it — let me refer you back to Hugh Rowan, no longer with us. His story is very simple. In the early hours of 23 August 1972, he arrived home from work at approximately 1.15 am. After going upstairs to speak to his wife, he went back downstairs to make himself a sandwich and to have a drink. There was a knock on the door. He left his food, he went to answer the door, and suddenly he found himself confronted by two young men pointing guns. He froze as they started shooting. He was hit five times, one bullet entering through his stomach into his spinal column. He gave evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, and he said:

"As you are aware there are Victims and there are Innocent Victims. I as a person who has been seriously injured feel insulted to think perpetrators have the same entitlement to victimhood as I and thousands of others who have been killed injured or maimed at the hands of either republican or loyalist paramilitaries. I feel that the families of paramilitaries who were killed injured or imprisoned should not have the same rights to victimhood as the people who were going about their Legal and Lawful way of life when victimhood was bestowed upon them. The majority of people who were to become victims did not want any part of the Troubles until we were dragged into it. We did not choose to be Victims/Survivors."

We ignore this distinction at our peril and at the peril of our children and grandchildren.

Currently, the EU is working on enhanced rights and protections, and within that draft directive is this definition of a victim:

"a natural person who has suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering or economic loss, directly caused by a criminal offence".

And it is the family members of a victim whose death was directly caused by a criminal offence and who have suffered harm as a result.

I call on OFMDFM to examine the significance, the consequences and the implications, should that definition become law. The Ulster Unionist Party accepts the difficulty of articulating an agreed definition of a victim, just as it is difficult to agree anything about what happened, why it happened, or the language we use to describe what happened. However, there is a moral imperative to accept the distinction between perpetrator and victim, as defined by the late Hugh Rowan.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Draw your remarks to a close.

Mr Nesbitt: I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Humphrey: I support the motion and congratulate the Members from the Ulster Unionist Party who brought it to the Chamber. Like Mr Nesbitt, I attended the meeting of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister that was attended by representatives of the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, and on behalf of the Democratic Unionist Party, I pay tribute to its board and chairman, as I did at that meeting. I thank them for the service that they have given to victims in Northern Ireland over the past number of years and pay tribute to the dedication and diligence they have shown as a board.

I have the great privilege of representing North Belfast in this House. As someone born and raised in North Belfast, I have been very fortunate not to have anyone in my family lost during the Troubles. However, my father was shot by republicans on the Crumlin Road on 15 August 1969, but, very fortunately, he lived.

Twenty-one per cent of the murders in the Troubles happened in the constituency of North Belfast, which was known as the killing fields of Northern Ireland. It is a constituency that has more peace walls and interfaces than any other in Northern Ireland, and it has suffered greatly throughout the Troubles.

I welcome the establishment of a new victims' service, and I know that the process of establishing the new board has begun. The staff are being finalised, and the process of appointing a new CEO will begin shortly. An interim CEO has been appointed in the short term.

It is important that we look at the definition of a victim. Throughout Northern Ireland, there are many victims, whether they were in the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the Police Service, the Ulster Defence Regiment, the Royal Irish Regiment or the regular forces stationed in Northern Ireland or whether they were prisoner officers or members of the public. Those people were committed to ensuring that, as a society, Northern Ireland remained as normal as it could be, just as others sought to have anarchy manifested in our streets. They protected our community from murder, intimidation and corruption. On behalf of my party, I pay tribute to the police, the Ulster Defence Regiment, the Royal Irish Regiment and, of course, members of the public who simply stood against what was wrong. Those victims, innocent victims — because they are innocent — cannot be compared by any right-thinking person to those who would seek, in a premeditated way, to destroy lives and property, destabilise the state, undermine democracy and murder in cold blood.

Establishing what is right and what is wrong is the benchmark for any decent society and any democracy. We must always set, and indeed maintain, high standards, not just for those of us who have the privilege of living in this generation but for the generations to come. There is no question that Northern Ireland is a better place than it was. Equally, however, there is no question that our peace is not yet a complete peace. The weekend before last, in my constituency of North Belfast, we had the manifestations of those who would seek to take us back; those who would seek to bomb, murder and destroy. They have nothing to offer, and they cannot be allowed to win.

It is, therefore, welcome that the funding that is in place is in place, and it is important that the institutions are there to ensure that victims' groups, innocent victims' groups, are maintained and funded, and funded at a level that allows that work to be done.

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

Mr Humphrey: On behalf of the Democratic Unionist Party, I support the motion.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As is normal, I thank the proposer for bringing the motion forward. I had some reservations about it but I think that it is important that we have a discussion on this issue today. It is also important to determine whether the purpose of the motion is to support victims or whether it is a divisive motion that is trying to create a hierarchy of victims. If it is the latter, that cannot be allowed to happen.

We have to find a way of dealing with the past, and it is important that we look at that in today's debate and at how victims are all part of the past and how support services have been put in place to get us out of the situation of dealing with the past.

If there is an attempt to create second-class victims, it will fail, because that is the same as having second-class citizens, which was the main source of conflict in the first place.

Sinn Féin supports victims from all communities, and we support the funding for victims and survivors based on equality of implementation to ensure that everyone gets what they are entitled to. From speaking to them, I know that many victims feel that that is not the way that things were dealt with in the past and that equality of treatment did not always come first.

12.00 noon

The memorial fund, for instance, which is referred to in the motion, did good work, and it should be complimented for that. However, many victims found that it was not easy to access and that it did not deal with the same issues with equality of operation. Many felt that there was a different approach taken to some victims than there was to others. So, I do not share the opinion of the memorial fund that is in Mr Elliot's proposal.

It is also important to read behind the proposal, because Mr Elliot's commentary in the 'News Letter' today is slightly different from the words of the proposal. It is very clear from his commentary in the 'News Letter' that the proposal is an attempt to create two tiers of victims. That is something that cannot be allowed to happen.

We welcome the opening of the Victims and Survivors Service last week and hope that it will continue to support victims and their needs and take that into a new generation.

The theme of inequality of implementation flows right through. Many victims will say, and have said to me in the past, "Where is the difference in the victims?" They say that because they see different funds being put in place for former members of the RUC, RUC Reserve, UDR and other services, despite the fact that members of those organisations were paid to do a job at that time. Despite that, they were paid compensation.

Mr Hussey: Members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary may have been paid for the work that they undertook, but they were not paid to be shot, they were not paid to be murdered and they were not paid to be treated in the fashion in which they and their families were treated. Therefore, that comment is wrong and should be withdrawn. The RUC did a job and did it exceptionally well, and I also pay tribute to its members for their work.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Molloy: You are entitled to your opinion. I would differ with it and with the way in which it was reached. The point I am making is about the differences in dealing with different groups of victims. Special funds were put in place for people from the services, yet other victims found it difficult to access funding to support them and received no special compensation.

That is despite the fact that many of those organisations were involved in collusion in the murder of Catholics across the North, particularly in my own area, known as the "murder triangle", where there was clear collusion between the UDR, the RUC and the RUC Reserve in the murder of Catholics. The victims of that collusion and their families have received a pittance of compensation and little or no investigation into their cases. Cover-up was the order of the day.

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

The proposed European definition of victims does not deal with the victims of the conflict here. That proposal is in the European Parliament; it may develop and survive in its present form, and it is something that the Ulster Unionists feel is appropriate. I do not feel that it is appropriate, because it does not deal with the same situation that we have here.

We have the whole idea of a peace project. Peace funding was designed for a community coming out of conflict and to bring the community together to deal with the past and support it in doing so. It was not meant as a means of being divisive. If the motion is designed to divide the community and divide victims, it will fail, because there can be no going back to having second-class citizens, and there can be no going back to having second-class victims, even though that seems to be the aim of the proposal from Mr Elliott and his party.

Mr McDevitt: I rise with some concern about the motion, not because of what I am sure is the good intent of those who tabled it — I think there was great intent behind it — but because of the significant introduction of a definition of a victim of crime, which is what the European directive gives. It defines a victim of crime and seeks to harmonise services and support services for the victims of crime across the European Union.

I read a considerable part of the debate that took place in the European Parliament last year on this issue. It does not seek, nor was it ever intended to seek, to address issues of victims of conflict. I could not find in the debate reference to the North of Ireland, Northern Ireland, the Basque country, the Balkans or any other region of conflict within the European Union. I found only a very sincere and genuine attempt by legislators at a European level to seek to define the victim of crime.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for giving way. Of the roughly 3,500 deaths that we describe as conflict-related, how many does the Member believe were not crimes?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McDevitt: Unfortunately, that is the issue, and Mr Nesbitt has just put his finger on it. It is not what I believe were crimes. Mr Eastwood will talk later about this, but, unfortunately for the families of Bloody Sunday, there is a question as to whether or not, in the mind of the state, those who died are victims of crimes. For the families of Ballymurphy, there is an open question in the mind of the state as to whether those who died are victims of crime.

I would be very concerned that we would unintentionally end up excluding people who we all, I think, feel were innocent victims of this conflict because we are trying to shoehorn a European definition intended for one purpose, and that is the harmonisation of support services and other services around victims of crime, into a post-conflict situation. That does not take away from our need to fully debate, understand and resolve to seek to define victims in the context of our local conflict. I absolutely support that, and the SDLP will continue to work hard to do so, but I am unhappy and nervous about applying this definition to our local context in the post-conflict sense.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr McDevitt: Of course, Mr Allister.

Mr Allister: I must say I am puzzled by the Member's approach. If someone plants a bomb, it is patently a crime. If someone is shot on their doorstep, it is patently a crime. If someone is shot in a situation by a member of the security forces and the shooting is unlawful, it is a crime. So, what is the difficulty in identifying that we are here to deal with genuine victims of crime? The real problem, however, is that the present definition equates the victim with the perpetrator and makes the person who planted the bomb and is injured equally a victim, which, of course, is an utter obscenity.

Mr McDevitt: I appreciate Mr Allister's intervention and have no doubt about its sincerity. However, if Mr Allister were to refer to a paper that the Assembly Research and Information Service did on behalf of the SDLP a couple of weeks ago, and which I think is in the Library, he will find that, if you apply just the unlawful test to those killed by state agents and representatives of the state in the context of the Northern Ireland conflict, there are very many people who all of us in the House would, I think, believe to have been the victims of unlawful killings who are not considered so today. That is because the test that was applied at different stages does not meet the standard that we would apply ourselves. Because we may feel it is a crime does not make it a crime. Yet, this definition would require us to abide by a definition that I know would not meet the needs of our region.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr McDevitt: Of course I will give way; it is an important issue.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Member for giving way. He will be aware that, in 2009, my party launched a public consultation on the whole idea of the definition of a victim, and a Bill was brought before this House in 2010. Unfortunately, when

it was brought forward, the Alliance Party and yourselves vetoed it. I hope that will not be the case today.

Mr McDevitt: I appreciate Mr Humphrey's comments. I also really appreciated his contribution. I was not aware of his father, and I am very glad that he lived to enjoy what I hope was a full life, if not is still living a full life.

We need to take this from a local starting point, and this is not a local starting point. This is a starting point intended for entirely different purposes.

Colleagues, refer back to the debates of the Council of Ministers in the European Parliament. Refer back to the comments last month of Alan Shatter, incoming president of the Home Affairs Council of the European Union, in which he points out the need to do a huge amount of work on issues of harmonisation for victims of crime in the European Union. Unfortunately, that work will not solve our problems around victims of conflict. My appeal to the House is to reflect on that today and to resolve not to try to shoehorn someone else's definition into our situation but to understand and accept that we have a situation that is more complicated than the draft European directive allows us to deal with —

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

Mr McDevitt: — and think about matters in that sense.

Mr Lyttle: When I speak to victims and survivors, the most fundamental need that is communicated to me is the need to be recognised. Therefore, I welcome the opportunity that the motion provides to recognise victims and survivors in our community and to ensure that the Assembly delivers the care and support that they need. What is also made clear to me when I speak to victims and survivors is that we must continue to attempt to understand the human legacy of the Troubles and never cover over, or attempt to reinvent, the brutal impact of that period in our history.

We can never underestimate the legacy of Northern Ireland's violent past. As someone who was not even old enough to vote on the Good Friday Agreement, the legacy that the next generation has been given as a result of that period makes me very angry. We have heard that, during the Troubles, 3,700 lives were lost and 40,000 people sustained serious injury. The 'Cost of the Troubles Study' in 1997 stated that at least 6,800 people experienced the death of an immediate family member in a Troubles-related incident.

The Alliance Party acknowledges the grief and the deep and lasting impact of the deaths and serious injuries caused by the Troubles. That impact has changed forever what many people consider normal, everyday life. It has robbed people of their ability to work and their mobility and has caused serious emotional and mental health problems, the full extent of which is just becoming known.

The Alliance Party welcomes and recognises the work undertaken by the Commission for Victims and Survivors in very difficult circumstances to identify the needs of victims and survivors, whether physical, psychological or financial.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: I want to try to get through all the comments; sorry.

The commissioners have advocated strongly for better support for victims and recognition that their needs are complex. I welcome the new Victims and Survivors Service and the opportunity that it provides to deliver better co-ordinated support for victims. In particular, I welcome the fact that victims will receive a holistic assessment of need, which we hope will ensure that every member of this community who requires help will get it.

It is important that we recognise the work of the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, as the motion states, and also perhaps the Community Relations Council, which, for many years, has delivered vital financial assistance and support to individual victims and survivors, their families and constituted groups. During its time of operation, the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund gave people affected by the Troubles a range of vital practical help, including financial assistance for carers and seriously injured people, disability support, and training and education support. It is worth noting that OFMDFM's slowness of administration and disagreement have, at times, been referred to as making it difficult for that support to be delivered. Hopefully, that will improve with the new service.

The Alliance Party believes that it is essential that the new Victims and Survivors Service develops the knowledge and experience available from that work to help people with the most sensitive and complex needs in our community and that direct support to victims is maintained. The voluntary and community sector has also played a vital role in support of victims and survivors. The WAVE Trauma Centre, which has already been mentioned today, has provided vital assistance and continues to do so.

The Alliance Party believes that high quality support and assistance is fundamental. The 'Strategy for Victims and Survivors' published by OFMDFM in 2009 states that action is required in three areas: a comprehensive needs assessment to inform services; dealing with the past; and building for the future. The Assembly has recognised that it is not for victims and survivors alone to deal with that difficult legacy.

12.15 pm

I was concerned about the motivation behind the motion, and, in my opinion, what has been said in media articles today is not reflected in the motion. That is cause for concern, particularly in relation to the third clause. It is obviously acceptable for the First Minister and deputy First Minister to consider the impact of any European directive. However, we have an established framework in Northern Ireland to deal with our specific circumstances in relation to victims and survivors, and any changes proposed to that should be led by the victims and their needs, not by politicians or for a political end. The new Victims and Survivors Service must be allowed to progress on that basis if we are to continue to deliver for all the victims —

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

Mr Lyttle: — and for a shared and better future for this community.

Mr Weir: I join others in thanking those who tabled the motion for bringing it forward. I also join other Members in saying that I cannot claim to be a victim, nor, indeed, can

any member of my family. I lived through the Troubles and lived a reasonably peaceful life in what might be described as the leafy suburbs of Bangor. While it was not untouched by the Troubles, it was less touched than some other areas. However, I am very conscious of the fact that I was able to have, in Northern Ireland terms, a relatively normal upbringing. For that, I owe a great debt of gratitude to the members of the security forces — the army, the police and the UDR. They were on the front line protecting the lives of many ordinary citizens and ensuring that they were able to grow up in a normal fashion. Therefore, it is important that we pay tribute to them.

As Members have indicated, the motion falls into a number of parts. The first couple of parts deal with support for victims to deal with the legacy of the past and with the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund. I join others in praising the work that the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund has done. A considerable amount of work has gone on and is ongoing in respect of practical support for victims. In recent years, that level of support has trebled. While the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund has done good work, it is right that those services are subsumed into one body providing that delivery. I believe that the establishment of the new victims and survivors' service is a very positive step forward and should be welcomed by all sides of the House.

As Mr Nesbitt indicated, victims come in many different shapes and sizes in terms of their attitudes. Some see themselves as being linked with particular groups; many see themselves as individuals. Some want their issues to be centre stage; others do not want to be disturbed and want to be left alone. The proposer of the motion indicated that we need to make it absolutely clear to people what services are available and that they have the opportunity to avail themselves of those services. However, we should not be surprised if some say that is too painful a part of their life and that they do not want to have to deal with it, or, perhaps, they feel, from a material point of view, that they are able to cope and feel, perhaps wrongly, that to accept help is some form of charity. Therefore, whatever our views on the latter part of the motion, it is clear that we need to give that positive support.

Turning to the final part of the motion, let me make it absolutely clear: there needs to be a distinction drawn in the definition between a victim and a perpetrator. The current definition comes from the 2006 legislation, which was there at the time of direct rule. It originally came from an OFMDFM document from about 10 years ago under a different regime. It is unacceptable. As Members indicated, I brought forward private Member's legislation that tried to change that definition and exclude from it any individual who had been convicted of an offence in connection with a conflict-related incident or being a member of a proscribed organisation. It should be noted that one would expect opposition from the Members opposite. That was not particularly surprising. However, the veto on that Bill could not have been triggered by Sinn Féin alone. Indeed, it was made a cross-community vote because the SDLP signed up to opposing that. When it came to the vote, it was also not supported by the Alliance Party. I find that disturbing and very disappointing, but we are where we are on that.

Time is very short, but I move now to the European definition. I am disturbed by the line that the SDLP has taken in connection with it. It may not be its intention to do

so, but it seems to draw some distinction between conflict-related —

Mr McDevitt: I appreciate Mr Weir letting me back in. The SDLP does not seek to draw a spurious distinction. It tries to say that we should not use the definition of a victim of crime as the catch-all definition of a victim of our conflict, because, as I have said on several occasions already today, there are many innocent victims of the conflict who, through this definition, would not be considered as being victims.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Weir: I do not agree with that, because I believe that a crime is a crime is a crime. It is not a question of whether I feel it is a crime, or whether Conall McDevitt or anybody else feels that it is a crime; it is whether it is a crime in criminal law. That is where the distinction is drawn.

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: No. I am short on time. I want to finish my point, and I have only a few seconds left. The position on that is and should be clear. The problem with the current definition is that it does not draw a distinction between the victim and the perpetrator, which, I think, is grossly offensive. I think that the European definition is a step forward, and to have a degree of consideration to the wording is, at least, a step forward, but I am not 100% convinced that the definition is watertight. I apply the situation oft used of the Shankill bomber. Does the Shankill bomber, for example, who has blown himself up as part of that —

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

Mr Weir: Would a member of his family be a person whose death was caused by a criminal offence? Arguably, he would be, even though the person involved was the perpetrator? I am not, therefore, sure that this is necessarily the catch-all, but I support the motion. I think this is a matter that we need to come back to.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I appreciate the motion being brought forward. I am particularly appreciative of how much care people are adopting in coming towards the debate. I welcome the debate. It would be very easy for us to slip into the groove of our contested history and come at it from our set positions.

Given the time that has passed since the war was declared over and since we agreed the mechanism by which all shades of political opinion would address the social and economic priorities for our community, we should be adopting the same approach when it comes to our contested history. This is shared history, but it is, undoubtedly, conflict-orientated. Our present situation very often reflects that that conflict continues, even in debates in the Chamber. We may not have examples of open, outright warfare on our streets with the same kind of ferocity that we had, but there are still people who are intent on revisiting that situation. If we do not address the opportunity that we have in here to maintain the forward momentum, we are, in a sense, joining those who would attempt to destroy the compact that we have all agreed.

I start from the position that we were all victims. We were all victims. Some people do not accept that, but you have to ask yourself where the conflict of the past 30 years came from.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr McLaughlin: No, I will not give way to you, if you do not mind, because I know exactly what you are going to say. We have to consider whether people are going to depend on arguing that every republican is a murderer or complicit in murder, or that every RUC officer is a bigot and has been involved in state oppression. I do not start from that position. I was a member of the civil rights movement. I was out on 5 October 1968. I got a broken elbow for my trouble, but I do not argue, and I never have, that every single RUC officer I have met has been a sectarian bigot. In fact, and I say this as a republican, on many occasions, I was treated with courtesy and professionalism. Having a black and white approach that everybody on the other side of an argument is bad and the people who are on our side are good, is not the way to proceed.

If we go back to 1968, we will see that we did not create the divisions that existed in our society, so we were all innocent victims. People, including members of the British security services who were involved in commissioning murder, responded to that. Now, the fact that they were wearing uniforms and the fact that they were using guns that were legally authorised by Westminster did not detract from people's perspective that they were being —

Mr McNarry: Thank you for giving way. I am always interested to hear what Mr McLaughlin says, because he comes at it from an approach that helps me to understand. I wonder whether he could help me understand further. When he talks about the war, can he tell me — a unionist — who he believes republicans had a war against in Northern Ireland?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McLaughlin: Thank you. David, I thank you for the question, but I will resist that temptation if you do not mind. If you want to use your own time to develop that concept, you can. I am not the person who described it as a war. Read the British Government's statements; read the RUC's statements; read the unionist leadership's statements as well as listening to my words. Anybody who would describe what happened to our society and the convulsion that our society went through as anything other than a war does not agree with the broad international opinion —

Mrs D Kelly: Just very briefly in relation to the definition of a war, if it was a war, should the Geneva Convention not apply and the act of causing of people to disappear not be treated as a war crime?

Mr McLaughlin: Perhaps people might want to explore that as well, and I invite you to do the same, although I do not know how far that will take you. The point that I am making is that we could have avoided that, and we could avoid it in the future.

President McAleese stated in the past year that we cannot change the past; however, we have a responsibility to change the future. Some of the attitudes and discussions that we will have in the House today will demonstrate that this is a very challenging issue. I say with some regret that some of our representatives in the House are not up to

that challenge. They are not prepared to go there or to look. When they point the finger and say that those irregulars — those who were not members of the security services — who took up guns were criminals, and that those who were wearing uniforms were not, irrespective of their actions, you cannot hope to get agreement on that approach. The issue of trying to differentiate between victims really is continuing the divisive conflict of the past. Our responsibility is not to continue that conflict but to find ways of bringing forward genuine reconciliation and adequate and appropriate responses for those who have been traumatised as a result of the conflict, which is what the Victims and Survivors Service is about. However, if we do not start on the basis that the conflict —

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

Mr McLaughlin: — itself represented a failure of politics, that is a challenge for us to make politics work for the future.

Lord Morrow: I, too, commend those who tabled the motion, because it is very appropriate and timely that we should debate the issue.

I listened to the comments made by Mitchel McLaughlin and Conall McDevitt, and to say that they are confusing and difficult to understand may not be true, maybe that is just par for the course. Members of the SDLP have to make up their mind on the issue: they cannot be both, and that is exactly what they are trying to do. It is unfortunate that they take this allegedly high moral ground and this holier-than-thou attitude, but when it comes to actually stepping down on the one side or the other, they are the typical fence-sitters. Of course, they will also insist that their members go to the funerals and applaud those who get a full paramilitary send-off. They do not see any anomaly in that. They say that that is the right thing to do. They also campaign vigorously for the release of people like McGeough. Who is Mr McGeough? I will tell you who he is for those who may be confused here, and there is obviously confusion in the SDLP. Mr McGeough is a convicted terrorist. He was convicted for the attempted murder of Councillor Sammy Brush, one of my colleagues on Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council. Thankfully, Sammy Brush had the presence of mind to return fire and repel those who were coming to take his life. Yet, the SDLP vigorously campaigns for the release of that sort of person.

12.30 pm

Mr McDevitt: I appreciate Lord Morrow letting me in on this point. I think that this highlights the importance of being quite accurate about definitions here and of not using language loosely.

There are a couple of issues. First, it is absolutely right to get a definition of victim. Anyone innocent who died during the Troubles should be a victim, and a crime should be a crime. The reality is that if certain things that are very obviously crimes by today's standards had been considered crimes at the time, we would not have had whitewashes and the legacy of the perception that the state applied different standards. That is the historical reality.

Secondly, on the definition of war, I think that it is very important to reflect on the fact that the British Government and the IRA never allowed the conflict to be defined as

a war; they engaged in the rhetoric of it. All parties knew that if they allowed it to be defined as a war they would be subject to the Geneva convention. I would be very happy had the Geneva convention applied here. However, we have to be precise; and that, unfortunately, was not the case because neither the British Government nor the IRA would ever allow it. I think that Lord Morrow makes some very important points, but they need to be thought about in that context.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that interventions should be brief. The Member has an extra minute.

Lord Morrow: Mr Deputy Speaker, I will not need to be reminded again about what to do when Mr McDevitt asks me to give way. That was a slight abuse. However, I do try to give way to Members when they ask. I heard what he said. That is the type of rhetoric that people are, quite frankly, a bit disgusted with and a bit fed up listening to.

Sinn Féin also has much further to go on the issue. Of course, Mitchel McLaughlin tried to say that we are all victims and that the awful society in which we lived made us all victims. When he got a crash across the elbow, he was very magnanimous and said that he took it as the way things were and that he did not blame every member of the RUC. That is despite the fact that he and his organisation campaigned vigorously for the destruction of the RUC, which unfortunately happened, and we know the consequence of that.

There have been other failures in this whole attempt to address the issue, not least the Eames/Bradley report. Mr McLaughlin is coming from exactly that background. If you read the Eames/Bradley report carefully, you will find that it also states that we are all guilty. The terrorist who pulled the trigger, fired and executed a member of the security forces is no guiltier than the member of the security forces or the unfortunate individual who was murdered by a terrorist bomb while standing at a bus stop. According to the Eames/Bradley report, the person standing at the bus stop was just as guilty as the person who planted the bomb. How disgraceful and obnoxious. Is it any wonder that we have difficulties defining a victim?

Let us make something very clear. Mr Molloy mentioned the murder triangle. I know the murder triangle very well, because I lived in the centre of it. We were at the cutting edge of it, and we know exactly what was going on there. The impression that Mr Molloy seemed to give is that the security forces were in cahoots with those from the loyalist side. However, let me remind Mr Molloy and the whole House today that the greatest majority of unsolved murders are the ones that were committed by PIRA.

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

Lord Morrow: That should never be forgotten. Resolution has been quite high on the other side; that has not been the case on the Provisional IRA side.

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

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 after lunch will be Question Time.

The sitting was suspended at 12.34 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

Forum for Victims and Survivors

1. **Mr Swann** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the victims and survivors' forum. (AQO 1867/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister Anderson to answer the question.

Ms M Anderson (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Go raibh míle maith agat. The forum is a statutory duty of the commission and, as such, its operation lies entirely within the discretion of the commission. We have been informed by the victims' commissioners that they have appointed 25 individuals to serve as members of the forum for victims and survivors for a two-year period. A registration meeting took place on 26 April, when prospective members were briefed on the forum's operating procedures. A two-day induction workshop will take place in May, and the first formal sitting of the forum will be held in Belfast on 21 June. The membership of the forum will be publicly announced in advance of the first meeting.

Mr Swann: It is unfortunate that the junior Minister answered rather than the deputy First Minister, because where I wanted to go with the supplementary was in regard to the victims and survivors' forum and the right for the truth. Does she know, with the deputy First Minister's recent naming in the Smithwick tribunal and his role in the IRA, whether he can inform the House whether he will give evidence to that tribunal?

Mr Speaker: Order. Once again, I warn Members from all sides of the House that supplementary questions must relate to the original question that is down in the Order Paper. Some Members continually rise in their place and knowingly ask a supplementary question that has no relevance whatever to the question. I have seen that over the past number of weeks. Members deliberately rise in their place, knowing that the question that they are asking has nothing to do with the question on the Floor. I warn Members that, if they continue to do what they are doing, they will not be called to ask a supplementary question for some time in the House when it comes to Question Time. I will leave it to the deputy First Minister as to whether he wants to answer, but the supplementary question does not relate to the original question in the Order Paper. I am going to move on.

Mr Eastwood: I ask the junior Minister, I think — I am not sure whom I am asking — whether she will give us an assurance that the forum will be provided with permanent

fiscal and financial security to ensure that it can meet the needs of victims in the medium to long term.

Ms M Anderson: I can definitely give you that assurance. The costing for the forum will be £92,000 for year 1 and £92,000 for year 2. That money has been ring-fenced for that reason.

Mr Molloy: I thank the junior Minister for her replies so far. How will members be appointed to the forum? How have they been processed so far?

Ms M Anderson: The First Minister, deputy First Minister and the Department have no recommendation or approval role in the appointment process for the victims' forum. In convening a forum, the commissioners have acted in accordance with article 6 of the Victims and Survivors Order 2006, which established a duty to make arrangements for a forum, and article 3 of the 2006 order, which defines a victim and survivor for the purpose of the commission. Twenty-three of the 25 members are deemed to be victims and survivors by the commission in accordance with article 3 of the 2006 order, and two individuals are deemed to be associated members.

Mr Speaker: Question 8 has been withdrawn.

Institutional Child Abuse Inquiry

2. **Mr P Maskey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the inquiry into historical institutional child abuse. (AQO 1868/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: We have made significant progress towards its establishment. It is a very involved and detailed process, and it is absolutely crucial that we get it right. We are taking every care in finalising the details to avoid delays at a later stage that could cause further hurt to victims and survivors of abuse. The First Minister and I, junior Ministers and officials have had and continue to have in-depth discussions with victims and their representatives. There has been consultation with experts on this type of inquiry, and their advice and insight have been invaluable. Junior Ministers are in ongoing discussions with a potential inquiry chair about the terms of reference and set-up of the inquiry. Acknowledgement forum panel members are in place, and they are developing their structures and protocols. Suitable accommodation has been identified in Belfast, and we are working to secure premises in Derry, so that victims and survivors can access an acknowledgement forum in either location. An inquiry secretary and office manager have also been appointed.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat. I appreciate all the work that has been done by the Department up to this stage. Is the deputy First Minister confident that the inquiry will receive full co-operation from all the institutions involved?

Mr M McGuinness: It is my fervent hope that that will be the case. In other inquiries that looked at the role of the religious in child sex abuse, there has been a tendency for them to be less than co-operative. In July last year, Enda Kenny said:

"Because for the first time in Ireland, a report into child sexual-abuse exposes an attempt by the Holy See, to frustrate an inquiry ... And in doing so, the Cloyne report excavates the dysfunction, disconnection, elitism ... the

narcissism ... that dominate the culture of the Vatican to this day."

He went on to say:

"The rape and torture of children were downplayed or 'managed' ... Far from listening to evidence of humiliation and betrayal with St Benedict's 'ear of the heart' ... the Vatican's reaction was to parse and analyse it with the gimlet eye of a canon lawyer".

I noted following a meeting between the victims group Savia and the Catholic Church that the church made it clear that it would co-operate fully with the inquiry. In order to guard against anyone not fully co-operating, we will ensure that the inquiry has full power to compel people and documents.

Mr Campbell: Given that such a considerable number of people have come forward claiming that they were abused through the Roman Catholic Church and the institutions thereof, what steps will be put in place to ensure that the wider community does not end up paying hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of pounds to compensate people who were abused in such a way?

Mr M McGuinness: We are in the early stages of putting in place a very important inquiry into institutional abuse. Ongoing discussions are taking place between junior Ministers and the prospective chair of the inquiry, who is an eminent legal figure. All these matters will have to be considered very seriously in the context of the terms of reference. However, there can be absolutely no doubt in anybody's mind that, as we go forward, we have a duty and responsibility to stand by those who were very cruelly sexually abused and, indeed, raped through institutional abuse. These are matters that we will have to contend with in the time ahead, and I think that all of us in the House recognise the importance of the issue. We have seen in the last short while how important that matter is.

Mr Hussey: Will the deputy First Minister affirm his call for Cardinal Brady to reflect on his position after he failed to act on information that he had regarding the alleged abuse of children in the 1970s?

Mr M McGuinness: I am a practising Catholic, and I love my church. I absolutely respect the rights of all others to believe in whatever they want to believe in and respect their beliefs and churches also. However, I love my church, and I believe that the Catholic community throughout the island of Ireland is absolutely dismayed and, indeed, angry at what it has heard in recent times. Over the past couple of days, an attempt has been made, in my opinion, to deflect attention from the failings of the Catholic hierarchy, and we are all very conscious that, in the past couple of weeks, we have been told that a number of progressive priests have been silenced by the Vatican. I regard the attempt to deflect attention from the failings of the Catholic hierarchy on these matters as an attempt to silence politicians also, and we have no intention whatsoever of being silenced. Politicians all over this island have spoken out with great clarity about how they feel about the total mismanagement of these important issues, which are of great relevance to victims and survivors.

Of course, the issue of Cardinal Brady's position in all of this is important for a lot of people. However, of more importance to me is the attitude that pertains in the

Vatican. The major failing that exists within the Catholic Church resides in the Vatican. I have first-hand experience of that. I went to the elevation of Seán Brady as cardinal in Rome, and, in the aftermath of an event held that evening, I spoke to a Monsignor who railed against the people of Boston. They, he said, ran Cardinal Bernard Law out of Boston because of his failure to confront child abuse in his diocese. So I know where the problem resides, and I absolutely agree with Denis Bradley, who, over the past number of days, recognised that the issue of Cardinal Brady was of less importance than the attitude of the Catholic Church in the Vatican —

Mr Speaker: I remind the deputy First Minister of the time limit.

Mr M McGuinness: — and how it has miserably failed the victims of child sex abuse.

Mr Dickson: The current evidence indicates that abuse within the Catholic Church was not confined to institutional abuse but extended to wider abuse, particularly against young people, outside institutions and in parishes. Therefore, can we be assured and can the House be satisfied that any inquiries will also take into account all those matters?

Mr M McGuinness: This particular inquiry is specifically to deal with institutional abuse. We have seen, over the past couple of days, what I consider to be a very important intervention by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin. He has emerged from the mess as a colossus within the church, someone who understands absolutely what is going on and what is required to put it right. He has called for the establishment of a commission of inquiry, North and South, into the Fr Brendan Smyth case to establish exactly the role of the churches, bishops and the statutory agencies, such as the Garda Síochána in the South and the RUC in the North. We have to take that on board. The trail of destruction, which, it appears, lasted from well before 1975 right through to the early 1990s, raises all sorts of questions about how this monster was handled by the church.

As a Catholic, I was appalled to hear that, nine years after the investigation by Cardinal Brady — then Fr Brady — and other churchmen, at the behest of the bishop, powers of confession and mass were restored to Fr Brendan Smyth. That absolutely atrocious, diabolical decision undoubtedly left many more young people open to being preyed on by that serial and habitual rapist.

Play and Leisure Strategy

3. **Mr Lyttle** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the development of a play and leisure strategy for children. (AQO 1869/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister Anderson to answer this question.

Ms M Anderson: Go raibh míle maith agat.

Play and leisure is being delivered through an implementation plan that was approved by the Executive and published in March 2011. The implementation plan is evidence of collaborative working between the statutory, voluntary and community sectors. It contains 37 actions due to be

delivered by 2016. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister leads on 22 of those actions, and other Departments lead on the remaining 15. Many of the actions assigned to OFMDFM need local council and community involvement. Therefore, during 2010 and 2011, councils were offered funding of up to £10,000 to assist them in setting up partnerships. Some 14 councils availed themselves of the offer and received a total contribution of £125,000 from OFMDFM. Engagement with the remaining 12 councils is continuing, and our aim is to have partnerships established in all council areas by March 2013.

One year into the plan, we are reviewing the progress that has been made. We are also working on the delivery of actions due to be completed in the next two years. I will not name them all, but, for instance, one is to run a pilot project focusing on the play and leisure needs of children with disabilities by June 2013. The future delivery of the plan will be taken forward under the Delivering Social Change framework.

2.15 pm

Mr Lyttle: I thank the junior Minister for the answer. It is good to hear of progress that is being made. How does the strategy link in with the 0-6 early years strategy? How important is play and leisure to the development of our children and young people?

Ms M Anderson: It is crucial. The strategy links in very well. As the Member probably knows, under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, there is an obligation that applies to all bodies, including all 26 councils and not just the 14 that I have referred to that have set up the partnership. Under article 21 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, every child has the right to engage in play and recreational activity. In the work that Jonathan Bell and I have been doing as junior Ministers with responsibility for children and young people — we had a brief conversation with you about Delivering Social Change — we believe that play and leisure are crucial not just to the child poverty action plan but to the work that we are taking forward in OFMDFM and collaboratively across Departments.

Mr I McCrea: Will the junior Minister outline any specific reasons why the councils that have not engaged so far have failed to do so? Do you feel that, as this progresses, additional funding will be made available?

Ms M Anderson: We have been working with the other councils to encourage them to enter into a partnership. As I said, every council has a statutory obligation. We are providing the funding to enable and assist them to establish a partnership. Members who have a relationship with or are involved in any of the council areas — we can give you the 12 that have not participated in the scheme so far — should encourage their council to fulfil its statutory obligation. We are doing a business case at the moment. We are reviewing it so that we can provide assistance to councils that have yet to avail themselves of the opportunity to come forward. The work of OFMDFM is to facilitate; it is up to councils to deliver on their statutory obligation.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire sóisearach as an fhreagra a thug sí. I thank the junior Minister for her answer. Is Newry and Mourne District Council one of the councils

that has engaged with her Department? If so, what progress has been made with the partnership in that area?

Ms M Anderson: You will be pleased to know that Newry and Mourne District Council has been engaging with us, as have 13 others. Jonathan Bell and I met PlayBoard last week. We have discussed with PlayBoard and others the need for a forum to bring all the councils together so that we can assess the work that has been done. There are some models of good practice. It would be remiss of me not to say that one of the models that we are looking at is in my constituency of Derry.

Mrs Overend: Will the junior Minister tell us how much of the £1.5 million funding for children and young people over the 2012-13 period will be allocated to the implementation of the play and leisure policy?

Ms M Anderson: Our baseline for children and young people is more than that, when you consider that £12 million has been allocated for childcare, for instance, and money has been allocated for SIF. We have been working with the business case that is being reconsidered because, as junior Ministers, we did not think it was robust enough when we looked at it with the officials. We believed that we could do more. That is work that we are doing.

The answer to your specific question of how much of it will be allocated is that we believe that more could be allocated than what was in the original case, hence the reason for the review and reconsideration of the work that we have done thus far.

OFMDFM: Brussels Visit

4. **Mr Sheehan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the recent visit by the junior Ministers to Brussels. (AQO 1870/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: As there is considerable speculation that junior Minister Anderson is going off to a posting elsewhere, we have decided to increase her time span during Question Time. I will ask her to answer this question.

Ms M Anderson: Go raibh míle maith agat. Of course, I will not add to that speculation at all.

Junior Minister Bell and I led a delegation of senior officials from all Departments to Brussels between 27 and 29 March. This intensive and comprehensive programme of engagement with Europe and European Commission officials was part of the Barroso task force process. The purpose of the programme was to take stock of the progress made to date against the Executive-agreed priorities that have been raised. We looked at other issues, particularly the Executive-proposed strategic priorities, with the Commissioner and the Barroso task force members.

We will make a detailed statement, or Jonathan may with whomever — me, perhaps — to the Assembly in the near future concerning the programme, and our officials are drafting a report to be placed in the Assembly Library. In the meantime, with your permission and indulgence, I will give an overview. There were 54 meetings over three days. They took place with Commission officials from 14 directorates general. The programme included a plenary session held in our Brussels office with a keynote speaker, Walter Deffaa, the newly appointed director general of the regional policy

directorate. This provided an opportunity to discuss the challenges that face our region and the wider European economy, as well as the emerging regional and European policy priorities.

The Brussels programme also provided Minister Bell and me with the opportunity to progress other areas of importance, including a future Peace IV programme, the peace-building and conflict resolution centre and the forthcoming Irish Government presidency of the Council of the European Union, and to meet our MEPs. The programme represented a further step up in our European engagement, providing our Departments with unprecedented access to the Commission —

Mr Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

Ms M Anderson: — and allowing them to follow across a range of policies and programmes.

I felt it was important that you all heard that.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. What input will the Executive have during the 2013 presidency of the Council of Europe?

Ms M Anderson: As the Member will no doubt be aware, Dublin will take over the presidency of the Council of Europe in 2013. During that period, there will be critical negotiations on the major policy areas in Europe, such as the future of the common agricultural policy and the cohesion policy. We have been keen to ensure that our interests are fully taken on board and represented in Europe, and, to that end, we have had a number of discussions with Dublin, both through the North/South Ministerial Council and our engagement with the Irish permanent representative to the EU to explore the opportunities for co-operation. We have seconded an official to the Irish permanent representative in Brussels to assist with the 2013 presidency, and we will continue to explore the potential of this further by looking at other secondments.

Mr Weir: As time limits tend to be tighter in Brussels than they are here, will the Member briefly outline what preparation was put in ahead of the summit to bring Departments together to ensure that there was a co-ordinated approach to maximise funding?

Ms M Anderson: Junior Minister Bell and I had meetings with officials, particularly the more senior officials across all the Departments. Initially, some reluctance was shown by one or two Departments about the opportunities that could be maximised when attending the meetings that we and others had scheduled for them in Europe. It was only when they got there that there was a realisation across the Departments that we needed to go to Europe, because Europe was not going to come to us.

Mr A Maginness: I do not think that it is premature to congratulate the junior Minister on her elevation to Europe, but I remind her that she is not the first Derry person to represent Northern Ireland in Europe. [Laughter.]

Was there any discussion with the European Commission about Horizon 2020? It is important that we get the criteria right so that local companies can obtain funding from Europe to develop their business.

Ms M Anderson: The Member's congratulations are, of course, premature, although it would be an honour and a privilege to bring Brussels back to the Bogside.

Jonathan Bell had a number of meetings, and we raised the issue of Horizon 2020, particularly once we discovered that the Irish Government officials had brought over 100 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) during Horizon 2020's developmental stage so that they could be informed about what was coming down the line and have better information about access to funding. That is the kind of work that the Assembly needs to do to maximise the funding opportunities that are available in Europe.

OFMDFM: Funding Allocations

5. **Mr B McCrea** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what procedures have been put in place to ensure that ministerial approval is obtained before their Department issues letters of offer or allocates funding to projects.

(AQO 1871/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: The First Minister and I take very seriously the responsibility to have all expenditure properly approved. In the light of that, OFMDFM introduced a grants manual in July 2011 specifying the procedures that staff must follow in the administration of grants to directly funded organisations working in the voluntary and community sector.

The guidance specifies that ministerial approval must be obtained for the approval of any new programme or scheme, and it must be renewed on each occasion that the scheme is launched. To strengthen governance structures further, a new governance unit was set up in the equality and strategy directorate in October 2011. The unit performs a verification check on all grant-funded groups, ensuring compliance with the terms of their letters of offer. I can assure the House that procedures have been put in place to ensure that ministerial approval is obtained for all schemes before letters of offer are issued.

Mr B McCrea: I am somewhat surprised that the deputy First Minister did not let the junior Minister deal with this question as part of her training programme. Given that there are some issues in the north-west, will he explain exactly how seriously the matter is being taken? There is perhaps a feeling that this is just an administrative error and it will be put right, but quite significant sums of money are involved.

Mr M McGuinness: More stringent measures have been put in place to ensure that this does not happen again. I absolutely agree with the Member that it is an important matter. Internal audit intends to carry out a follow-up exercise on the 2010-11 report to provide evidence of compliance with the new procedures in 2011-12. Directors complete a quarterly stewardship statement, which provides assurance to the Department's accounting officer that policies and procedures are being adhered to. The Department will look at the matter very carefully indeed.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the deputy First Minister for his responses so far. He has outlined a number of the measures that have been put in place to prevent this type of thing happening again. Given the recent events, which further highlighted the problem, can he advise the House whether any other measures have been

taken, particularly where other organisations are breaking rules that they should not break?

2.30 pm

Mr M McGuinness: As I said, new procedures have been in place since July 2011. They have been further strengthened by a new governance unit, which was put in place in October 2011. The procedures set out the circumstances in which the different levels of approval, including ministerial approval, are required and the steps to be taken to achieve that. Ministerial approval must be granted on each occasion that a scheme is launched or relaunched. As I also said, internal audit will carry out a follow-up exercise on the 2010-11 report to provide evidence of compliance, and directors will complete a quarterly stewardship statement to provide assurance to the Department's accounting officer that policies and procedures are being kept to.

We have had to deal with other situations in recent times and we are all conscious that we are dealing with public money. Where there has been a lapse in the pattern of behaviour within individual areas of responsibility, we are determined to ensure that we have processes in place to ensure that that does not happen again.

Regional Development

Mr Speaker: Questions 5 and 12 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

Translink: Finances

1. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of Translink's five-year strategic plan and the implications for its employees. (AQO 1882/11-15)

6. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the projected future financial performance of Translink. (AQO 1887/11-15)

8. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister for Regional Development how his Department is working with Translink to tackle the serious financial challenges that it will face over the coming years. (AQO 1889/11-15)

10. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his Department's plans to ensure that Translink does not go into deficit in the next two years. (AQO 1891/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 1, 6, 8 and 10 together as they relate to similar issues.

Each year, Translink produces a three-year corporate plan, which is discussed with my Department and has to focus on the year ahead. Under the Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 1967 and the Companies Act 2006, Translink is obligated to consider going-concern issues and must, at least, break even year on year. Plans are drawn up that take account of that obligation, including funding, costs incurred by Translink — staff and fuel costs are key — fare income and levels of service. Although I have endorsed the position for the current year, I have not done so for the following two years as there is more work to be done.

I recognise that the funding position for Translink in 2013-14 and 2014-15 is more constrained. Combined with cost pressures on fuel and existing wage agreements, that means that a financial deficit is projected by Translink at this stage. I expect Translink to develop plans to address that, and I will be asking my officials to look at funding. In addition, following two earlier efficiency reviews of Translink as part of the programme for the reform of public transport, my Department is in the process of initiating a further efficiency review. The Committee for Regional Development will be fully engaged during that process and kept informed as plans are progressed.

It is important to recognise that any planned reviews of budgets or future in-year monitoring rounds could impact here. Although a plan can be drawn up for that, we need to recognise that that will require time to develop and will be subject to change. As regards employees, there are no current plans for any compulsory redundancy schemes. Translink continues to ensure that staff members are deployed as efficiently as possible.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that there is considerable concern among drivers and other staff about redundancies? There have been some voluntary redundancies this year, and there is concern about the introduction of compulsory redundancies in years 2, 3, 4 and 5. There are also concerns about a reduction in services, particularly in rural areas.

Mr Kennedy: I am aware of the issues that the Member has raised. Translink will take those issues forward, and I will be interested in their outcome, as indeed departmental officials and, I am sure, the wider Assembly and Executive will be. Over the past number of years, changes have evolved and efficiency measures have taken place in Translink. Those have been brought forward in the absence of compulsory redundancies. Hopefully, that course of action will remain open to us in the future.

Mr Hamilton: I am sure that the Minister was as concerned as the rest of us when he heard about Translink's projected £2 million profit being turned into a £11 million loss inside a year. Does he agree that perhaps that points to a more systemic problem in Translink? Although I welcome the efficiency review that he announced, will he consider having the performance efficiency and delivery unit carry out that work, to help him stave off further fare increases?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. Indeed, at some point in the future, he may be uniquely placed to assist with the financial arrangements for not only my Department but Translink. I look forward to when his early interest in regional development and in Translink in particular may yield additional moneys for us.

Translink and the Department have looked closely at bringing forward efficiency savings, and, as far as we can, we will continue to do that. I will consider the Member's suggestion. However, I inherited the reality of the Department's budget, which is challenging in later years. By working together — including with the Finance Minister, and possibly with his successor — we will seek to improve the situation.

Mr Cree: Rather than tinkering with savings and cutting costs, does the Minister agree that there is an opportunity to look at the overall operation of the whole business?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for that supplementary question. His point is well made. We continue to review, on an ongoing basis, the funding that is available to Translink and how Translink operates. In effect, it is a business that has to, at least, break even year by year. It remains to be seen whether we can look at wider-ranging or fundamental change in how it is governed. Bearing in mind that it is responsible for providing an efficient and effective public transport system, I am slightly wary of how the introduction of private operators would impact, particularly on rural services. That has to be balanced against the obviously very strained financial situation in which we find ourselves. However, we will certainly look at and take every opportunity to improve the situation.

Mr McCarthy: That was to be my very question: will the Minister assure the Assembly that rural and country routes will not be sacrificed in the interests of saving money? At this moment, community rural transport is under pressure. In fact, some operators have not even got this year's funding allocation. So, the rural routes need to be safeguarded as much as possible.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. I am now always cautious when responding to him, lest I say anything that would offend him or for which I might have to apologise in private. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McCarthy: You are all right.

Mr Kennedy: Anyway, I refer the Member to my answer to my colleague Leslie Cree from North Down, and I assure him that protecting services, particularly those in isolated rural areas, is fundamental, regardless of how Translink is funded.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers so far, in particular the latter one, in which he said that he will seek to protect rural services. Further to that, will he assure me that there will be no reduction in services to such areas or any increase in the cost of using rural or any other services, as a consequence of the bit of hokey-cokey that we have seen from Translink in its recent profit and loss announcements?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. I am never one for hokey-cokey, in politics anyway. It is important that we understand the financial position that we find ourselves in and about which I have to be realistic.

I have indicated strongly my sense of the importance of retaining, in particular, rural services in isolated areas. Nevertheless, the budget that I inherited is challenging. To make things work, Translink will have to consider all options. I am not and will not be a prophet of doom, but we will seek to work with Translink to ensure that services are maintained to the required level and that, where possible, efficiencies are driven through so that we can have a cost-effective but fully resourced public transport system.

Mr Allister: The Minister referred to an efficiency review. Will that consider an examination of why Translink spends tens of thousands of pounds per annum — strangely, given that it runs a public transport system — on taxi fares for its staff?

Will it look at the efficacy of the chief executive's £200,000 salary?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. Clearly, he has been on the happy pills again. *[Laughter.]*

Translink regulates the use of taxis by its staff. Taxis are used only when they are the most economically viable solution and not to use them would result in significant overtime costs. The annual costs are small in relation to the costs and inconvenience that would be caused should services have to be cancelled because staff were not in the correct location at the correct time. Translink will continue to monitor all operations to ensure that they are as efficient as possible. I know of some public comment on the salary of the chief executive, who has been in post for a number of years, predating my term as Minister. These are contractual issues, and I am always loath to enter discussions that centre on personalities. Neither am I into the politics of envy.

Mr Speaker: Question 2 has been withdrawn.

Buses: Derry

3. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will consider the creation of bus priority measures in and around the Derry City Council area. (AQO 1884/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In recent years, Roads Service has delivered a number of bus priority measures throughout the Derry City Council area. These include bus-turning circles, improved mounting and dismounting facilities, red bus markings and kerbside build-outs at various locations across the city. In addition, the 125-space park-and-ride facility constructed at the city end of Drumahoe incorporates bus boarding on either side of the A6 Dungiven Road and serves the intercity Goldline service 212. The facility, which cost £230,000, currently operates at 70% capacity. More recently, consideration has been given to the development of a quality bus corridor to run from Bridge End via Buncrana Road and Strand Road to Foyle Street and then via the expressway to Craigavon Bridge, Duke Street, Glendermott Road and Dungiven Road to Drumahoe. This is like reading out a bus or railway timetable.

A study is being undertaken to consider the potential of such a corridor, and I expect a report within this financial year. As part of this development, my Department will progress legislation during this financial year to introduce bus lanes from Foyleside roundabout to Carlisle Square roundabout and from Pennyburn roundabout to Maybrook Mews. Further to these schemes, Roads Service proposes to develop suitable bus priority measures at signalised road junctions along the routes. Delivery of the schemes will depend on the successful completion of the statutory process. My Department will also take forward work to determine the potential for further bus priority measures on the corridor running from Bridge End to Drumahoe. This will include consideration of the conditions necessary for it to work.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his answer, particularly his commitment to exploring the option of bus corridors throughout Derry city. Does he accept that creating bus corridors would establish the only conditions under which people will get out of their cars and on to buses, namely when people see that buses can get them where they

want to go more quickly and recognise their economic and environmental benefits?

Mr Kennedy: Yes.

2.45 pm

Mr Campbell: The Minister outlined that issue in great detail, particularly as it relates to the rural area of Londonderry out towards Drumahoe and beyond to Claudy. Have the Minister or Translink taken account of the possible implications of the dualling of the aforesaid road junction and the difficulties that that might entail, assuming we get the go-ahead in the not-too-distant future for that roadway?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his very cleverly designed question. The answer, of course, is that all these matters are subject to funding, and Roads Service officials are perfectly aware of the need to improve the infrastructure there. I also am aware of the representations made, and we will seek to make progress subject to funding being provided to us. As part of that, we are waiting on the outcome of the investment strategy for Northern Ireland, which will indicate the allocations to my Department, in particular, and others. I can confirm to the Member, who is a former Minister for Regional Development, that I have carried forward the argument for additional funds for roads infrastructure and regional development to the Finance Minister and to Executive colleagues.

Titanic Quarter Rail Halt: Fraser Pass

4. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to upgrade the Fraser Pass walkway leading from the Newtownards Road to the new Titanic Quarter rail halt. (AQO 1885/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Roads Service has been working closely with the East Belfast Partnership board, Belfast City Council, Sustrans and others to provide enhanced pedestrian and cycle measures between east Belfast and the Titanic Quarter. Additional facilities recently provided include new toucan crossings at Kings Road and at Dee Street, in the Comber greenway, and new toucan crossing facilities incorporated within signal-controlled crossings at the junctions of Short Strand, Bridgend and Middlepath Street on the Sydenham bypass, with connecting cycle linkage through the adjacent car park. Traffic-calming measures at Island Street and Ballymacarret Road, incorporating dropped kerbs, tactile paving and an extended road hump at the junction with Fraser Pass, are also nearing completion.

My Department has no specific proposals to upgrade the route linking the Newtownards Road with the Titanic Quarter rail halt along Fraser Pass. However, I understand that consultants had identified the Department for Social Development (DSD) as the key driver in providing that element of the project. Officials from Roads Service would be willing to meet their DSD counterparts to assist with the development of proposals if that were deemed appropriate. I further understand that the East Belfast Partnership board is investigating, along with Belfast City Council, the potential for creating a pedestrian/cycle link through the adjoining Pitt park.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his very comprehensive response. I must pay tribute to his officials for the work that they have done to date. Does the Minister agree that

upgrading the walkway and the linkages between the Titanic Quarter and the Newtownards Road/Ballymacarret area will encourage tourists to visit east Belfast and to look at the many attractions that are now in vogue, including the yardmen project at the bottom of the Newtownards Road?

Mr Kennedy: Yes.

Mr Copeland: As the Minister knows, part of the access to the Titanic Quarter railway halt comprises a tunnel. Tunnels are widely used to access and egress some public transport systems in particular. Could the Minister give some detail as to what thoughts he has had about making those places more useable and attractive for members of the public, because they can be dark and quite off-putting for those who use them?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question, and I agree that there are situations that we would seek to avoid in providing tunnels and underpasses. I can confirm that underpasses are constructed, in accordance with specific design standards, to minimise the risk to users, to reduce antisocial behaviour and to include the provision of lighting to and within such structures. Of course, lighting is one of the key features. Ongoing maintenance checks also identify any surface defects and ensure that the structures are kept in serviceable conditions, and, obviously, routine maintenance is carried out to action any repairs.

Mr Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn, and question 6 has been grouped with question 1.

Parking Fines: Town Centres

7. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister for Regional Development what assessment was made of the damage to town centre trading resulting from his recent 50% increase in fines for illegal street parking. (AQO 1888/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his question. As he will know, I inherited the proposal to introduce on-street charging in towns across Northern Ireland from the previous Regional Development Minister. However, as he and other Members will be aware, in September last year, I announced that I would not be proceeding with the proposal. Prior to making that decision, I met elected local representatives and traders' representatives, including the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA), and I listened carefully to the concerns they expressed about the potential impact on city and town centre trading across Northern Ireland. I am, therefore, very aware of the pressures faced by traders in the current difficult economic climate. However, I am also aware of the problems caused by illegal parking, which adversely impacts on shoppers and retailers and generally results in unnecessary inconvenience for commuters. Therefore, in my recent briefing to the Committee for Regional Development, I indicated that I have approved an increase in the amount of the penalty charge notice. That increase has not yet been implemented, but I consider that it is necessary to act as a strong deterrent to those who park illegally. I believe that it is those people who should contribute more towards the considerable cost of providing parking services. I should stress that that increase will not affect those who park legally and properly and abide by the law.

Mr McNarry: I appreciate the Minister's detailed response to my question. He will know that Mary Portas recently recommended an end to parking charges in town centres. Given that the number of vacant shops is increasing on a daily basis, has the Minister consulted with his counterpart Minister McCausland on the merits of the Portas report?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I can confirm that we are interested in looking at the recommendations of the report by "Mary Queen of Shops", Mary Portas. I am particularly interested in that. Somebody said, "Hail Mary, Queen of Shops". I was not quite sure about that description.

This issue is very important. I have indicated to members of the Regional Development Committee and to Executive colleagues that I want to have discussions with, and have agreed to have discussions with, Executive colleagues, including the Minister for Social Development and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, as well as, presumably, the Finance Minister. I want to ensure that the Executive, in the corporate sense, are addressing town centre issues, particularly traders' issues, because far too many units are becoming vacant and have "To Let" signs up. Given that the economy remains the Executive's priority, it is important that the Executive address this issue in a comprehensive way. I intend to follow through on those discussions, and members of the Regional Development Committee will, of course, be interested in their outcome as well.

Mr I McCrea: One of the criticisms of the implementation of parking fines is the failure of the "red coats" to warn people that they need to move on or at least have a conversation with them to encourage them to move on before going straight out with a ticket. Therefore, will the Minister consider some form of team-building exercise for the "red coat" teams to ensure that those who are carrying out their job properly and are trying to encourage people to move on can pass that knowledge on to those who go out specifically to ticket?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question and for the suggestion he has made. I am not sure whether he is volunteering his own services or those of his father, who could sing to them and put them in better form. *[Interruption.]* I will not repeat what your colleagues are saying.

Obviously, there is significant training offered already. The job of a parking attendant is not easy and is not without its challenges. On average, one ticket is issued every two hours. I have had representations from many people, not only political representatives but traders and people from traders' organisations, who feel that some people employ an overzealous attitude. However, those are the facts of the situation. Allowance is made, and there are some methods by which enforcement officers exercise caution before they issue tickets. That training will continue. As with all things, commonsense is the best thing that can prevail.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I hope that the Minister does not advocate that my father starts singing.

I was interested to note the UUP Member for North Antrim trying to blame the former Sinn Féin Minister for the recent elevation in parking charges. Surely, the Minister would be better placed to act on some of the car parks where prices

went from 30p for three hours to 40p an hour. One such car park is in Quay Lane South in my constituency, where the level of revenue generated in six months dropped from £18,000 to £15,000. Will the Minister assure us that where parking charges have increased in some car parks and a reduction in revenue has occurred, the decision to increase the charges will be reversed?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary. He raises a number of issues. I have never heard his father sing, so I cannot comment on that.

The other issue that is important to remember is the one that he mentioned himself. If the policy of the then Regional Development Minister, his party colleague Mr Murphy, had been implemented, on-street car parking charges would have been implemented in towns throughout Northern Ireland. That is a fact. After consultation and having spoken to political representatives and, in particular, trading representatives, I sought to ensure that that decision was not implemented. However, plans for the introduction of on-street charges were so advanced that they effectively left a hole of £8 million in my budget. That is what I am seeking to plug now.

I understand that these are difficult and challenging issues, but it is a bit rich for members of parties who agreed to those budgetary changes and who proposed alternative and equally restrictive charges for car parking in town centres to lecture those of us who are left trying to grapple with the outcome of their decisions.

Translink: TaxSmart

9. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the TaxSmart initiative.
(AQO 1890/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) corporate human resources, in conjunction with my Department, has been developing a TaxSmart scheme for the Northern Ireland Civil Service. TaxSmart is a salary sacrifice scheme that allows staff tax and national insurance savings by paying for their annual bus travel card from their gross salary over the year. The development of the scheme is at an advanced stage, and it is planned that the scheme will be launched in the coming weeks. I attach great importance to encouraging more of the general public to travel by public transport, and I support the TaxSmart initiative.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he, through the Department, consider supporting an extension of the scheme to include rail users? Will he encourage greater usage and greater uptake from Departments?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I am happy to look at the suggestion that he makes. Much of this will, of course, be dependent on finance and all those issues. I will seek to reply to the Member in writing.

Mr Rogers: Minister, thank you for your responses thus far. What are you doing to ensure that employees and employers know about this scheme?

3.00 pm

Mr Kennedy: We are trying to notify staff about the scheme, and arrangements are in hand to promote it, pending its

introduction. It is evident that DRD and DFP staff will be facilitated first, with the other Departments following on a phased basis. However, all staff in the Northern Ireland Civil Service will be in a position to participate in the TaxSmart initiative by the autumn.

Mr Speaker: Question 10 has been withdrawn. The Member is not in his place for question 11. Question 12 has been withdrawn.

Roads: Mount Eagles, Belfast

13. **Ms J McCann** asked the Minister for Regional Development when he expects work to begin on the unfinished roads at Mount Eagles, Lagmore, Belfast.
(AQO 1894/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Roads Service has advised that it is arranging a CCTV survey of the sewers in the Mount Eagles development. Roads Service will consider the results of the completed survey to determine a time frame for the commencement of the works necessary to bring the roads up to adoption standard. As I advised at my recent meeting with the Member, it is anticipated that adoption works will commence by the end of the summer.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Minister for his answer. We met the Minister recently and raised this issue. The people in Lagmore have been waiting and hearing for years that this work will be brought forward quite soon. I really press the Minister for a time frame of when that work will start, because it is a health hazard to the people in that community.

Mr Kennedy: As I indicated, I have been informed that the adoption works will commence by the end of this summer. I will undertake to confirm that in writing to the Member.

Social Development

Mr Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Housing Executive: Capital Assets

1. **Ms Dobson** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the capital value of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive stock expressed as land, domestic dwellings and other assets.
(AQO 1897/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I am advised by the Housing Executive that, at the end of March this year, the capital value of its stock was as follows: the housing stock, which is approximately 90,000 units, has a value of £3.4 billion; the land it holds has a value of £72.3 million; and other assets stand at a value of £68.8 million.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for his response. When Housing Executive properties are transferred to housing associations, in what manner is the Executive's corporate debt apportioned? In other words, does the debt transfer with the property?

Mr McCausland: The transfer of properties to housing associations is something that we are taking forward. There has been only one example of that so far, which was the case of Rinmore in Londonderry. In future, we intend to take a substantial number of properties across. The arrangements for that have not yet been formalised with the

Housing Executive. We have asked it to identify a number of properties, but the detailed arrangements of that have still to be worked out.

Mr Durkan: Is the Minister of the opinion that the sizeable asset that is the Northern Ireland Housing Executive could be utilised as a means of attracting investment, thus enabling the building of more, much-needed social housing?

Mr McCausland: The Member is straying into the area that I have referred to on a number of occasions recently, and that is the forthcoming housing strategy. It is important that we maximise the potential for building new homes in Northern Ireland, and if there are ways in which you can lever in additional money using, for example, the sort of approach he is talking about, that is the sort of thing that we may consider in a strategy.

Mr Agnew: The Minister stated in answers to Assembly questions to me that approximately 6,000 houses require multi-element improvements. Given that there is in Rinnmore, as he pointed out, a pilot scheme where those have been transferred to housing associations that, by my estimation, would represent up to £200 million of public housing stock. Would he see it as good value for money for the majority, if not all, of that stock to be transferred to housing associations?

Mr McCausland: When we do not have the capital money in the budget to do the sort of work that is being talked about to meet the requirements for multi-element improvements to Housing Executive stock, the only way in which that can be funded is through transferring properties across to housing associations, which can then borrow money to undertake the work. The choice is between not doing the work and going down that road. It has proved popular with the residents of that estate in Londonderry. It is now increasingly recognised that that is the way forward for major improvement programmes. If we can improve the quality of the homes — I am sure that the Member will agree — and improve, for example, their energy efficiency to address issues of fuel poverty, it is imperative that we go down that road. I think that it will be successful.

Jobs and Benefits Offices: Staff

2. **Mrs McKeivitt** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he plans to retain all current staff positions at all the existing locations of jobs and benefits offices.

(AQO 1898/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am committed to maintaining a network of front line offices throughout Northern Ireland that meets the needs of customers. I have no plans to close any jobs and benefits offices. The Social Security Agency is working with relevant impacted government organisations to consider how best to deliver a range of services through jobs and benefits offices as a result of the changes brought about by the reform of the welfare system.

Central to the planning of all those changes is the need to ensure that customers continue to have access to the necessary advice and support channels that they will need as the changes are introduced. That includes ensuring that there is the right number of staff with the right skills in the right places to help meet the needs of our customers. Work is also under way to consider the organisational and staffing

considerations for each of the reform initiatives, although it is too soon to determine the staffing requirement in detail.

The agency must continue to modernise to better position its services to deal with future change, including universal credit. To that end, my Department is considering how best to complete the roll-out of the Customer First initiative after it was successfully introduced in the north district and the Belfast west and Lisburn district. Customer First ensures the ongoing viability of the network, safeguards and modernises service delivery, and provides a better position to allow the agency to sustain future change. No staff will lose their employment as a result of Customer First.

Mrs McKeivitt: Given the fact that most Members' constituency offices have been inundated with concerns from customers, does the Minister have any plans to increase the support services offered by the front line advice centres in the wake of the implementation of welfare reform?

Mr McCausland: The proposed changes to the welfare system represent the most radical changes to the welfare system since the Beveridge report of the 1940s. My Department is working with the Department for Work and Pensions to consider impacts for Northern Ireland customers of all proposed reforms to working-age and disability benefits. As the Member will know, an Executive subcommittee has been set up to help minimise, where possible, the negative impacts of the Welfare Reform Bill for Northern Ireland.

This is all work in progress. We continue to review the different measures to ensure that we understand the impact of the policy on people in Northern Ireland. It is important that we do not cause unnecessary concerns among people, many of whom are among the most vulnerable in our society.

I can assure the Member that it is very much in our minds to ensure that we are adequately staffed to meet future demands.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Specifically on the proposed abolition of the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), has the Minister expressed any preference for any jobs and benefits function currently discharged by DEL to be transferred to the Department for Social Development?

Mr McCausland: There are arguments for and against various possible permutations. However, a little more thought is required, and that is under way. I could not, and do not want to, give an answer to that this afternoon. As the Member will understand, there are arguments for aligning certain services. Keeping together and bringing together jobs and benefits is a good thing in itself. That is why we have jobs and benefits offices. It sends out the message that they do not simply deal with handing out benefits; they also facilitate people and support and help them back to employment. The two belong together in many ways.

Mr Campbell: The Minister outlined the scale of the potential change for welfare reform and the Housing Executive. Will he reassure the House and the community that, in doing that, organisations such as the Housing Executive, the Social Security Agency and the old Child Support Agency will be at the forefront of his mind? Those agencies had a systematic under-representation in recruitment from the Protestant community. Will the Minister

ensure that as we go forward, in whatever format, there will be equality in recruitment to the Civil Service?

Mr McCausland: The Member refers to an issue that he has quite rightly raised on a number of occasions. It is important that there is a fair employment pattern in respect of employment practices and representation across the public sector workforce. It is something that has been on my mind. I have thought about it and considered it, and it will be taken into account because it is important that we follow the general pattern in society today of focusing attention on issues of fair employment. It is something that others have highlighted for many years in regard to other organisations, and the public sector should not be in any way exempt from that.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his responses. Many constituents are concerned about welfare reform changes, especially because of the way they are being communicated through the media. Will any of the current staff be dedicated to specifically communicating the changes to current benefit recipients in a clear and understandable manner to help to try and alleviate some of those fears?

Mr McCausland: I welcome the Member's concern about the issue of accurate and factual information. A lot of the information put out in the past has been inaccurate, unfounded or ill-founded. In one case, a public representative claimed in the media that 90% of people in a particular area were being turned down for a particular benefit when they were assessed. However, when the figures were checked, they were very different. It was a gross exaggeration. That sort of misinformation is extremely unhelpful and creates unnecessary fears. There are genuine concerns, and we all share them. There are well-founded concerns, and we share them, but there is no place for alarmist talk and exaggeration. It is important that we get accurate information.

Our staff are doing all that they can to ensure that we get the accurate information out there through briefings and through disseminating information to the media in particular. The media pick up on a lot of the misinformation and the ill-founded and unfounded information, and they simply regurgitate it. Then it gets out there into the ether and is repeated again and again.

Social Housing: Strabane

3. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister for Social Development how many social housing units are planned for the Strabane area in the current financial year. (AQO 1899/11-15)

Social Housing: North Down

4. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister for Social Development, following the announcement of 4,600 new social homes, to outline the new homes that are planned for the North Down area. (AQO 1900/11-15)

Mr McCausland: With the Speaker's permission, I will answer questions 3 and 4 together, as both questions relate to the social housing development programme. As Members are aware, I have published plans to deliver 4,600 new social homes over the next three years as part of our Programme for Government commitment to deliver 8,000 new social and affordable homes by 2015. By that time, we

will have delivered up to 6,000 new social homes and at least 2,000 new affordable housing opportunities.

The social housing development programme was published recently and is available for all to see on the Housing Executive website. The Housing Executive has not identified any specific housing need in Strabane over the next five years. However, the programme includes a 30-unit supported housing scheme for elderly people in the Strabane area.

In north Down, housing need over the next five years is projected to require 770 homes, so there is clearly a need to be met. For that reason, our social housing development programme for the next three years contains a total of 363 units for the north Down area. However, the provision of new social housing cannot and will never be the only answer in meeting housing need.

Each year, we allocate approximately 9,000 homes to new tenants from our existing stock, and that contribution is often overlooked. It is also worth highlighting that we must create more housing opportunities that will inevitably have to be outside the social sector, as we do not have unlimited resources. The private rented sector, for example, plays an important role for many in Northern Ireland. As part of my forthcoming housing strategy, I plan to introduce new measures that will support those living in that sector.

3.15 pm

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. When does the Minister envisage the complete version of the draft three-year build programme for Strabane? Can he elaborate and give us an indication of what that will entail?

Mr McCausland: We have published the social housing development programme, and it is on the Housing Executive's website. As I indicated, it includes a 30-unit supported housing scheme for elderly people in the Strabane area. In the past three years, we have started 44 new homes in the Strabane area, and our existing stock allowed us to make a further 176 allocations. While I appreciate Members wanting to focus on the new housing plan for their constituency, we must not lose sight of how the existing stock is managed and re-let to meet housing need.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answer. What does the Minister hope to do to get more social housing to meet the needs of people of the future in such towns as Strabane, where there is now a very large private rented sector and where tenants do not always enjoy security of tenure?

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for his question, but I go back to the point I made earlier in my initial answer. The provision of new social housing cannot be, and will never be, the only answer to meeting housing need. The situation in Northern Ireland is no different to that in England, Scotland or Wales. Housing need will be met in part by social housing, but it will also be partly met through affordable housing and the private rented sector. We should not simply cast aside the private rented sector. It is a very substantial and important sector. It is, therefore, important that we ensure that the proper protection is there for landlords and tenants, so that the rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants are recognised and it is a good functioning sector.

The private rented sector is a significant contributor to meeting housing need and should not be simply dismissed on the basis that it is not good enough, so everybody has to get a social house. We are no different from England, Scotland and Wales, where the private housing sector is a major contributor to housing provision, and we should not expect it to be any different. Let us work together to get a better private rented sector, so that the people in it have a good experience.

Mr Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Housing

5. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. (AQO 1901/11-15)

6. **Mr Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his plans for the future of housing associations. (AQO 1902/11-15)

13. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any plans to review the workings of the housing division within his Department to ensure that it is fit for purpose. (AQO 1909/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Questions 5, 6 and 13 are interconnected and, with your permission, Mr Speaker, I propose to answer them together. I plan to bring forward a new housing strategy in the coming weeks that will seek to address the wide range of challenges we face in the housing sector. Critical to that new housing strategy will be making sure that we have the best structures in place to deliver our strategy in the coming months and years. That means that we need to critically examine the current structures in the Housing Executive, the housing association movement and, of course, my Department's housing division, which has policy oversight for all of this. The fundamental review of the Housing Executive is completed, and I hope to announce a way forward shortly.

The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations has recently appointed a new chief executive officer. I understand that a programme of reform and greater collaboration is already under consideration and that my Department's procurement strategy is a key part of that. As I said earlier, with a new housing strategy soon to be announced, our focus will turn to delivery, and if the current structures or arrangements cannot meet that challenge, I will act quickly and decisively to change them.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his answer. What is the Minister's assessment of the recommendations of PWC to create a single social enterprise landlord to drive housing reform?

Mr McCausland: The PWC report was initiated under my predecessor. I always like to give credit to those who did things prior to my arrival in the Department. Members over there will notice that I do that quite often. It was a PwC report. We are now at the stage of producing detailed recommendations, which will be taken forward through the normal process. It will go through the Executive and then be brought to the Assembly. It would be premature of me to comment on those in advance of that process. I am sure

that the Member will recognise that it would be somewhat inappropriate.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer so far. Does he agree that there are too many housing associations?

Mr McCausland: It is not necessarily a question of the size of the housing associations. Certainly, there is a case to be made that, with larger housing associations, there is an economy of scale. Nevertheless, some of the smaller housing associations provide a very good local service. At a time when we are seeking to lever in as much money as possible to provide social housing, and the larger the scale of housing association the easier that probably is, there is a strong argument to be made for greater collaboration, at least, and co-operation across the housing associations. That sense of collaboration and co-operation and the introduction of procurement groups are a movement in the general direction. I know of a number of housing associations that are engaged in a process of consolidation. Three or four housing associations in my constituency are seeking to amalgamate into one, and I know of another in the constituency that is in the process of being merged into another housing association. A process and a tendency are emerging — in some degree, even from the housing associations themselves.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Will the Minister give us an idea of what form the new structure will take?

Mr McCausland: If the Member is referring to the new structure of the Housing Executive, which I assume he is, my response is the same as that to a previous question. The package, in regard to the Housing Executive, will be brought forward to the Executive — that is, the Executive of the Assembly — and then to the Assembly in due course. Until we do that, it would be premature to deal with it in questions on the Floor of the Assembly.

Ms Lo: Is shared housing included in the review? If not, how is the Minister going to gauge the developmental need for shared housing?

Mr McCausland: For me, shared housing can mean a number of different things. It depends on different areas and how it works out on the ground. Of course, shared housing should never be seen in isolation from other sharing. Housing is just one part of life. Where I live will be influenced by the school that I can send a child to or by the social or recreational facilities that are available in an area. It is wrong to simply take out housing and look at it in isolation. We should be looking at how we improve the process of sharing across a range of services, and I particularly think about education. The availability of local appropriate education is one of the key factors in determining where people live. You have only to look at the impact on an area of housing if a school closes in that area and the way in which people might move away from that area. Let us look at these things in a more joined-up way. Certainly, the issue has been in my mind.

Mr Speaker: Some Members may have difficulty in rising in their place to ask a supplementary question. I will try to encourage them.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Point taken.

Can the Minister confirm that the mutualised model is no longer an option and, if not, why not? While I have got you there: when are you coming to New Mossley?

Mr McCausland: First, the questioners keep trying to draw us down a particular road of saying in advance the outcome of our deliberations. I commend the Members for their tenacity and perseverance. It is very commendable, but I am afraid that it will be unsuccessful. We will announce those things in due course and take them through the process in the proper way.

As the Member will be aware, I have had a number of requests to visit New Mossley from him and from members of my party. I am sure that I will take that up at the very earliest opportunity.

Mr Speaker: Question 6 has already been answered.

Housing: Shared Room Allowance

7. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the additional discretionary funding for the shared room allowance in helping people who apply for it to remain in their accommodation. (AQO 1903/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The shared room allowance changes were implemented in January 2012 as part of welfare reforms. At the end of March, the Housing Executive awarded discretionary housing payments to 213 tenants affected by shared room legislation, which came into effect in January 2012. So, over a period of three months, 213 tenants came forward. We have increased the support available through discretionary housing payments from £1.713 million in 2011-12 to £3.426 million in 2012-13. It will increase again to £6.944 million in 2013-14 and to £5.939 million in 2014-15 before falling back to £4.431 million for the next two years.

Although the funding is not allocated to specific areas of change, such as the increase in the age threshold for the shared accommodation rate, it is intended to provide the housing sector with enough flexibility to sustain tenancies where additional support is needed in vulnerable cases. Although that will undoubtedly enable more people to be assisted in the short term, the added funding is not regarded as a means of mitigating the necessary changes being implemented. That means that some people will have to find more affordable accommodation.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for his answer. You mentioned the increase, of which much has been made. As you are aware, even if a person qualifies, it lasts for 13 weeks only. So, there is still a possibility that such people will become homeless, because the payment just prolongs the time when they are not homeless for a further 13 weeks. It is also quite difficult to get payments in some cases because they are made at the discretion of local housing managers. I wonder whether that has been factored in.

Mr McCausland: On the first issue of the shared rate's impact on people, it is worth noting that, according to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, between 5,000 and 6,000 claimants are likely to be newly affected by the age change. The average housing benefit reduction payable to each of those claimants will be an estimated £27.78

a week. If you look at the number of people who will be affected and at the number who have come forward for the discretionary housing payment, it would seem that, in a significant number of cases, people are absorbing that increased cost themselves.

The Housing Executive wrote to each of the claimants advising them individually of the estimated reduction in award and the effective date of reduction, and it provided advice on the possibility of assistance from the discretionary housing payment scheme. So, everyone was notified of the scheme, but not everyone has taken it up.

The matter is clearly set out in the title of the scheme: it is a discretionary scheme. The Housing Executive takes the following factors into account: are people vulnerable; have they any other resources; have they any debts; are people's living expenses unreasonably high; were people aware that housing benefit was unlikely to meet the rent; is alternative cheaper, suitable accommodation available; has the landlord commenced eviction proceedings; and what is the likely outcome if a discretionary payment is not paid? That list is not exhaustive, and there are other exceptional circumstances. However, the criteria are extensive and allow the Housing Executive to respond to a wide range of situations in which there is a shortfall between the rent charged and the level of benefit. I accept the fact that it is discretionary; there is no doubt about that. However, it is probably better if it is discretionary and has some flexibility built in, because the criteria and the factors taken into account address the more difficult cases.

Mr Gardiner: Will the Minister confirm that the funds available to him will match the need?

3.30 pm

Mr McCausland: We have doubled the amount of discretionary housing payment available this year from last year. Last year it was £1.713 million; this year it is £3.426 million. It doubles again next year, so it will have been quadrupled in a two-year period, up to £6.944 million. The indications at the moment are that it will be adequate, and if there is any change, we will certainly keep that issue before us, but, at the moment, it does seem to be adequate.

Housing Executive: Double Glazing

8. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Social Development what schemes are scheduled for the Upper Bann constituency, over the next 12 months, to replace single-glazed windows with double-glazed windows. (AQO 1904/11-15)

9. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister for Social Development, in planning the roll-out of double glazing in Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties, if he will ensure that the standard of installation meets quality standards and represents value for money. (AQO 1905/11-15)

Mr McCausland: With the Speaker's permission, I will take questions 8 and 9 together, as they both relate to the double glazing programme. The installation of double glazing in all social housing is a priority of mine in order to tackle the thermal efficiency of individual homes. The Programme for Government, therefore, contains the commitment to improve the thermal efficiency of Housing Executive stock and ensure full double glazing in all its properties.

In the financial year 2011-12, because of additional funds provided in-year through the monitoring rounds, the Housing Executive has already installed double glazing to approximately 5,100 properties. The Housing Executive's initial assessment was that 48,000 properties would require some form of work, at a cost of £120 million. However, it is now estimated that work is required to only 30,000 properties, although the Housing Executive is still unsure on whether that will be the final figure. I intend to ensure that the cost of that work will represent value for money.

Following discussions with those in the glass and glazing industry, I now have considerable concern about the value for money of the Housing Executive's current specification to contractors for window installation. I believe that significant savings could now be made, ensuring that we deliver on that commitment, while maintaining industry standards. I have, therefore, asked the Housing Executive to rigorously review the entire glazing specification. Until that review is completed, all further double glazing installations are to be held until the new contract provisions, to include any revised specifications, can be put in place. The only exception to that would be where a current Egan contractor has a contract placed with a supplier for delivery of frames and any cancellation would mean nugatory expenditure. I am, therefore, unable at this stage to provide a list of schemes scheduled for the Upper Bann constituency over the next 12 months.

My concern is that the current process used by Housing Executive contractors is extremely and unnecessarily expensive, in that it involves the removal of plaster from around the windows, replastering, damage to tenants' decoration, with a resulting redecoration grant, and the form of hinges that they use cost five times the cost of industry standard hinges. For all those reasons, it is well worth looking at, because a substantial amount of money could be saved on the figure previously quoted by the Housing Executive.

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Speaker: Questions 5, 7, 10 and 13 have all been withdrawn and require written answers.

Music: Community Sector

1. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in light of the closure of 'AU Magazine', to outline her Department's plans to encourage the local community-based music sector. (AQO 1912/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I thank the Member for his question. The Arts Council funds a wide variety of community-based music organisations, for example, the Nerve Centre, the Oh Yeah music centre and a range of traditional arts organisations, like Andersonstown Traditional and Contemporary Music School, the Armagh Rhymers, and many bands supported through the musical instruments for bands scheme. In addition, the Arts Council is developing a music strategy to enable more people to experience and participate in music. The Arts Council strategy will continue its support of community-based music organisations through its community arts strand. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and Invest NI published a new music strategy in November 2011. That

focuses on the commercial and export focus potential of the sector. The potential of the traditional music sector has also been highlighted. The Arts Council music strategy will complement the commercially focused strategy developed by DCAL and Invest NI.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her very detailed answer. She will know that 'AU Magazine' has been going for nine years and has contributed enormously to the provision of the community music sector. Will the Minister give the Assembly or, indeed, 'AU Magazine' any alternative methods to continue to promote the locally based community music sector?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question, particularly the part about the 'Alternative Ulster' publication. As he knows, it was not successful in 2012 and 2013, and the application to the Arts Council for funding failed. My understanding is that it has not put in an appeal and has not applied for Lottery arts project funding. It would perhaps be worthwhile even to talk to groups such as Arts and Business, which has been very successful in helping community-based arts organisations to get sponsorship and support. You could perhaps even talk to Belfast City Council about its corporate sponsorship and arts support for such groups over the years. Those two examples come to mind.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Was there any specific reason why the Arts Council refused the funding for 'AU Magazine'?

Ms Ní Chuilín: That round of funding was very specific in that it required certain criteria to be met. The application failed to reach the required level of ranking against the three programme criteria at stage 1 moderation and, therefore, as has been the case for many applications, could not proceed to the financial recommendation stage of the process. It appears that the application was particularly weak in areas of governance and financial management, and as I said to Kieran in response to his question, 'Alternative Ulster' has not put in an appeal to the Arts Council and has not applied for project Lottery funding either.

Mr Eastwood: As probably one of the only avid readers of 'Alternative Ulster' magazine in this House, I am sorry to see it go. Can the Minister outline specific funding sources that are available to the community-based music sector?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Most groups in the community-based music sector have applied to the Arts Council previously and to their local councils. There are demands on them to meet certain criteria to protect the public purse and the investment and to make sure that the initial reason for funding being awarded is to reach those in most need and to reach as wide an audience as possible. It is challenging for many groups. Those are the two main funding bodies for the community-based music sector.

Ulster-Scots Academy

2. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her Department's vision or concept for the Ulster-Scots Academy. (AQO 1913/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Following an economic appraisal, a ministerial advisory group on the Ulster-Scots Academy was established

in March 2011. The ministerial group is responsible for building a broad understanding of the Ulster-Scots tradition in Ireland and further afield; promoting a greater impact and coherence in the sector; and securing the broadest possible support for that work across the community in the North. It also promotes research, knowledge and understanding of Ulster-Scots language, history and cultural traditions. The group has been allocated almost £2 million for the period from 2011 to 2015.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister for her answer. How does the withdrawal of funding from the academy affect the long-term delivery of targets and assist the reduction in budget to Libraries Northern Ireland?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The ministerial advisory group had a particularly big underspend. Almost £500,000 was surrendered, and there was an underspend as well. I have received reassurance that that will not happen in future comprehensive spending review (CSR) periods, but when there is an underspend and money is surrendered, you look to see where the priorities are. At that stage, it was libraries. I would have much preferred that the money was spent but, on that occasion, it was not. I made sure that it was put to good use.

Miss M McIlveen: The Minister referred to the underspend of the Ulster-Scots ministerial advisory group, and, to date, the excuse has been that it is a new body. I am not sure how much longer that excuse can be used. However, can she assure the House that Ulster Scots is a priority and that she will ensure that the money is spent in future?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will take the last point first. It is a priority for me, and the money will be spent in the future. I hope that the ministerial advisory group can spend the money, but if it becomes clear that it cannot, I will make arrangements to make sure that the money goes straight out to the community.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Will the Minister explain why the total academy budget was not spent last year?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The ministerial advisory group on the Ulster-Scots Academy was unable to spend its full allocation because there was not the required time to second suitable staff, develop business cases and secure the necessary approvals for proposed projects. As I mentioned earlier, almost £500,000 was surrendered in the January monitoring round. A further underspend of £245,000 was identified in February.

The group has taken action to ensure that its future budget allocation will be spent over the rest of the CSR period, and that includes preparing draft research and development, a strategy and a grant scheme. The proposed grant scheme will fund projects that promote high-quality research to open up access to information and expand the appreciation of Ulster-Scots cultural traditions. It is a concern for everyone that such a large amount of money, allocated for a specific purpose, was not spent and, equally, that an additional underspend was incurred. Therefore, my officials and I will be closely watching and monitoring progress, particularly on that matter, because there is a big community out there waiting on services to be delivered. We need to make sure that that happens.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Arís, gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for her answers. The original question referred to the vision or concept for the Ulster-Scots Academy. I welcome that development. Will the Minister advise whether Ulster Scots, which many argue is a dialect, will be incorporated into that? I do realise that it is recognised as a language. However, will the Gàidhlig na h-Alba — that is, the Gaelic that many of the people brought with them from Scotland during the plantations — be incorporated into that, as a part of that vision and a part of the academy?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have not seen any specific examples. However, I assure the Member that, even at the most recent sectoral meeting of the British-Irish Council, which took place in Gweedore, a separate group, the Ulster-Scots Agency, along with Foras na Gaeilge, was party to the launch of Slí Cholmille, which looked at the connections between the Irish language and people living in the north-west who went to Scotland and vice versa. We heard how not only the language but the culture that has been enriched, separated, enriched again and shared is taken forward. However, on the Member's supplementary question about the ministerial advisory group, I am not sure whether that specific aspect of the Scottish Gàidhlig language will be part of the proposed schemes.

Sport: Shared Services

3. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she would support proposals for the provision of shared sporting services. (AQO 1914/11-15)

Mrs Ní Chuilín: I fully support proposals for the provision of shared sporting services, which would greatly help to develop sports and improve relations in sport in the North. Under my Department's strategy for sport, Sport Matters, I am already promoting the provision of shared services and spaces for sport and encouraging all stakeholders to identify opportunities for greater sharing of sports facilities. Sport Matters also proposes, under its "places" pillar, the provision of multi-sports facilities and services that promote community integration. Furthermore, given the present financial climate, with resources becoming increasingly scarce and greater challenges put on them, there is a bigger focus on sharing existing facilities. I am sure that the Member agrees that that makes economic sense.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for her answer. Following a proposal from some north Belfast schools — St Malachy's, St Patrick's and Belfast Royal Academy (BRA) — I wonder whether the Minister has had discussions with her counterpart in the Department for Social Development about the provision of some shared sporting facilities on the Girdwood Barracks site?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have had discussions with the three schools that the Member mentioned, as has the Minister for Social Development and most Members for North Belfast. They are very exciting proposals. However, the Member should be aware that those schools are currently sharing their facilities, so they are not waiting for the development of Girdwood. They, and other schools not mentioned, are sharing facilities; namely, the Belfast Boys' Model School, Belfast Model School for Girls, two of the Irish schools and the Irish primary schools. They are all sharing facilities. North Belfast has set a good example by showing

other areas how that can be done, particularly given the challenging times that the area faced.

3.45 pm

Mr I McCrea: The Minister may be aware that Derryresk Gaelic club outside Coalisland recently intended to carry out a road safety event as part of its programme of working with the police and the Fire and Rescue Service. Some local residents attempted to protest to stop that event happening and, unfortunately, they were able to do that. Will the Minister join me in condemning those who tried to stop that progress taking place? Will she try to ensure that such events continue to happen?

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member is certainly outside the original question, which was about shared sporting facilities. The Member is outside the remit of the original question, and we should move on.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I congratulate two Derry men, Darron Gibson and James McClean, on their selection. Will the Minister outline the progress that she has made with the relevant authorities through her Sport Matters strategy?

Ms Ní Chuilín: All politics is local. I commend the Member for getting that in. Hopefully, his statement will be in the 'Derry Journal'. Well done, Raymond.

The Sport Matters strategy focuses on sport, physical activity and physical recreation. We are only two years into its implementation, but there are signs of progress. The stakeholders include sporting bodies, the district councils and the Department of Education. They have all signed up to the strategy and are co-operating in developing a shared and cross-cutting delivery of arrangements. Sport NI has also worked very closely with the Department of Education on the development of a policy that will support some of the issues that Members have raised in the past about opening up and sharing schools' sports facilities, particularly when school has finished. That will greatly benefit the rest of the community. We hope that that will be completed by the end of the summer, which, I am sure, will be most welcome.

Mr Copeland: Has the Minister engaged with her Executive colleagues to examine the possible relationship between education and local government in taking a strategic view of sports provision?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The answer that I gave to Raymond is a strategic approach to sports provision. Through the Executive, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) is tasked with developing a funded strategy for physical activity and sporting provision. Most local government bodies have been involved in the development of the sports strategy; indeed, they are on the sports monitoring group, which I chair. It is not the case that they come to the meeting to pass time; they come in a proactive way and bring forward ideas and examples of where we could all have a better and more joined-up approach. I am sure that the Member agrees that that is the only way in which we can deal with the issue.

Mr McDevitt: In the spirit of the question, I share Mr McCartney's best wishes for the two local men who were called up at the weekend. I express our best wishes to

everyone competing at the highest level this summer in sports. It is going to be a great summer for sport across Europe.

Will the Minister indicate what specific targets or objectives she is working towards in shared sports services? Can she share with the House any numbers or specific priority areas?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I can write to the Member. There is a huge list of targets that have been met so far, and there are targets that have yet to be met. I am reassured by the approach and the can-do attitude that people are bringing to the table in relation to sports provision. Local government, in conjunction with DCAL, Sport NI, schools and disability sport, have been creative in making sure that people who were left out or who were furthest removed from sport and physical activity are brought in. Given the problems that we have and the challenges that we face, particularly in relation to mental health and well-being, suicide prevention, obesity and diabetes, the health indicators that might have been a second thought or an afterthought in the past are now right in the middle. The previous Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure delivered a report on those issues. They have been brought firmly into the middle and into focus. I am very impressed with people's commitment to date.

Sport: Youth Participation

4. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans her Department has to develop a cross-departmental strategy to increase youth participation in sport. (AQO 1915/11-15)

6. **Ms Brown** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what her Department is doing to promote sport and exercise among young people as part of a healthy lifestyle. (AQO 1917/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 4 and 6 together.

In 2009, my Department published Sport Matters, a 10-year strategy for sport and physical recreation that was approved by the Executive. It contains a number of targets specifically designed to increase participation in sports across the population, including young people. To ensure that the targets are delivered, a DCAL-led Sport Matters monitoring group, chaired by me, has been established to oversee the implementation of the strategy, including its sport participation elements. As I mentioned earlier, that group includes senior representatives of DCAL, the Health and Education Departments, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), the Department for Social Development, the Department for Employment and Learning and the Environment Agency, as well as representatives from local government. As part of the process, a Sport Matters action plan has been developed and published, which sets out detailed actions that are being taken forward to ensure that all the targets set out in the strategy, including those relating to young people and participation in sports and exercise, are achieved within its lifetime.

Mr Dickson: Thank you for your reply, Minister. What action are you taking to deal with obesity among young people? Does she agree that it is a vital, cross-cutting issue that needs to be dealt with by her Department as well as the Education and Health Departments?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am sure that the Member heard my response to Conall McDevitt. That seems to be almost a repeat of his earlier question. Obesity, better physical health and well-being, mental health and physical activity are right in the middle of the strategy, the action plan and its implementation, particularly for children and young people.

We need to make it easier, not more difficult, for children to participate in sport. Certain issues have been raised by young women, and older women said that sport at school put them off involvement or participation in sport for the rest of their adult lives. We all want to make sure that that does not happen. All the health and well-being indicators, as well as the social ones, are in the middle of the action plan.

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for her response. As already mentioned, and as the Minister is aware, obesity is a very serious issue facing the health and well-being of future generations. Will the Minister tell me how she is working with the Ministers of Education and Health to ensure that children in particular benefit from a healthy and active lifestyle?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am sure that the Member heard me list the Departments earlier, all of which have high-level representation in the monitoring group. I also sit on the children and young person's ministerial group, and a lot of these targets and actions overlap, which I think is a good thing. No Department should work in isolation. Through attending the ministerial subgroup on children and young people, I bring to other Departments information on what DCAL does to end exclusion and provide better opportunities. The Sport Matters strategy is one such issue, and crossover with other Departments and bodies working on our behalf is essential.

Mr Humphrey: I appreciate the opportunity to ask the Minister a question. She mentioned working across Departments and consulting. I agree entirely about sharing facilities, as she mentioned earlier in reference to North Belfast, as that is important when working with councils, universities, private clubs, and so on, to ensure that there is no duplication. I hope that, when the Minister consults, she does not leave out those involved in working with young people, not just clubs and youth clubs, but state youth organisations such as the Boys' Brigade, the Scouts, the Girls' Brigade, the Church Lads' Brigade and the Girl Guides.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware of the Member's work in this area in North Belfast. The strategy has been in progression for two years. The feedback that we got, particularly about the community empowerment partnership (CEP) model in north Belfast, was very good, because the organisations that the Member listed were not just involved in traditional activities, particularly around the Scouts. They provided children with opportunities that they would not normally have had, which is very important.

I mentioned young girls earlier. Just recently, at Queen's University playing fields, five sports were represented that children, particularly young girls, would never have had the opportunity to play. Those children came from GB, Girl Guides and club backgrounds and would never normally, for example, have had the opportunity to play camogie. The girls from camogie clubs might never have had the opportunity to play hockey or rugby, and they got involved in that, which was very good.

It is important that the groups that emerge and develop and those that have been working for a long time do not become invisible to departmental strategies, because that is where people feel excluded and alienation creeps in.

Mr Speaker: Questions 5 and 7 have been withdrawn. Question 6 has already been answered.

Fracking: Fish Stocks

8. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has any concerns that fracking could have a damaging impact on fish stocks. (AQO 1919/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: It was hard to flick through that very quickly.

I have great concerns about the potential impact of fracking on the natural environment and habitats. I have ensured that DCAL's inland fisheries group is notified of all hydraulic fracking applications as part of the consultation process. All hydraulic fracking applications — I will just call it fracking — are submitted to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) under section 11 of the Mineral Development Act (NI) 1969. DCAL officials will make an assessment of the potential impact of any fracking activity on fisheries, and this will be considered in the overall assessment of each application. DETI has recently established a shale gas forum to address recent interests and concerns about fracking. DCAL's inland fisheries group is represented on this forum.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for outlining the significant concerns that there are about fracking and the potential impact on fish stocks. She mentioned the shale gas forum. Would she support proposals to make that forum more open and transparent, given the significant level of public interest and concern around this issue, and to assure the public that Departments are working in the wider public interest?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I support what the Member is asking for. All Departments need to provide clarity and transparency, and there certainly needs to be clarity and transparency around this issue. The shale gas forum has representation from other stakeholders — the Department of the Environment, planning, environmental policy, the Environment Agency, the Health and Safety Executive, DARD and NI Water. Those are just a few examples of public bodies sitting on the forum.

We all have a section 75 duty to make sure that it is inclusive, but if the Member has identified any gaps, perhaps he would forward them to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I agree that, particularly where new fora have been established, people question, even if not in a critical way, the representation on the boards and how the work of the boards is transparent to people in the community.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answers so far. She will be well aware of the importance of the lakes and waterways to people and to tourism in Fermanagh. What are the potential risks to fisheries in Fermanagh, given that the company behind these plans seems to think that it can lift as much water as it wants from lakes such as Lough Macnean if fracking goes ahead?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Any potential threats to fish would be the same regardless of which lake they were in, but I take the Member's point about Fermanagh. The fracking process

requires large amounts of water, which may be abstracted from water bodies in the vicinity. This could result in a lowering of the water levels, which would have a detrimental effect on fish populations.

Over 50 different chemicals can be used in the fracking process, and although much of the water and chemicals are collected during the process, they have the potential to pollute ground water that could, in turn, seep into surface waters, resulting in fish kills. Only a small amount of the water used for pressurisation can be reused in the operation, but almost 60% will be stored on site, which could become a potential pollutant source.

4.00 pm

Mr Kinahan: The Minister said that every fracking application will be based on an assessment of the harm that it would do to fish stocks. However, to know what harm fracking will do to fish stocks, we need a baseline. When will the Minister have a baseline for the stocks of fish in all our rivers and loughs?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I commend the Member for weaving that question in, but our baseline for fish stocks is really about conservation. It is a bit ridiculous to suggest that I would know how many fish there are in each lake, and I do not, for one moment, think that the Member is suggesting that.

Mr Lynch: He is.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Maybe he is. Perhaps I will go and count them myself. *[Laughter.]* I take on board what the Member said, and I acknowledge his concerns about fracking.

Mr Speaker: Order. That ends Question Time. I ask the House to take its ease as we move into the next item of business.

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

Private Members' Business

Victims and Survivors

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly recognises the significant number of victims and survivors who need appropriate help and support to enable them to deal with the legacy of the past; further recognises the important work of the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund in addressing the specific needs of victims and survivors; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to consider the implications of the European Parliament's proposed legal definition of a victim contained in its draft directive to establish minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime. — [Mr Nesbitt.]

Mr Kinahan: I am very pleased that we are debating this motion. I start by reiterating what my party leader said earlier: this is a critical time for all victims. That is really what we should concentrate on today.

None of us wants to see victims, and we never want to see it happen again. Yet, as we look in our newspapers, we see that groups are still stirring and trying to fight their causes. Those groups should put all their energy into helping their communities in other ways and should channel their energies elsewhere. We may not have a perfect system in the Assembly, but it is much better than what we had in the past 40 years. We need to do things better in the Assembly, and that will require leadership from us all. While certain parties are still pushing for a united Ireland or for other issues, our failings give fuel to their dreams and to those who feel that we are not achieving. However, they will not achieve their aims through us. There will always be trouble and, therefore, we will always have victims. So I reiterate that it comes back to leadership, and all of us need to be involved. We have the Good Friday Agreement and a good way forward. Let us make sure that every party is leading the way forward.

When you look at the motion, you think of the number of victims of the Troubles; we have heard about the 40,000 and many more victims. I draw Members' attention to a very good book that came out last week, which highlights, in shared memories, some of the awful stories and the bravery of members of our Wounded Police and Families Association. However, that is just one area; there are many other areas in which people still suffer. The loss to family life and communities and the torture and pain, whether emotional or physical, is appalling. At the same time, we need to remember to thank all the carers. Therefore, I go back to where I started: none of us wants to see it happen again, and it is up to us to reach out and to try to find a way forward.

The third part of the motion is driven by the regulations and guidelines of the EU. There is a new definition of and a new assessment for victims that we should be ready for.

So, as an Assembly, let us make sure that we get ready for it.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: I will give way.

Mr McDevitt: Does Mr Kinahan accept that the definition of a victim of crime that is offered in the draft EU directive is the definition of a victim of crime that is currently that used in the jurisdictions of the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom? The directive will not change anything for us; it simply seeks to harmonise that definition in the EU.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much. Yes, I realise that that is what the directive does. However, I would also like to point out that, while the EU discusses these matters, we have a chance, as a body, to lobby it and to make sure that the definition and the assessments that we want as a body are included, so that we can ensure that no more victims are created in the future.

We have our chance to influence the directive. The time that we have to do that is very short. We probably have only a year before the EU passes it. So I go back to my point: we need to use our MEPs, our four Assembly representatives and the power and influence of all our Departments. A look at what happened in Strangford lough and the EU fines that are threatened over the mapping in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) shows that we do not have a good history of engagement with Europe. The EU will adopt the directive, but we have a chance to change it and we will then have three years in which to get ready.

Let us make sure that we are ready and have a system in place that ensures that we can look after our victims properly and that we have the resources there. That is because we are not talking just about terrorism today; it is also victims of human trafficking, of organised crime, of violence in close relationships, of gender-based violence and much more. We must get ready, which is something that the Assembly has not been good at. So let us make sure that we focus, engage and get all the right systems in place, because that is what we should be doing today. We owe it to all victims.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. My party colleagues Mitchel McLaughlin and Francie Molloy stated the Sinn Féin position that there must be no hierarchy of victims and survivors in this society as it emerges from conflict; that we must not create any such hierarchy; and that Sinn Féin is opposed to the creation of a two-tier or multi-tiered system of victim status. I am absolutely for the provision of proper support systems, mechanisms and services for victims and survivors of the conflict, but I am not prepared to support the exclusion of the victims of British state violence or their relatives from any service or any definition.

Before I make my next point, I acknowledge the hurt and suffering on all sides of the conflict and the truism that the protagonists in the conflict came from all sides. I have no desire to cause offence to anyone, and I know that my remarks will be seen from different perspectives. I want to record that today — Tuesday 8 May — marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the deaths at Loughgall, County Armagh, of eight IRA volunteers and Anthony Hughes. This evening, there will be a commemoration for those men in Cappagh, County Tyrone, and a mass that I and many others plan to attend.

I wish to record the fact that the men's families and a wide section of the community where I come from were traumatised by the deaths of these nine men, who were loved and respected by their families and their community. To the families of those killed at Loughgall, I express Sinn Féin's support for their pursuit of truth and answers to their entirely legitimate questions around that shoot-to-kill operation by the British Army. I want support services for victims and survivors to be inclusive.

Again, I preface my final remarks with an appeal for unionist MLAs to accept that we approach this subject from different perspectives, experiences and community sensitivities. In the debate, unionist MLAs should not set out to dehumanise Irish republicans or nationalists in this conflict. Earlier, Maurice Morrow, I am sure quite correctly from his perspective, made certain remarks about a political prisoner called Gerry McGeough in Maghaberry prison. In my view, he is a supporter of the peace process and is a qualifying prisoner for immediate release under an agreement between the British and Irish Governments.

I also want to take issue with last week's inquest findings, which sought to justify the British Army killings, also near Loughgall in a separate and later incident, of Dessie Grew and Martin McCaughey. There was no such justification, and I record my support and Sinn Féin's support for those families.

Mr Eastwood: I am disappointed that the Ulster Unionist Party decided to table this motion. We need to understand that the proposed definition of a victim does not meet the needs of many of the victims of our dreadful conflict. In fact, the SDLP supports the European Parliament's attempt to harmonise across all member states the definition of victims of crime. It is absolutely clear that this definition was never meant to be applied to victims of conflict. From reading the transcript of the debate in the European Parliament, it is clear that that definition was never intended to be applied to issues of civil conflict here or anywhere else in the EU. It is unfortunate that the Ulster Unionist Party is attempting to narrow the definition of victims in our conflict. However, the motion highlights that we still have no comprehensive mechanism for dealing with the past.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much for giving way. In article 21, we are told that the text currently states that particular attention should be paid to the victims of human trafficking, terrorism, organised crime, violence and others. Therefore, it does intend that.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Eastwood: Thank you for the intervention, but your party has stated already that this proposed definition will apply only to victims who have been included as part of a so-called crime. We all think that a crime is a crime is a crime, and I agree with Mr Allister on that. Unfortunately, in the eyes of the law, that is not the case for many of the victims of our very troubled past. We as a party believe that real peace and reconciliation will be achieved only when we acknowledge and account for the past and address the suffering of all victims and survivors. Truth, healing, justice and dealing with our past will be stalled if those who know the most and did the worst over the years of the conflict fail to step forward in openness and honesty. This is the work that we must be engaged in and which we must be getting

on with to truly deal with the past and truly bring about reconciliation for all our people.

It was only last week that the new Victims and Survivors Service was opened. This organisation should be allowed to do its work and should not be hindered by narrowing the scope of its work. Many of the victims of our conflict would not be included if we used only this narrow definition. During our troubled history, many people were killed here who would not be included. I would ask the proposers —

Mr Allister: Can the Member give an example of someone who is killed as the product of the carrying out of a criminal act who would not be included as a victim of crime?

Mr Eastwood: I am coming to that. Do not worry.

I ask the proposers of the motion to consider the fact that many people who we know as victims were not, technically, killed as the result of a crime. I ask the proposers and Mr Allister this question: does the fact that no one has ever been charged with the murders of 14 people on Bloody Sunday in Derry in 1972 and that no criminal prosecution or investigation is yet under way mean that the Bloody Sunday families would not be included in this definition, after all that they went through and given that people across the world have now realised that that was a crime and was unlawful?

I hope that the motion was not tabled to create a hierarchy of victims, and I appeal to the Ulster Unionist Party to remove that part of the motion and support a wider definition of victims for all those who were killed in the conflict. Rather than coming in here to create political arguments over the past, we should all dedicate ourselves to finding an all-encompassing mechanism for dealing with the past and meeting the needs of all victims.

4.15 pm

Mr G Robinson: This debate gives the opportunity to acknowledge the ongoing and everyday struggle that victims and survivors endure on a daily basis, whether through physical or hidden injury. We must not forget that theirs will be lifelong struggles, and we must support the provision of mechanisms for every individual if and when they require help. There are numerous individuals with physical and hidden injuries in Northern Ireland, including former members of the security forces; the RUC, the UDR, the B-Specials, prison officers and members of Her Majesty's armed forces, and innocent civilians from both communities — and I stress that I said both communities — many of whom gave up their spare and family time to protect this country from total anarchy.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Earlier in my contribution, I paid tribute to all those who served in the security forces throughout the Troubles and continue to serve here in Northern Ireland. Does the Member agree that those who served in the Royal Ulster Constabulary and continue to serve in the police, and those who served in the UDR and the Royal Irish Regiment and continue to serve, particularly those from the Roman Catholic community, are among the bravest of the brave, because, on returning to their homes, they and their families did not have the protection of barracks or stations or those guarding them at night?

Mr G Robinson: I agree entirely with my colleague.

It is my firm belief that someone who perpetrates the acts that caused injuries to innocents must in no way be equated with the victims and survivors of terrorism. That would be the greatest insult to the innocents whose lives were taken and those who were left with injuries to deal with daily. For me, to compare the two would be the greatest insult imaginable. We must never compare the bomber or gunman with those whose life they took or destroyed. That should be clear and unable to be misinterpreted in legislation.

DUP MEP Diane Dodds put it eloquently:

"it is vitally important that no individual who was/is a member of a proscribed organisation as listed by the sovereign government of a member state at the time of the offence should be equated with the same status of their victims."

Diane also drew attention to the need to support those in Northern Ireland who are suffering due to the impact of terrorism on their mental health. Thankfully, that is increasingly being recognised. I commend my colleague for her stance and agree with her wholeheartedly.

I want to make it clear that I support the introduction of victims' legislation. I must, however, stress the need for services to be delivered by suitably qualified organisations and people. Money is scarce, so we must use it wisely and target it responsibly.

In conclusion, I pay tribute to the families who lost loved ones and to those who will forever carry the scars, visible or otherwise, of what we call the Troubles. They deserve and need our support, but let us make sure we give it in a way that does not equate perpetrator with victim.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I would like to say a few words on the motion, but I must first apologise for not being here to hear the earlier part of the debate. However, even from the little part of the debate that I have heard thus far, I think it is fair to say that we have come a little bit of the way towards dealing with these things on a more mature and rational basis.

From our party's point of view, and I think from the view of many others, there should be no hierarchy of victims as has been described. We have to acknowledge, as the motion suggests, that there are a significant number of victims and survivors who need appropriate help and support to enable them to deal with the legacy of the past.

I have no hesitation in saying that one of the singular failures of our process to date is that we have not managed to grapple with how to deal with the legacy of the conflict. However, to echo Danny Kinahan's earlier remarks, it is important that we acknowledge that we have come a long way: we have, to all intents and purposes, put the conflict behind us. Although there are still some difficulties, none of which I want to minimise, we have, by and large, laid the conflict to rest, and we are in a much better place than we were a number of years ago. Again, that is not to suggest for one second that we are complacent or that we do not recognise that we have not properly grappled with the effects of the past and our conflict and with how that has impacted on many of the people we represent; people who have been victims of the conflict from all sides and from all perspectives.

Certainly, as I said, our party's view is that there cannot and will not be any hierarchy of victims. Everyone who has lost a loved one or who has been injured is a victim of this conflict, no matter who the perpetrator may have been. We can rehearse all the elements from which the conflict came, the cause of the conflict, the working out of the conflict and all that. However, I was a bit more encouraged by the fact that I heard people address the issue this afternoon without descending into what might have been described some time ago as a vitriolic tit-for-tat response. We have not really seen that today, and that is very encouraging.

I hope that victims and survivors of the conflict will take some encouragement from the fact that, most importantly, we have, by and large, laid the conflict to rest and that we are still working to make sure that we make the peace process successful and beneficial for everyone. I hope that, in the time ahead, those people get the support that they need from us. As Danny Kinahan said earlier, they require the kind of collective leadership that will continue to move this society forward and that will enable us to make progress on the political front and the peace front and ensure that there will be no other victims. It is essential that we tailor support to the needs of victims and survivors as individuals or in groups. If they choose to work within groups or with friends and colleagues, that is their choice. We have to take them at face value; we cannot say that we have a victim-centred approach if we do not take heed of what victims say, whatever perspective they present themselves from.

I was very pleased to hear the more positive contributions today. Again, I stress that, as far as we are concerned, it is perhaps useful and wise to look at other examples, whether from the European Parliament or in a European directive. We should look at those examples, if they are enacted, to see if they are applicable to here. If they are, let us benefit from that. If they are not, let us ensure that the current definition of victim is at least retained, if not built upon, in the time ahead.

On behalf of the party, I want to re-emphasise a number of points. First, there cannot be any hierarchy of victims, because, at the end of the day, there are people who are suffering as a result of our conflict and they are not going to ask, "Who caused my conflict?" or "Who caused my pain to be greater than somebody else's?" People who have suffered know that their pain is the same as everybody else's. In many cases, many victims have shown tremendous courage and leadership by enunciating that type of ethos over the years. They have shown leadership themselves. In the quest to lay the legacy of the past to rest, we have to make sure that, as we move into the future, we provide a collective and mature leadership and that we give our support to victims —

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

Mr A Maskey: — as they need it in the time ahead.

Ms M Anderson (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Go raibh míle maith agat. I thank all the Members who took part in the debate, in particular for the way that they contributed; they did so in a very sensitive and caring manner.

Providing appropriate help and support for victims and survivors remains, without doubt, a key priority for the Assembly and the Executive. As the lead Department in providing support for victims and survivors, the Office of the

First Minister and deputy First Minister has been working to raise awareness of and co-ordinate activity on issues affecting victims of the conflict across Departments and throughout the North of Ireland in general.

As Mike Nesbitt said when he opened the debate, the Victims and Survivors Order 2006 gave the Victims' Commission a statutory duty to establish a forum. The victims' commissioners have recently appointed 25 individuals, and neither the First Minister nor the deputy First Minister made recommendations or had an approval role in their appointment.

There was a registration meeting of the forum, as we said during Question Time, on 26 April. That will be followed by a two-day induction meeting, with the first formal sitting on 21 June. I want to be clear on an issue raised during the debate: the two junior Ministers are more than willing to meet with forum members.

A new Victims and Survivors Service has been established and, as Colum Eastwood said, should be allowed to do its work. The service is a new arm's-length body of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. It opened its doors on 2 April and was officially launched by Jonathan Bell and me on 2 May.

Mike Nesbitt, Francie Molloy, Chris Lyttle and others want the new service to reach out to a group of people described as "the hidden victims." We assure them that there is a stream of work being undertaken to increase the awareness of the services available. Since the new service opened its doors, it has had almost 200 callers, many of whom had not approached existing providers.

The service has been tasked with the co-ordination of the delivery of services to meet the needs of individual victims and survivors of the conflict, as defined by the Victims and Survivors Order 2006, which Alex Maskey just referred to. As Peter Weir said, efforts were made to change the definition, but they did not get the support required. It is my personal view that the current definition, which was arrived at after much consideration, is fit for purpose. As Barry McElduff and Colum Eastwood said, it is wrong to attempt to create a hierarchy of victims.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Ms M Anderson: No, I would prefer not to.

Mr Allister: I wonder why.

Ms M Anderson: I would prefer the debate to be conducted in a very serious and caring manner — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms M Anderson: — as has been the case thus far.

William Humphrey asked whether the service will have enough funding. During 2012, it is planned that the Victims and Survivors Service will take responsibility for the administration of all the current funding that is provided to groups that work with victims and survivors through the Community Relations Council's victims unit and to individuals through the memorial fund. That will continue and build on the work carried out by those organisations.

The service is committed to improving the standard of services that are provided to victims and survivors. It will do that by making sure that all service providers and services meet the minimum practice standards, as published by the Commission for Victims and Survivors. The service now offers individual assessments of the needs of victims and survivors in relation to their physical and mental health and well-being, personal development, social support and advocacy. Those assessments have already begun. When needs have been assessed, the service will create an individual package to best fit the needs of the individual.

For the sake of Members here and the board members of the memorial fund, I want to be clear that junior Ministers are more than willing to meet representatives of the memorial fund. Regular meetings between representatives of the memorial fund and officials from our office have taken place. In fact, officials met representatives from the memorial fund to discuss the transfer of function plans three times last week.

Many Members mentioned the importance of the memorial fund and how it has addressed the specific needs of victims and survivors by providing them with help and support in a practical and meaningful way through the provision of direct financial assistance based on assessed individual needs. Over the past two years, £7.3 million of funding has been channelled through the fund, providing direct financial assistance to individual victims and survivors, including those suffering from psychological injury. A further £3.4 million has been awarded for this financial year.

That will provide support for victims and survivors across a wide range of schemes, including financial assistance, chronic pain management, care for carers and disability support.

4.30 pm

The memorial fund has delivered a vital lifeline for victims, providing them with sensitive and critically important support in their own communities. Further to the help and support that the memorial fund has provided, OFMDFM has provided funding for victims' groups through the Community Relations Council, and we acknowledge the work done.

Over the past two years, the Department has provided in the region of £13.7 million of victims' funds through the Community Relations Council's strategic support fund and development grants scheme. A further £7.3 million has been allocated for this financial year. That funding allows groups to provide invaluable services to victims and survivors. It takes cognisance of the needs of victims as identified by the commissioners' comprehensive needs assessment: health and well-being; social support; individual financial need; truth, justice and acknowledgement; welfare support; trans-generational; and personal and professional development.

The victims' programmes administered by the memorial fund and the Community Relations Council will be subsumed into the new service over the coming year. It is our intention that those groups and individuals in receipt of funding will not be adversely affected by the changes or see a difference in the service provided.

With regards to the European Parliament's proposed legal definition of a victim, the Department is aware of the draft directive referred to in the motion. The directive refers principally to the rights of victims in the legal process and

therefore is not directly comparable with the objectives of the victims' service in the North of Ireland, which relate specifically to the everyday psychological and social needs of victims of the conflict here.

If it were to apply, the definition proposed by the directive might severely restrict those who may be able to avail themselves of the current services, as the directive relates to the rights of all victims, primarily in the context of criminal proceedings, as opposed to the Department's objective, which is the provision of services and support to victims and survivors of the conflict in the North on assessed needs. The victims and survivors of the conflict may have a view on that, and it is, of course, essential, as Chris Lyttle said, that their views are heard and taken into account.

With regards to the interpretation of what constitutes a family member, the draft directive interpretation is much wider and therefore could, perhaps, present a challenge. Again, because the directive relates to the rights of all victims, that widens the focus that we currently have on the provision of services and support to victims and survivors of the conflict here. However, Ministers will, of course, without doubt, take due consideration of any relevant section should the directive come into force, and we will liaise with our colleagues in the Department of Justice if we need to do so.

It is sad but true that we cannot change what happened here during the conflict, but through a process of leadership, as Danny Kinahan said, through a process of reconciliation and healing, we can work together, I believe, to build a better future for all.

Mr Elliott: I thank all those who contributed to the debate. Clearly, I was listening to party leader Mike Nesbitt who, opening the debate, highlighted the issues around the motion and its three sections. I was moved when he referenced Hugh Rowan, who highlighted clearly a number of the deficiencies and failures of the current process, maybe without saying it in those terms.

Mr Nesbitt and other Members paid tribute to the staff and board members of the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, a group that has carried out work but often gone unnoticed as victims in society. Although I appreciate that you cannot force people to accept help, there are people who are not involved in any group or organisation but who need help.

I noted and appreciate Mr Humphrey's support for the change in the definition of a victim. Lord Morrow continued in that vein and also highlighted the differences in the SDLP position. He was rightly concerned that the SDLP cannot continue to sit on the fence. I was more than surprised at Mr McDevitt's contribution, which I would term as an anti-European Union speech. I am surprised at what appears to be Mr McDevitt's and Mr Eastwood's opposition to people being defined as victims because they have been subject to a criminal offence. I cannot for the life of me understand why they would object to or not support such a definition.

Mr Eastwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: I am quite happy to give way.

Mr Eastwood: Maybe the Member missed what we said. Will he accept that we said that the SDLP completely supports the European Parliament's attempt to harmonise the definition of victims of crime across member states? That is

the reason for the debate and the proposed draft directive. However, what we also said was that that does not imply that it should be used in a post-conflict situation such as ours or any other across the European Union. It would be a bit disingenuous for the Member to say that we did not say that.

Mr Elliott: What I am hearing is that it is right for some but not others. You cannot pick and choose. You are either a victim of a crime or you are not. I have to say that Mr Eastwood has failed to identify that. I heard —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: OK.

Mr Allister: The Member puts his finger on a critical point. We have heard much talk today about a so-called hierarchy of victims. Does the Member agree that there are indisputably two categories? There are victims, and there are victim makers. It is because the perverse legislation that we have equates the two that we have the absurdity of the present situation and the perversion that the person who responds to this debate on behalf of the Government is herself a victim maker and a convicted terrorist.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for that. I was going to come on to at least some of those points. Mr Maskey came in at the end of the debate and said that we had come a long way in dealing with these issues and laid the conflict to rest. It was quite obvious that Mr Maskey had missed quite a large part of the debate, because Mr Molloy, who spoke earlier, changed its entire tone. All that Mr Molloy could do — Mr McElduff was not far behind him — was criticise me, the British establishment and the British security forces. What way was that to take the debate forward? We were trying to have a genuine debate on victims issues in Northern Ireland, but those Members on that side of the House lowered the entire tone. Mind you, I suppose that I would not expect anything better from some of those Members.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: Very briefly.

Mrs D Kelly: First, I am sure that the Member will accept that the SDLP was never a victim maker of any description. Secondly, when defining people as victims, do you accept that there were also victims of state violence, including the families in Ballymurphy?

Mr Elliott: I accept that the SDLP, as far as I am aware, has not been a victim maker. Members talked about not allowing a two-tiered system or a hierarchy of victims. There is a hierarchy of victims already. If I were a real innocent victim, I would not think it fair for the people who caused me to be a victim to be classified in the same vein as me.

I would be very surprised if anybody here, especially from the SDLP Benches, would actually accept that, because I do not. That is why there is already a two-tier system.

Mr Eastwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: I am sorry, Mr Eastwood, I will not give way any more. That is why we have to get a system that is fair and equal. That is what the victims of this society are calling out for, and we do not have it at present. If Sinn Féin Members have moved on as far as they often tell us they have moved

on, I would be really surprised if they do not recognise the hurt that there is in all communities.

It was almost implied that we are all perpetrators to some degree, but I do not accept that. There may have been perpetrators from all sides, but only some people were the actual perpetrators. The offenders who went out and murdered and maimed people of this society, whether they were members of the security forces or the general public, should not be allowed to be classified in the same vein as the people whom they made the victims.

I agree with Mr Allister. I have to say that it makes me very uncomfortable that the junior Minister who was responding on behalf of the Department today was allowed to make what I suggest was almost a Sinn Féin rant as opposed to a ministerial response. That is very concerning to me and I am sure to many others in this House.

Mr A Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: I will give way very briefly.

Mr A Maskey: I ask this question genuinely. You opened your remarks by saying that you wanted to keep the debate on a level playing field and at the most mature level. You criticised Francie Molloy and Barry McElduff, and that is fine. That is your choice to do that. I am not saying that you are a victim maker. I did not level that allegation against anybody in this Chamber today, or indeed, against anybody. However, does the Member not understand that he comes from a UDR background, and it may be difficult for some people to think that they are being lectured by someone who was a member of an organisation that was detested by a lot of people in one section of our community? I ask you to reflect on that. I do not even want you to respond to it because I have not accused you of anything.

I liked what I heard from Danny Kinahan, who talked about showing leadership to keep moving this process forward. If that was your plan, I advise you and urge you to stick to it.

Mr Elliott: Mr Maskey should reflect on his own history and on the history of those in his party before he starts lecturing me and others. Clearly, he has not moved on to witness who the real victims are. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. All remarks should be made through the Chair, please.

Mr Elliott: Mr Maskey and some of his party colleagues have not moved on to recognise that, if there are real innocent victims in this society, they should be recognised as such and not those perpetrators —

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he accept that, in general terms, whatever oversight or overreaction may have occurred in a tiny minority of occasions in terms of security forces personnel cannot be compared to deliberate, pre-planned, pre-organised intent to murder on the part of terrorists? The two things are not equal.

Mr Elliott: There is recognition of that. If there is not open recognition from all sides, I am sure that there is private recognition. When you have witnessed the number of people who were murdered by paramilitaries and terrorists in this society, it speaks volumes. It says more than I can ever say in this debate today, and it says more than anybody else in this House can say. You need to listen to the real victims of

this society. You need to listen to the people who have had their loved ones murdered in cold-blooded circumstances. Even to this day, if you visit the homes of some of those people —

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

Mr Elliott: — you hear how they brought up young families under those circumstances because of the cruel, callous murderers and terrorists in this society.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the significant number of victims and survivors who need appropriate help and support to enable them to deal with the legacy of the past; further recognises the important work of the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund in addressing the specific needs of victims and survivors; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to consider the implications of the European Parliament's proposed legal definition of a victim contained in its draft directive to establish minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime.

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

4.45 pm

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Lisnevin Prison Service Site, Millisle

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes, the Minister will have 10 minutes to respond and all other Members who wish to speak will have approximately eight minutes.

Mr Easton: I bring forward this Adjournment debate because of deep concerns from residents living in Millisle. For many months, they have been hearing alarming rumours about the future of Lisnevin.

I suppose I should start with a brief history of the Lisnevin site. It was a family summer home, turned young offenders' home, and it is now the Lisnevin training school, a prison officers' training centre. Lisnevin school was an industrial school and was sometimes called Millisle borstal after it moved to its location in 1931. It closed as a detention centre on 7 October 2003.

On a humorous note, it is apparently haunted by ghosts, which still walk the halls. The story is that a butler threw a maid off the rocks, just off the shore at the borstal, after killing her and dragging her through an underground tunnel that has now been blocked. I do not know if that is true, by the way, but that is the story.

Rumours started to surface about the future of Lisnevin when I was approached in August last year by the Millisle Community Association, which had been given information that works were under way on the site. They had been informed that there were plans afoot to put category C prisoners on the site. As a result, I decided to enquire of the Justice Minister what was going on. I did so by way of Assembly questions. I asked several questions and wrote several letters. One of the questions related to Woburn House on the site. The Minister replied that there were no plans to house prisoners at the Woburn House/Lisnevin site in Millisle. I received a letter from the Minister on 24 September, and he confirmed that there were no current plans to use the complex to detain dissident republican prisoners or to house prisoners or youth offenders at any of the buildings on the site. A further letter on 1 February stated that there were no current plans to house women prisoners in the Lisnevin site.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Will the Member give way?

Mr Easton: No, the Member will not give way.

Those replies were of some comfort at the time. However, rumours persisted, and I was very surprised at the response to a question that I submitted for written answer on the subject of Lisnevin shortly after receiving that letter from

the Minister. He said that the prison population had risen sharply in recent times and that an estate strategy had been prepared to address the population growth and the associated overcrowding issue. As part of the strategy, he said that consideration was being given to a number of sites that may offer the potential to provide additional continuing accommodation and that those sites included Millisle.

We can see what happened with regard to Lisnevin in the space of several days. We thought we had clear answers on the issue of housing prisoners on the Lisnevin site in Millisle, but that changed, and we were told that plans were being considered to house prisoners of some description on the Lisnevin site. I feel very disappointed with the Minister. He gave so many reassurances, and then, within a short space of time, those changed.

To make matters worse, one newspaper alarmed many residents in Millisle when it mentioned the prison review. It stated that a private US firm was being lined up to run a new women's jail in Millisle and that 60 women were to be transferred from Hydebank. It also said that prison chiefs and the prison review team were looking at moving 380 low category inmates from Magilligan to other parts of the Millisle site. You can see why residents of Millisle were becoming more and more concerned as that went on.

Today, Minister, you have a chance to explain why there have been conflicting answers from you and the Department and explain what your Department's plans are for the Lisnevin site. If those plans are to house prisoners on the site, I assure you that that will be met with stiff opposition by me and the residents of Millisle.

The residents of Millisle had to endure years of concern when the site was used as a young offenders' home and there were numerous escapes and escape attempts. If there are to be changes on the site, will the Minister give a guarantee that there will be a public consultation and that he will listen to the views of the residents of Millisle? This, Minister, is your chance to put the rumours to rest. I hope that you will step up to the mark and put an end to these conflicting reports, which emanated partly from your office.

Mr Cree: Sorry, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I was at a meeting of the Commissioners, so I was sort of short-changed.

This matter has been going on for a long time. In fact, I was looking back, and one-time Member of Parliament James Kilfedder raised the issue in 1982, and Des Browne raised the issue of the future of the Lisnevin site in 2002. It is nothing new in that sense, and stopgap measures have been put in place in the meantime. However, there is considerable disquiet now because of what may happen at the site. As the previous Member who spoke said, there have been mixed messages. Certainly, from the raft of questions that was submitted and the Minister's answers, it looks as if something is planned, but it is not quite clear what. Of course, the estate strategy is not helpful in that regard. Therefore, it is a good opportunity for the Minister to clear up the situation if possible. If not, he should tell us exactly what the options may be at this point.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for securing the debate. This is an opportunity to get clarity. Obviously, as has been indicated, concerns have been floating about Millisle for some time with regard to rumours, much of which I suspect

are wild speculation. However, in the absence of facts, rumours tend to take root. For those who have a long memory of the former juvenile detention centre in Millisle, also known as the borstal, there are bad memories. From time to time, the sirens sounded when somebody had absconded from the site. Consequently, the perception or the fear of what may go there is very pertinent and, therefore, people are looking for reassurance.

When the estate strategy was published, it made reference to the training side. As soon as Desertcreat comes on stream, the intention is that the training side will be sold off. However, there was silence around the issue in the report. Indeed, the one pertinent paragraph was the issue of a contingency facility for a prison overflow. When officials attending the Committee were pressed, they gave us some examples: if there was a fire in one of the buildings of an existing prison or, which is slightly more worrying as it is the most likely occurrence, if there was a spike in the prison population — there have been variations of up to 9% in the prison population at times — and there was a need for an overflow, the lowest-category offenders could go to some contingency institution. When pressed, their indication was that this was something that would be carried forward and that someone would be appointed in July with the intention of finding an appropriate location, probably by the end of this year or early next year.

When pressed specifically on Lisnevin, officials indicated that Lisnevin and Massereene had been the two particular facilities that had already been looked at. As part of that, they used the phrase that they were "unpromising" or that they were not ones that were seen to be particularly fit for purpose. Although that does at least send out a signal that Lisnevin is unlikely to be the choice for a contingency location, the fact that it has not been formally ruled out creates and helps to fuel the concern of the local community. The fact that it will take time for the Department to produce a final report on the location means that residents have uncertainty and worry hanging over their heads.

I join the other Members who have spoken so far in appealing to the Minister. Millisle's location is slightly remote, as it is very close to the most easterly point in Northern Ireland. An awful lot of work would need to be done to the facilities to make them fit for purpose. Indeed, I wonder whether part of the facility might be sold off to another public sector body or to the private sector. I do not know how that could sit side by side with some sort of refurbished contingency prison. It strikes me that Lisnevin is completely the wrong place for this. I appeal to the Minister to kill off the speculation by giving an assurance today that Lisnevin will not be put to such use and that other locations will be sought instead. Give people that peace of mind.

Mr A Maginness: It is not my intention to speak at length, but Mr Easton raised a number of pertinent questions about the future of Lisnevin. He quite properly raised local people's concerns and worries. So this is a right and proper subject for an Adjournment debate. It would be very easy for us to say that people are overreacting and that there is too much speculation, etc. However, people need reassurance. So it is right and proper that the debate provides the Department and the Minister with an opportunity to give that reassurance to local people.

Mr Weir referred to the Justice Committee's consideration of the outline estate strategy. As far as this aspect of the prison estate strategy is concerned, there does seem to be a gap. There seems to be an intention to divest the estate of some part of the complex and not to bring prisoners to it. However, that was immediately contradicted by the inability to give an absolute reassurance, because there could be a contingency situation that requires prisoners to be brought there. I think that that is very unfortunate and that it is necessary for people to be given a clear view of what will happen. If prisoners are to be brought there, people need to be told that that will happen and which category of prisoners will be held there, be it women prisoners, younger prisoners or whatever. That ought to be done, and that is, I think, the purpose of this Adjournment debate, which Mr Easton secured. It appears that the Department is playing it both ways, and I would like that to be resolved. That is very important. I will leave it there and look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

Mr Ford: Given that the outline estate strategy is just about to go out for consultation, I cannot believe that Members expect me to give a hard and fast answer on the future of any part of the prison estate. There is not much point in having a consultation if a Minister prejudices it. In the absence of any firm position, we are clearly in danger of debating something that may never happen. Such a position is simply not possible when the estate strategy is about to be consulted on.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ford: I will.

5.00 pm

Mr A Maginness: I do understand what the Minister is saying — that it is a draft strategy that is going out to consultation, and so forth — but even within a draft strategy, there should be very strong indications of what the Department and Minister feel about the particular strategy. So, it is not unreasonable and unfair for people in Millisle to ask what the thinking of the Department is — it may not be its definitive thinking — in relation to that complex.

Mr Ford: In response to Mr Maginness's point, I say that he and others who were present at the Justice Committee's consideration of the outline strategy — indeed, anybody who reads the Hansard report of it — will see the clear line of thinking that was put forward by officials, not as a firm position but as an indication of thinking.

The reality is that, since last September, I have had 18 items of formal business correspondence or Assembly questions relating to the future use of the Millisle site. I had three letters from Peter Robinson MLA; an Assembly question for written answer from Peter Weir; a letter from Jim Shannon MP; a letter from Lady Sylvia Hermon MP; a letter from a member of the public; and 11 items from Alex Easton, comprising five letters, one request for a meeting — he has not responded to an invitation to meet me — four Assembly questions for written answer and one Assembly question for oral answer.

On every occasion, the answer has been given that there are no current plans for the Millisle site. Although it is clear that there is an issue of the estate strategy needing to be open at this stage, the indication has been that there are

no current plans. I really think that it would be better if the House judged me by the words that I give and the words that senior officials of the Department give, rather than writings in the 'Sunday World'. If there are plans, they will be subject to the usual full consultation, and Members of the House, residents of Millisle and of every part of Northern Ireland will have their opportunity. Until then, there is nothing I can say.

Adjourned at 5.02 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 14 May 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr B McCrea: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Regarding the Committee for Employment and Learning's report to the Assembly that is to be debated tomorrow, I have been asked by the Committee to draw to your attention Standing Order 46(7). Standing Orders are silent on the matter of an Executive response to a report. It has been drawn to my attention that there will perhaps be no ministerial response to the debate. The Committee feels that that is disappointing, given the timescale and importance of the issue. I wonder whether, Mr Speaker, on behalf of the Committee, you can investigate the matter and find out what might be done, because it is a matter of general public interest.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. The Member will know that that is a matter for the Executive and the individual Minister. In defence of Ministers and the Executive, I will say that they do come to the House whenever they can, especially for important business. I always encourage Ministers to come to the House and to give it its rightful place, and I have to say that Ministers do that. On the issue that you raise, I have some sympathy. However, address it with the Executive and the individual Minister. The Member may need to follow that road. At the end of the day, it is really up to the Executive as to whether and which Ministers come to the House.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Institutional Format

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): In compliance with section 52C(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the seventh North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) institutional meeting, which was held in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham in Dublin on Friday 27 April 2012.

The First Minister, Peter Robinson, and I represented the Executive at the meeting. The Irish Government were represented by Eamon Gilmore, Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, who chaired the meeting. During the meeting, we exchanged views on the current economic situation and budgetary challenges, and discussed opportunities to build on existing co-operation, particularly on the economy, service delivery and tourism. We noted opportunities to maximise tourism gains during 2012 and 2013, including 2012 Our Time, Our Place, Derry/Londonderry UK City of Culture and "The Gathering" of 2013. We launched the 2011 NSMC annual report, which summarises work taken forward across all the NSMC areas for co-operation in 2011.

We discussed the challenges and opportunities associated with the Irish EU presidency in 2013 and reaffirmed our commitment to securing a further round of PEACE and INTERREG funding, and stated that that is a priority for us. The Council welcomed the collaboration that has taken place to maximise the drawdown of EU funding, particularly for research and development, and agreed that it was important that that collaboration continued.

The Council welcomed progress on a range of initiatives, delivered and planned, which aim to deliver economic and social benefits in the north-west, including the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government commitment to develop the One Plan for Derry/Londonderry; collaborative work between Derry City Council and Donegal County Council to develop synergies between the One Plan and An Stráteis, the Donegal county development plan; construction of the new £70 million radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin Area Hospital, planned to commence in 2013 and be operational by 2016; commitment to the upgrade of two sections of the A5, with the Executive funding £330 million, including the Irish Government's commitment of £50 million; commitment, to date, of over €120 million from EU programmes in the north-west, including flagship projects such as the €30 million Project Kelvin and the €16 million Peace Bridge;

and commitment to maximise the economic tourism potential of the City of Culture and “The Gathering” of 2013. The Executive have committed £12.6 million, subject to completion and approval of appropriate business cases, to support the delivery of the City of Culture programme, including the hosting of the Turner Prize, the Stirling Prize and the All-Ireland Fleadh; and the north-west has been allocated £18.5 million under axis 3 of the Northern Ireland rural development programme.

The Council agreed to review progress on the north-west gateway initiative at the next NSMC institutional meeting. We discussed matters relating to the North/South bodies, including progress on corporate and business plans, implementation of cumulative efficiency savings and the ongoing review of the bodies’ financial memoranda. The Council noted that Liam Nellis, the chief executive of InterTradeIreland, is due to retire and thanked him for his contribution to the work of InterTradeIreland.

We discussed progress on consideration at NSMC meetings of a number of proposals concerning the North/South bodies. We look forward to further discussion of that and of the other elements of the St Andrews Agreement review at the June 2012 NSMC plenary meeting. The Council agreed that the next NSMC institutional meeting will be held in Armagh in October.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. What steps have been taken to increase efficiency and good financial planning with regard to North/South bodies?

Mr M McGuinness: That is always under review. We are all very conscious of the very stringent economic circumstances that affect the Government in Dublin and ourselves. The Ministers of Finance, North and South, have regular contact with each other and meet on a consistent basis. They continually review, through officials, the work of the North/South bodies. So we are very, very conscious of the need to ensure that public funds are being used wisely and in a way that brings mutual benefit to our institutions, North and South. This is something that is kept under ongoing review. We are satisfied that, thus far, a very important overview of the situation has been undertaken by the Finance Departments, North and South.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a thabhairt don Leas-Chéad Aire as na freagraí go dtí seo. I thank the deputy First Minister for his answers thus far, and for the statement that he has made. Will he elaborate further on co-operation in tourism across the island? It is good to see the Peace Bridge and the various projects. A project that I would love to see completed is the bridge at Narrow Water at Warrenpoint. I know that there is wide cross-party support for it amongst all the MLAs in the constituency, and I welcome that. Will you update us on the tourism co-operation across the island that you discussed?

Mr M McGuinness: At the institutional meeting, we outlined the great confidence that we have in our tourist sector, which has been revitalised with new attractions and major events coming to the North. We highlighted the success to date of the Titanic building, which has exceeded all expectations; it is on course to receive 500,000 visitors this year. We spoke about the importance of large-scale tourism initiatives, such as the City of Culture and “The Gathering”,

and the huge potential that they have for our economies. We agreed that ensuring access to those events was important; for example, through direct flights to the island. There is recognition in Dublin of the important tourist project that we have here, not just this year but next year. Of course, we look forward with great excitement to the Irish Open, which will be on the north coast in the course of the next couple of weeks. I think that everybody recognises that that, coupled with the huge success of our golfers, North and South, in international events all over the world, brings great credit to us and pitches us as a major tourist attraction on the world stage.

Infrastructure is hugely important for tourism. Quite a number of parties, as well as Louth County Council and Newry and Mourne District Council, have been lobbying on the issue of the proposed new bridge that has been in discussion in that part of the world over the past while. I am open to correction, but I think that our Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Arlene Foster, recently met elected representatives from the local community. It is something that is consistently being kept under review. Obviously, in taking that forward, there is still a body of work to be done, such as economic appraisals. Given that there was support from the EU for the new Peace Bridge in Derry, we will look very much to Europe to recognise the potential of the construction of such a bridge and how it would contribute to our tourist product and the important building of community relationships, North and South.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for his report. I note, at point 6, the commitment to secure a further round of Peace funding. The deputy First Minister will be aware that, under previous Peace rounds, many millions were allocated to ex-prisoners and their families. Does he take a view on whether a time comes when it is no longer healthy for somebody to define themselves primarily as an ex-prisoner? As we approach the twentieth anniversary of the ceasefires, might Peace IV be a mechanism to address that issue?

Mr M McGuinness: At the meeting, the Tánaiste outlined the challenges and opportunities that are associated with the Irish Government’s presidency of the EU in 2013. During those discussions, we recognised that there is an issue in relation to the whole EU Peace and INTERREG funding. It is very important that we recognise that Europe thinks that it is hugely important that we continue to encourage people who were previously participants in the conflict to continue to contribute to the development of the peace process. There is always the danger that complacency can set in and that people can take for granted the progress that has been made. That would be a huge mistake.

We all have to recognise, as we move further into the peace process, that the next big project for all of us — I am sure that Europe is focused on it — is the whole process of reconciliation. Looking at the work that has been done by ex-prisoner groups, on the republican and loyalist sides, it is quite clear that a huge number of people who were previously in conflict with one another are now very much at one in supporting the peace process. That is hugely important. We have to continue to evolve the situation in a way that sees a very proactive programme of reconciliation taking place. Of course, the big question is about the role that former protagonists in the conflict play in that. Those involved in peace-building and conflict resolution recognise that people playing a positive and constructive role in trying to

build a better future for everyone have a very important role to play. That role is continuously under review.

12.15 pm

Mr Eastwood: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement, and I welcome the focus on Derry. I also welcome the commitment in his statement to maximising the potential of “The Gathering”. Can we now assume that the Executive will engage fully with the Irish Government to continue to maximise that potential in 2013?

Mr M McGuinness: We are involved in very important tourism prospects for this year and next, and the Irish Government have organised “The Gathering”. I have gone on record over the past couple of weeks saying that I think it hugely important that we try, from the island of Ireland’s perspective, to gain as much mutual benefit from that as possible. If there is some opportunity to expand the whole concept of “The Gathering” in a way that would see the inclusion of the Ulster-Scots people of North America, for example, and indeed others in different parts of the world, whether it be Australia, Canada or elsewhere, I think that that is worthy of consideration.

We have to recognise that when the project was first mooted, there was, understandably, some concern among colleagues in the Assembly about how it would be used. I like to approach these things in a way that sees us gain mutual benefit, but to do so in a way that ensures everybody is comfortable. If we were to consider the prospect that the whole concept of “The Gathering” could be expanded in a way that is inclusive and that everybody would be comfortable with, which is something that I would have to discuss with ministerial colleagues and seek their support for, then I think that would certainly be worthy of consideration.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the deputy First Minister for his report this morning. I note, as Colum Eastwood mentioned, the commitment to the city of Derry as City of Culture. The deputy First Minister will no doubt be aware of the excellent contribution made by the chief executive of the Culture Company, who is none other than Shona McCarthy. Anything coming from a McCarthy will always have success, I have to say —

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

Mr McCarthy: The £70 million commitment to the hospital at Altnagelvin is very welcome, but there are other health aspects that could be dealt with on a cross-border basis. Will the First Minister and deputy First Minister give a commitment that that will be carried on where and if necessary and possible?

Mr M McGuinness: I am sure that the culture people will be very heartened by the reference to the role played by Shona McCarthy. Far be it from me to draw any relationship between the Member who just asked the question and the work that Shona is doing, but I think she is doing a fantastic job, and I think that the Culture Company, in conjunction with Derry City Council and Ilex and working in co-operation with all of our Departments, has a very exciting year ahead in 2013.

The opportunities are incredible; it really is a launch pad for the whole city. I took great heart from the way in which the whole city came together — all of the political representatives and the entire voluntary and community sector — to make the bid in the first place. Having secured

the bid, we recognise now that huge benefits can be brought to the city, to the east and west banks, and we will continue to show that type of leadership and move forward in a way that clearly shows that we are moving forward to better times, and, most important of all, providing important economic prospects for our young people.

There was controversy over the radiotherapy centre prior to the last Assembly election, but that controversy has been put to bed. The radiotherapy centre will be built. Construction will begin in 2013 and will be completed by 2016. That will bring huge benefits to people in County Tyrone, Donegal, Derry and other parts of the north-west.

Our Health Minister, Edwin Poots, has, on a number of occasions, recognised that mutual benefit can be gained. For example, the new South West Acute Hospital will be utilised for the benefit of people in south Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan as well as people in County Fermanagh and parts of County Tyrone. Our Health Minister is taking a very broad-minded view on how we deal with those matters.

Mrs Hale: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. Will he inform the House what discussions took place on the attitude of the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) to the assets that it holds in Northern Ireland?

Mr M McGuinness: That is a very important matter that has come up at every meeting that we have been involved in because it presents huge economic issues for us and, indeed, for those people who are directly involved in some of NAMA’s decisions.

During the meeting, we discussed how our interests could be better reflected in NAMA’s decision-making, and we welcomed the Irish Government’s appointment of Denis Rooney to NAMA’s advisory panel. We restated our concerns that, in some cases, the advisory panel is asked for advice after decisions are taken, and we again pressed for a full representative on the NAMA board. Eamon Gilmore advised us that that is still under consideration. We understand that Minister Noonan is to discuss that with our Finance Minister, Sammy Wilson. He also reaffirmed his Government’s previous commitment that there would not be a fire sale of our assets in NAMA, and we have raised that issue repeatedly over the past couple of years since NAMA came on board. Our big concern was that it could be a major destabilising factor in our economic recovery, and as we have placed the development of our economy at the front and centre of our Programme for Government, we have great concern about that issue, and that is why we have argued for a full member on the board. We will continue to press that case.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister’s statement. The north-west gateway initiative’s social and economic benefits to the north-west have been very clearly set out, but could the Minister expand on the benefits to the economy as a whole?

Mr M McGuinness: During the discussions, we noted the range of initiatives that have been delivered or planned that will bring benefits to the people of the north-west. We noted that officials from both jurisdictions met to discuss the north-west gateway initiative on 3 February 2012. There has been significant investment in the region in the areas of economic development; health; education and skills; tourism; connectivity; economic infrastructure; EU programmes; and

agriculture and rural development. At the meeting, we all agreed that it will be important to monitor developments in the north-west, and the Irish Government proposed that, to give that work greater political impetus, it might be helpful for relevant Ministers to meet. So, we agreed to have a discussion about that with our Ministers.

Mr Clarke: A few moments ago, my colleague asked about NAMA, and I will follow on the economic theme. Given the number of local banks that operate on a cross-border basis, has any representation been made to the Irish Government to encourage them to lend more money, particularly in Northern Ireland?

Mr M McGuinness: That issue has come up repeatedly in recent times. During discussions at the meeting, we expressed our concerns about the issue of bank lending, and the Irish Government share those concerns. We said that there is a strong perception that the banks are not lending, particularly to our small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and through mortgages, and that we had met the banks about that. The First Minister and I have had all sorts of meetings with the banks over the past while, and the Irish Government have also had meetings with the banks.

As part of the conditions for recapitalising the banks, the Irish Government set lending targets, and we were advised that it is difficult to determine how much new lending there has been but that the Irish Government are looking very closely at that. We asked whether the North was included in the lending targets, and the Tánaiste advised that it was included in the overall target but did not have a specific target. We said that the Executive have stepped in to try to make up some of the shortfall caused by the banks not lending, and there was general agreement that it is difficult to get to the bottom of the issue. We will have to persevere with that.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement and welcome the great support that seems to be going to the north-west and Londonderry. Were any discussions held with the Irish Government and the tourist board there about plans to include unionists worldwide? You have hinted at it, but it is not just about Ulster Scots. There is a bigger body to consider, including the Church of Ireland. What plans are being made for that?

Mr M McGuinness: I am very favourably disposed to the point that you make. Consistently, people in the Irish Government and other agencies have recognised the importance of becoming increasingly involved in more inclusive approaches, and it will be to the detriment of us all if we do not become involved in more inclusive approaches to all sorts of projects. With the opportunities that will be presented to us over the next couple of years, it is hugely important that we do everything in our power to include as many interest groups as possible, all of which are making powerful and positive contributions to the ongoing success of the work that we are involved in to progress the political process. How we can utilise that for economic advantage represents a challenge. However, from speaking to people in many of the groups that are interested in how we move forward, it is clear to me that many are searching for ways to play their part. It is up to the Government in Dublin and us to work together in ways that will make it possible for people to continue to make powerful, positive and constructive contributions.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. Will he give us an update on the A5?

Mr M McGuinness: We discussed the A5 upgrade at the meeting. It has been agreed that work will go ahead on two sections of the road: from New Buildings to Strabane, and from Omagh to Ballygawley. We understand that the work on the section from New Buildings to Strabane will begin in the autumn.

We welcome the fact that the Irish Government have signalled their ongoing commitment to the project and pressed them on a further financial commitment. We understand that the Irish Government remain committed to the completion of the co-funded project, which is of strategic importance to the north-west and the island as a whole. We also understand that when they are in a position to contribute financially, they will move on it. However, in advance of consideration of their next capital review framework, which is anticipated in 2015, they are not in a position to make funding commitments for the period post-2016.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fheagraí. I thank the deputy First Minister for his earlier comments.

Mr Clarke spoke about support for small and medium-sized enterprises, and I note that the deputy First Minister said that he shares many of the sector's concerns. Given the input by the Irish Government, specifically to the Allied Irish Bank and the Bank of Ireland, and, in some cases, their lack of support for developing businesses —

Mr Speaker: Do we detect a question?

Mr McGlone: — what specific, agreed course of action have they developed on that issue?

Mr M McGuinness: Everyone, North and South, is very conscious of the trials and tribulations that small and medium-sized enterprises are going through. We also recognise that a huge difficulty in that is the attitude of the banks. The banks have argued that they are lending, but that has been contested by the SME sector, by the Government in Dublin and certainly by us. We have to continue to keep the situation under review and keep the pressure on the banks so that, during this difficult economic time, we can see what more assistance can be given to SMEs.

We all know that there is considerable volatility in Europe at present. We have seen that with the presidential elections in France and the apparent instability in Greece. Indeed, according to this morning's news, there has been a failure to put together a Government in Greece. Inevitably, that will mean that a new general election there, possibly in the next couple of weeks.

12.30 pm

All of this creates considerable financial instability and impacts on the euro. The Dublin Government, we and other Governments throughout Europe are wondering where all of this will lead. In such circumstances, and given the volatility and uncertainty that there is, it is difficult to deal with these situations short of getting a political agreement on how we move forward. That is missing in Greece at the moment. There will also be negotiation between the new

president of France and the leader of the German Republic. The outcome of all of these decisions will, in all probability, affect economic progress for good or better in the course of the next weeks, months and years.

Mr Campbell: In his statement, the deputy First Minister referred several times to Londonderry's City of Culture status. Is he aware that there is concern among senior security forces and police personnel regarding possible threats by dissident republicans to events to be held under the auspices of Londonderry being the first UK City of Culture, and how emphatic can he be in his rejection of the failed policies of violence?

Mr M McGuinness: As someone who was very much part of the bid and who went to Liverpool with others to show all-party support; who, against all odds, achieved what is seen by the vast majority of its citizens as a huge success for the city — but, more importantly, as a huge opportunity for economic progress through the 2013 events that appear, at this early stage, to be exciting — I think that we all have to speak with one voice. From the time of the killing of the two soldiers at Massereene, through to the killing of Stephen Carroll and Ronan Kerr, our consistent approach in the Assembly has been that we have to speak with one voice in our utter and total condemnation of those who would try to drag us back to the past.

Unfortunately, tiny and unrepresentative groups are still out there, which believe that it is a good idea to try to destabilise not just the peace process but these institutions. What they have to come to terms with is that there is no prospect of destabilising the peace process, and there is no prospect whatsoever of breaking up the unity of these institutions. Some considerable time ago, the First Minister and I committed ourselves to the principle that, no matter what happens, we are going to remain firm, solid and united, and we are going to consistently express our unreserved condemnation of those who would try to disrupt the lives of our people and the prospects for economic progress in the future.

Whether you call it Derry or Londonderry, the city will have a wonderful opportunity in 2013. All of our people have come together in a great spirit of unity to use that opportunity to build a better future for themselves and their children. It ill-behaves anybody, whether they call themselves RAAD, Continuity IRA, the Real IRA or some other name, to try to disrupt what will be an exciting and important year for the city. That poses a huge responsibility on citizens who are among the tiny number of people who may give some sort of vocal or other support to such groups. They need to think again and to recognise the damage that they will do to themselves and to their children. They also need to recognise that the activities of these groups are totally and absolutely futile. They need to understand that we are moving forward, and in a way that will ultimately ensure that we are the people who will prevail.

So, there is a responsibility on citizens all over this island, North and South — wherever they see groups or organisations that are committed to the destruction of the peace process or the political institutions that the people of Ireland voted for in 1998 — to help the Garda and the PSNI in whatever way that they can, so that we can undermine the activities of those people. I am absolutely confident about the future, and I am very confident about our ability to

withstand some of the nonsense that is taking place at the moment at the behest of these groups.

Mr B McCrea: The deputy First Minister rightly drew attention to the investment in the Titanic project and in Derry/Londonderry. He also talked about enhancing “The Gathering” and such like to do with Ulster Scots. Will he agree that there are few bigger brands in the world than that of St Patrick and that St Patrick was, perhaps, the first Ulster Scot? When we are investing in other parts of the area, might we invest in St Patrick, particularly given the lessons that he might bring to us about reconciliation? Perhaps we should look to invest in Downpatrick as well.

Mr M McGuinness: I unreservedly agree with everything that the Member has said. I think that the St Patrick brand is important, and I know that, recently, difficulties have been experienced by the Saint Patrick Centre in Downpatrick. I passionately hope that those will be resolved. Recently, the First Minister and I attended a dinner in County Down, which was also attended by President Higgins, who came from Dublin. From looking around the room, it was quite clear to see that there was cross-party representation. Everyone recognised that St Patrick was someone who we could all see as a unifying figure for all of us. At the meeting, Ian Paisley Jnr made a very supportive statement on behalf of his father, Ian Paisley Snr. All of that shows that there are opportunities in County Down to be utilised and capitalised on for the benefit of not only County Down but the whole island of Ireland.

I am a huge supporter of the whole concept of St Patrick being a unifying force for all of us, and there are lessons to be learnt. For example, when we go to the United States of America or hear reports from Australia, Canada, India and many other parts of the world, we see the way in which St Patrick is celebrated and that we have a lot of catching up to do here. I am really encouraged by the recognition in the political process and the acceptance in the business community and among others that we could do more. I encourage everyone and I certainly would want to be part of a group of people who were trying to promote St Patrick as someone who is a unifying figure for all of us.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the statement to the House from the deputy First Minister, particularly his mention of the north-west gateway initiative and all of the elements that are involved in that. The Executive's Programme for Government contains a commitment to the development of the One Plan. Given that the main priority and economic driver for the One Plan is the regeneration and expansion of the Magee campus in Derry city, can the deputy First Minister outline to the House the commitment to the delivery of that economic driver?

Mr M McGuinness: We pointed out that we have included in the Programme for Government a commitment to deliver the One Plan, which will shape the regeneration of the city and the surrounding areas. We have also committed to other major initiatives in the Programme for Government, which will have a positive impact on the north-west region, for example the City of Culture and the upgrading of the Derry-Coleraine railway line.

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

The issue of Magee is important. The case has been made very powerfully by people in the city about how important

the continuing build-up of student numbers at Magee will be in assisting the regeneration of the city. Through the Department for Employment and Learning, Minister Stephen Farry is looking very closely at how the numbers involved in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects at Magee can be increased. Given the challenges that lie ahead and the real opportunities that are presented by the prospect of further investment from the United States of America, many of the companies that have been coming here recently in increasing numbers are placing a great emphasis on the need for young people who graduate with qualifications in STEM subjects. It represents a huge challenge, and Stephen Farry is addressing that challenge.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the statement from the deputy First Minister as well. He just made reference to the railway between Derry and Coleraine. Earlier, he made reference to the upgrade of the A5 road between Dublin and Derry. Will he give the House an undertaking to give the same priority to establishing the rail link between Derry and Dublin as an essential part of an all-island rail network that was fractured at the time of partition and needs to be put back together again?

Mr M McGuinness: Obviously, there have been all sorts of discussions in recent times, although I am not sure how intensive they have been. My colleague Pat Doherty, who represents West Tyrone, has been a huge supporter of such a project and has articulated his view, both publicly and in private, on the need for us to consider it. It would obviously be a major infrastructural project. Such things need to be dealt with in a way that recognises the opportunities that might be presented rather than in a political way. It would need considerable work in terms of an economic appraisal.

At this stage, it is a matter for the Minister for Regional Development, but there is no doubt in my mind that, if a comprehensive case could be made that the establishment of such a line would bring mutual benefit to the Southern Administration and our Administration, we would give it serious consideration. As always, a big challenge for us, in what are very difficult economic circumstances, is the cost associated with such a project. Of course, the whole investigation into the viability of the project is something that would also need to be tested and interrogated. It is certainly my view that, in principle, there would be no opposition to the rail link, but it would have to be viable and its costs would have to be able to be met.

Mr Allister: I revert to paragraph 10 of the statement, relating to the financial mismanagement of the North/South bodies. All the North/South bodies embarked on both their 2011 and 2012 expenditure without having their business plans approved, which the Comptroller and Auditor General has described as "poor governance" and "poor financial management". Given that and the fact that the language body's accounts are languishing years behind schedule, what real steps are being taken to tackle the rampant financial laxity afflicting the North/South bodies?

Mr M McGuinness: In 2011, the agreed budgets for North/South implementation bodies and Tourism Ireland were approximately £124 million in total. The Executive contributed approximately £34.4 million to the bodies in 2011. The bodies employ around 798 people. North/South implementation bodies and Tourism Ireland are jointly funded by the Executive and the Irish Government. Budgets for the bodies are determined annually, based on agreed business

plans that are approved by the sponsor Departments' Ministers and Finance Ministers from both jurisdictions and by the NSMC. Expenditure is monitored throughout the year, and each body, including Tourism Ireland Ltd, is required to submit annually a statement of accounts to the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland and the Irish Comptroller and Auditor General, who, in co-operation, examine and certify the accounts. Copies of audited accounts are laid in the Assembly and the Oireachtas.

Mr G Robinson: What benefits can be derived for Northern Ireland from the Irish Government holding the EU presidency in 2013?

Mr M McGuinness: Obviously, that is a very important situation. The main priorities for the Irish Government during that period will be the decisions that in all probability will be taken on the common agricultural policy (CAP) and the whole issue of structural funds. At the institutional meeting, the Tánaiste outlined the challenges and opportunities associated with their presidency of the EU in 2013. We noted that it is likely that several key decisions will be taken in relation to the CAP and future structural funds.

12.45 pm

It was recognised that it will be helpful for officials to keep in touch to discuss issues relating to the presidency. We have already put additional staffing resources into EU-related work, including secondees in both the UK and Irish permanent representation, and our Brussels office. I see their presidency in 2013 as a real opportunity for us to further develop our relationship with Europe and, hopefully, through their good offices, to try to influence key decisions that will be taken in relation to the CAP and the whole issue of structural funds during a very important year for Europe.

Health and Social Care: Shared Services

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the location of centres of expertise for shared corporate services in Health and Social Care (HSC).

On 7 December, I issued for public consultation a document entitled 'Consultation on the Model of Shared Services for Implementation in Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland'. The proposals that it contains were designed to increase value for money in the health and social care budget, with the money saved being taken out of administration and put into front line treatment and care. The proposals covered the location of a range of support services such as finance, payroll, recruitment and selection. The consultation ended on 29 February. Since then, I have been considering the responses received. I have held discussions with MLAs and trade union representatives, and my officials have briefed the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety. I come here today to announce my decisions.

I remain convinced that we need to do all that we can to reduce administration costs in Health and Social Care. The new financial and HR systems being implemented across HSC are broadly welcomed by trade unions and staff and will provide the up-to-date technology needed to increase our administrative efficiency.

While there is not the same consensus on the proposed model of shared corporate services, I am of the view that the model provided by centres of expertise is sound and that the reasoning behind the proposed locations of those centres remains valid. Accordingly, I have decided that the locations of the four shared service offices are as follows: the payroll function will be administered from College Street in Belfast; payment transactions will be undertaken from the Braid Valley Hospital site in Ballymena; income transactions will be located in Omagh at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital site; and Armagh will be the centre for recruitment and selection.

The new model, along with the implementation of the new systems, will support a consistently high standard of modern corporate services. More importantly, systems implementation and shared services together will generate savings of almost £120 million over a 10-year period, with annual savings rising to £17 million. It is vital for the welfare of patients that we free up that money, as it will be redeployed to the front line of Health and Social Care.

So far in this statement, I have confirmed the proposals published in the consultation document in December. However, there was a significant response to the consultation. Many views were expressed about the impact on staff who are currently based at sites that were not proposed as a centre of expertise. The staff most affected are concentrated in Downpatrick and Londonderry. Many are women in the lower pay bandings, often those who work part time and have family or other caring commitments. While each person has the right to follow their job to one of the new centres of expertise, distance may rule that option out for some staff. Equally, the low turnover rates currently experienced in HSC mean that staff cannot be guaranteed that a vacant post will become available with their existing employer in their current location.

I expect HSC staff to be treated with consideration and respect, in addition to the obligations under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Therefore, I have decided to make two key changes to the original proposals. First, I have decided, as part of the transition to the four shared service centres of expertise, to create a temporary accounts payable satellite office of 25 to 30 staff in Downpatrick and a temporary recruitment and selection satellite office with around 15 staff in Londonderry. I believe that those arrangements, which would last for a maximum of two years, will considerably reduce the displacement difficulties for the affected staff and provide additional time for employees and employers to come to a mutually acceptable arrangement, taking into account the personal circumstances of staff as far as possible.

Secondly, I now intend that the transition of support services to the new centres of expertise will begin slightly later than previously scheduled; it will start in March 2013, rather than the later part of 2012. That will bring a twofold advantage. It will mean that priority can be given to the implementation of the new systems, which was requested by many consultees, and it will give us slightly longer to manage the staffing implications and allow the personal circumstances of staff to be as fully catered for as possible.

The detailed thinking behind those changes is set out in my Department's formal response to the public consultation, which, together with the updated equality impact assessment (EQIA), is to be published later today on the departmental website.

This subject is complex and, as my postbag can testify, a subject of some controversy. I trust that the response I have outlined to the consultation will go a long way towards allaying the fears and concerns expressed. Members have frequently pressed for administration costs to be reduced in health and social care, and I am committed to ensuring that patients and other service users will ultimately benefit from the move to shared service centres in health and social care.

Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On behalf of the Committee, I thank the Minister for making a statement on this very important issue and for the briefing he gave earlier. The Minister indicated that this is an issue that concerns a lot of people. All Committee members have been inundated with letters and e-mails about the issue.

I note the Minister's reference to the EQIA and the fact that the results of the EQIA were fundamental in changing the original plan. It is thanks to the EQIA that the people of Derry and Downpatrick, of whom, as the Minister pointed out, the majority are women with caring responsibilities, will have an extra two years at their current location. Minister, when the unions briefed the Committee a number of weeks ago on this, they pointed out that there had been serious problems with shared services in England. Can the Minister inform us if lessons have been learned from the English model and whether he is convinced that shared services in our health trusts will deliver the savings that are promised and outlined in the statement?

Mr Poots: The EQIA was initially published to take account of the issues raised during the consultation. It also took on board suggestions and observations received from the

Equality Commission. The revised EQIA has been absolutely integral to the shared services outcome, and that has played a significant role in having the satellite offices for the two-year period.

I move now to the criticism from trade unions, in particular, on how this transpired in England, for example, and what lessons can be learned. We have looked at the processes that have taken place in England. Our processes are somewhat different in that they are going to be standardised right across the HSC, and participation will be mandatory. Therefore, there will be no opt-out. Consolidation of the corporate functions into centres of expertise will enable us to make the savings. Obviously, I am as anxious as anyone to ensure that the transition to centres of expertise goes smoothly. The implementation timetable was already scheduled to extend over several months, but we have refined that to make doubly sure that we allow for the operational changes to take place and the staff requirements to be met, to give priority to the implementation of the new systems.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his statement. What was the outcome from the extra time you granted to trade unions to come up with alternative arrangements?

Mr Poots: I met the trade unions, and a senior director from the Department briefed them earlier this afternoon as well. We offered them extra time. One composite response received cast some doubt on the capacity of centres of expertise to achieve the savings and drew quite a lot of its information from the work of the National Audit Office. My officials were aware of the deficiencies that had been identified by the Audit Office and have acted to avoid them in the HSC shared services proposal. In brief, the basic systems that have been procured have already been proven to work. HSC staff were directly involved in the specification and procurement. The issue about standardisation will not be a feature of the HSC arrangements. We will have processes for finance, procurement and logistics, and those have already been signed off. Also, the involvement of HSC shared services is mandatory rather than voluntary.

However, the issue of extending the offices in Downpatrick and Londonderry as satellite offices for the two-year period is a demonstration that we want to give due cognisance to the issues that were raised by MLAs, trade unions and staff, and, hopefully, give people a greater amount of time. Let me be absolutely clear: there is no doubt that it will cause inconvenience and disruption to individuals. However, we want to minimise that. We do not want to cause hardship to individuals; I think that will be very exceptional.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his statement and for what he said about taking care of the staff. Will the Minister detail how many staff overall have been affected? How many have been offered the option of relocation, and what resources are available to help them?

Mr Poots: It is actually over 100 jobs, but we have a number of vacancies at the minute, so there will probably only be a reduction of around 70 over what is currently being employed. It will be over 100 in terms of what would be employed, but because we have been anticipating this, jobs have not been replaced. However, it will cause inconvenience on a number of levels. In the first instance, people in the Belfast, Ballymena and Omagh areas will have little

inconvenience other than the fact that some will probably have to retrain from having carried out one particular line of work to a different kind of work than they have previously been experienced in. Nonetheless, they will have specific skills that they will have developed over the years, and we are confident that that will deliver good results for us.

The people who will be inconvenienced most will be in Downpatrick, and, to a lesser extent, Londonderry. There are greater opportunities for alternative jobs in Londonderry, so the people in Downpatrick will be most impacted. We understand the problems that they will face as a consequence. Those who have to drive to Belfast or Dundonald to work will receive mileage allowance payment and so forth for the first three years, and, over time, a small number of jobs will become available in the Downpatrick area as well.

Mr McDevitt: I am sure the Minister will agree that when inefficiency arises in a system, it tends to be a failure of leadership, not a failure of the workers, and I am sure that the Minister shares my deep concern that the people who are being asked to pay for that inefficiency in their jobs are low-paid working mothers. As we seek further efficiencies from the health service in the years ahead, can the Minister assure the House that we will not continue to ask low-paid working mothers to bear the burden for those efficiencies but that we will actually look to those who were responsible for the inefficiency in the first place?

Mr Poots: In the first instance, I should say that we are not looking at compulsory redundancies. People will remain in the employment of the health system. For example, 50 positions in the Belfast Trust have been held open, and they will be made available first to people who are working in the current services. Therefore, in that respect, people will not bear the brunt of this in that they will not lose their jobs. However, I fully appreciate that it will cause a significant and serious inconvenience for many people, and I particularly recognise that, in the case of Downpatrick, those people will have some distance to travel.

It affects people in my constituency, and I have met them. They currently work in Belfast, and some of them would naturally transfer to Armagh because that is where their job is transferring to, but there are not particularly good public transportation routes to Armagh. That creates a problem as well. Nonetheless, we have sought to ensure that there are jobs in the north, south, east and west of the Province, and we have sought to be fair in that respect, as opposed to concentrating jobs in and around the city of Belfast exclusively.

I think that that goes very much with the ethos that the Assembly proposed a number of years ago.

1.00 pm

Mr McCarthy: I am deeply disappointed with this afternoon's announcement. Despite the huge opposition from people at all the public meetings and almost 2,500 responses by people who opposed this move, including officials from some of the trusts, questions still remain on the cost-benefit analysis, equality proofing and the human aspect of low-paid staff losing their jobs. The Minister spoke about Downpatrick and Londonderry. Of course —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question.

Mr McCarthy: Of course, we were in sympathy. However, he has not mentioned Ards or Bangor. Are staff going to travel to Armagh, Ballymena or Omagh? I do not think so. Can the Minister justify the fact that each trust area, except the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, will have a centre of excellence, given the fact that that trust was given a commendation last week for being one of the best trusts in Northern Ireland and the UK?

Mr Poots: There are four specialisms and there are five trusts. I was not going to make a specialism for a trust. I suggest that travelling from Ards to Dundonald is not particularly onerous; I have done it on a few occasions myself. Alternative employment will be offered to people. They have the right to follow their job but they will also be offered alternative positions at their current pay grade. I am not surprised that the Member is disappointed that we are saving £120 million. I am not surprised that the Member is disappointed that, when this is concluded, we will be saving £17 million per annum, which can be put into front line services such as A&E, cancer services and mental health. If he would prefer to spend it on administration, that is his call, but it does not surprise me.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his statement. My question follows on from what he said about the savings of £120 million. Will the Minister provide a more detailed breakdown of the anticipated savings from those proposals?

Mr Poots: The projections of the savings are over the 10-year period, and we hope to reach savings of £17 million per annum by the end of that period. They have been verified in so far as such estimates can be verified in the planning stage. We had them questioned by the trade unions, albeit we did not have the type of detail that would have allowed us to challenge the savings that we projected because we believe that they are quite robust. We will be making investments, for example, to deliver those savings. There will be a £26 million investment in IT systems and a £4 million investment in accommodation. That will deliver us the savings. Essentially, we will save on employment, in the first instance, because we will be employing 100 fewer staff than we do currently. We will make significant savings in procurement because we will have a much better system for carrying out that procurement, and, in general, we will have a much more efficient computerised system, and we will make full use of modern facilities that are available to us. We are very confident that we can deliver substantial savings to the HSC over the period, which can then be translated into front line services.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, thank the Minister for his statement. He said that there would be no compulsory redundancy. At one of the meetings that I attended in Armagh about this, people were being asked to make decisions about voluntary redundancy and voluntary retirement without the details being available. They were given the date of 31 March this year, and they were expected to make that decision very quickly. Obviously, there is a two-year extension where people can opt for voluntary redundancy or voluntary retirement. Will the proper details of their particular case be given to them in adequate time for them to make an informed decision?

Mr Poots: In the monitoring rounds last year, we bid for and received additional money to offer voluntary redundancy to people across the HSC. Certainly, some of the money was

used in that area. The availability of that money allowed people to take up the opportunity of voluntary redundancy if it suited them. Over the next two years, I suspect that a relatively small number will wish to take voluntary redundancy, so I will bid again for voluntary redundancy in the next monitoring rounds to ensure that we can facilitate as many people as possible.

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for this afternoon's statement on shared services. Is a draft timeline available for implementation at the particular sites?

Mr Poots: The timeline is this: we are hoping to move ahead with payroll transactions from College Street, Belfast in the first quarter of 2013; we are looking at September 2013 for payment transactions from the Braid Valley site; income transactions, which will largely be administered from the Tyrone and Fermanagh hospital site, will begin in June 2013; and recruitment and selection will also begin in June 2013. The satellite offices will run for two years from now. Although there are 10 or more people in those offices, that is something that we can maintain.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement but, like Mr McCarthy, I am very disappointed in its content. Although there is a temporary reprieve for some recruitment staff in Derry, the majority of them will now have to travel as far afield as Belfast and Armagh to work. That will be totally unfeasible for the majority of those people, who are on lower pay bands and often have home care commitments.

Following on from Mr Brady's question on the availability of money for further voluntary redundancies and early retirement, can the Minister perhaps ring-fence money from the savings generated by the implementation of the new IT system, given that he is postponing the shared services move?

Mr Poots: The two-year run-in will allow the Armagh centre of expertise to build up to full strength and give the Western Trust a considerable amount of time to find employment for staff in the area that the Member represents. I think that that is important. We will seek to do that for as many staff as possible and to ensure that as many as possible are accommodated in their locality.

I know that some staff who work in Londonderry, for example, actually live closer to Omagh, so travelling to Omagh may suit them better. Nevertheless, a significant number of people in Londonderry will be affected as a consequence of this. The Western Trust has given me its word that it will work very hard to ensure that it accommodates as many of those staff as possible. That was the case with the previous review of public administration: the Western Trust made nobody redundant, and it managed to accommodate people at that time. We are confident that it will be able to do that this time, if not in all instances, in the vast majority of cases. We believe that that will be the case.

In respect of ring-fencing money, we will seek to ensure that we have enough resources available to meet the needs of staff, whether they wish to travel, retrain or take redundancy. A large number of staff will be largely unaffected by this. However, significant numbers will be affected in some way.

Mr S Anderson: I, too, thank the Minister for his statement. What is the Equality Commission's view of the process

conducted by the Department for the equality impact assessment?

Mr Poots: The Equality Commission gave its views and, as a consequence, we substantially updated the EQIA to address the significant equality issues raised in the course of the consultation. I found it helpful to have the Equality Commission's views. It was reassuring to find that we could accommodate the suggestions it offered. At a recent meeting, the commission indicated that it was satisfied with the EQIA process we were following and that we were able to address the issues during the consultation.

The EQIA has been amended to include an options appraisal to draw comparisons between proposed shared service sites to determine potential adverse equality impacts; additional data resources to support the conclusions reached; the expansion of the mitigating measures; greater integration of socio-economic profiling data; further information on local economies and labour markets; and a more detailed approach to tackling the transportation difficulties.

Mr D McIlveen: I also thank the Minister for his statement. I am sure that he will forgive me for my shameless parochialism when I ask him to outline what work will be carried out at the Ballymena site.

Mr Poots: Some work will need to be done and some amendments will need to be made at the Braid Valley Hospital site. We indicated the timescale for when we anticipate the office being up and running to a previous questioner. We are confident that we have the money set aside and the timescale to deliver the required work. The office will then be operating in a very comprehensive way, employing a significant number of people who will be working very closely together. The significant advantage in bringing people who specialise in those services to one particular site is that it maximises their skills and enables them to work to their fullest capacity, and with people who are skilled in the same arena. It will make a significant difference in delivering high-quality services for the HSC sector by bringing all those skill bases under one roof.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his statement. However, like some of my colleagues, I am extremely disappointed by it. When there is bad news to be delivered for South Down, it seems that the SDLP is the only party present to listen to it. I notice the absence of your party colleague Jim Wells.

Does the Minister accept that it would be impractical for the majority of staff in Downpatrick to follow their job to Ballymena? It will mean that, in two years' time, they will have no job.

Mr Poots: Mr Wells is a very good attender in the House, and if he is not here, there is a very good reason for him not being here. Unlike the Member opposite, Mr Wells has attended not just one but a number of meetings, making representations for the Downpatrick staff. I am sure that he is quite able to defend his workload to Johnny-come-lately on the issue. *[Interruption.]* I cannot help myself.

The Downpatrick situation is a serious issue, and the staff will have their concerns. I indicated from the outset of my statement that Downpatrick is the area on which this will have the greatest impact. I recognise that. I was in the difficult position of having to make a decision between Downpatrick and Armagh, but there was a much stronger

case for Armagh. Members can study that decision and look at all the documentation on it, and they will see that if I was to make a fair choice, that was the choice that I had to arrive at.

Nonetheless, I recognise that it will cause significant inconvenience and difficulties for the staff in Downpatrick. That is why we are seeking to accommodate them, and we will work closely with the South Eastern Trust to provide alternative employment for the staff who are based in Downpatrick. Although we cannot guarantee that the jobs will be in Downpatrick, we will seek to ensure that as many people as possible can be redeployed within the system as close to their homes as possible. Unfortunately, I cannot go any further than that, although I appreciate the difficulties that the staff are facing.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the fact that Armagh will be one of the locations for shared services. Will he detail what work will be carried out in Armagh?

Mr Poots: Again, there will be a reasonable amount of work to be carried out, but not a huge amount, and we are quite confident that we will be able to have everything up and running in an appropriate time at the Armagh site. I know that Craigavon was looked at as a possibility as well, but because of its scale and ability to be developed for that particular service, the Armagh site was better suited as a choice and came out ahead.

1.15 pm

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement today. As a very strong advocate of the decentralisation and sharing around of public sector jobs, I accept that there are winners and losers today. The Minister said in his statement that the arrangements would last for a maximum of two years. Could he give further clarification on that? If they are to last for less than two years, that will bring another raft of anxieties for the staff affected.

I accept what other Members have said in the House this morning, and I accept that there is a difficulty in Downpatrick. Times are very difficult in that part of the world for the fishing industry and other sectors where there has been quite a reduction in the numbers employed. I am sympathetic today to the needs of the people of Downpatrick. Given that people have caring responsibilities and that there are very few public sector jobs, could the Minister raise the issue at an Executive meeting and try to persuade Executive colleagues to move jobs out of Belfast and closer to people's homes?

Mr Poots: Although we have included the caveat that the arrangements for satellite offices will last for a maximum of two years, it is certainly planned that it will be two years. However, should the number of employees fall below 10 in those offices, they would no longer be viable. That is less likely to happen in Downpatrick, where we are looking at having a satellite office of 25 to 30 people, whereas, on the Gransha site, there will be around 15 members of staff. I am very confident that the arrangements in Downpatrick will run for the full two years, and, hopefully, over that period, quite a number of the 25 people in that office will find suitable alternative employment close to home and within the HSC system. However, that is the caveat.

Other Ministers have to make decisions on where their staff are located. We sought to include Ballymena in the north, Omagh in the west, Armagh in the south and Belfast in the east. I think that we have covered Northern Ireland quite well. I recognise that a lot of the staff involved are paid under £20,000, so travelling long distances is not really an option for them, particularly for those who have young families and who have to pay for childcare as well. Those are all things that we took cognisance of when we pulled this together.

Committee Business

Judicial Appointments

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 15 minutes to propose the motion and 15 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Justice on its review of judicial appointments and the recommendation that there should be no changes to the current process for judicial appointments and removals in Northern Ireland at this time; and endorses the intention of the Committee to undertake a further review of the judicial appointments and removals processes.

The Justice Committee undertook the review of judicial appointments in accordance with Standing Order 49A, and I thank Committee members for their constructive approach and contributions to the review.

Members will be aware that the Northern Ireland Act 2009 made amendments to the process of judicial appointments and removals as set out in the Judicature (Northern Ireland) Act 1978 and the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 as amended by the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2004. The 2009 Act also stated that Standing Orders should require one of the Assembly Committees to review the operation of the amendments made to the judicial appointments and removals processes by schedules 2 to 5 to the Act and to report on the review, including any recommendations for change to way in which judicial office holders are appointed and removed, by 30 April this year.

Initially, the review was to be undertaken by the Assembly and Executive Review Committee. However, following the devolution of policing and justice powers, an agreement was reached that responsibility for the review should pass to the Committee for Justice, and Standing Orders were subsequently amended on 28 November 2011.

Given the limited time available in which to complete the review, the Committee agreed to undertake a targeted consultation with a range of key stakeholders, including the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission (NIJAC), the Lord Chief Justice, the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman, the Attorney General for Northern Ireland, the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Minister of Justice, the Law Society, the Bar Council, and the political parties and independent Members in the Assembly. The Committee received eight written submissions and held three oral evidence sessions. I place on record the Committee's appreciation to all those who contributed written and oral evidence to the review.

The oral evidence sessions were with the Attorney General, the Lord Chief Justice in his capacity as chairman of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission and other representatives of NIJAC, and the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman. Those sessions raised some interesting issues and provoked some lively discussion.

The Committee was also aware that the House of Lords Constitution Committee was undertaking an inquiry into the judicial appointments process for the courts and tribunals of England and Wales and Northern Ireland and for the UK Supreme Court, and that the Ministry of Justice had just completed a consultation on appointments and diversity relating to the judiciary in England and Wales. The Committee kept an eye on the developments around those.

To meet the 30 April deadline for the completion of the review, the Committee confined its deliberations to a small number of issues, some of which I will now address. One issue that arose was the involvement of Ministers or this legislature in the Northern Ireland judicial appointments and removals process. The Committee considered whether the balance of power in relation to the processes has moved too far towards the judiciary and non-elected bodies and away from politicians. Although mindful of the reasons for the current position, the Committee noted that full responsibility now sits with NIJAC and elected representatives play no part in the process.

NIJAC also plays a key role in deciding on the maximum number of persons who may hold a listed judicial office at any one time. Although NIJAC must agree the maximum number with the Department of Justice, the Committee's view is that that is an unusual responsibility for such a body to have.

Given that there appears to be some perception, which was reflected in evidence received by the Committee but refuted by the chairman of NIJAC, the Lord Chief Justice, that NIJAC is dominated by its judicial members, it raised some questions that were discussed with the Attorney General, who said:

"One can speak of it as a constitutional issue of a hermetically sealed circularity of judges largely appointing judges."

The Committee also highlighted the fact that, in any other consideration of where power should reside in relation to judicial appointments and to what extent, if any, political representatives should have a role, a distinction should be made between involvement in the selection process and involvement in the appointment process. The Committee is also of the view that NIJAC should reflect on the challenge of addressing any perceptions that might exist.

One of the criticisms levelled about the appointment process for appeal judges was that appointments have been based on seniority. The 2009 Act introduced a change in the appointment process for appeal judges. However, the new process has not yet been used and no new appointments have been made.

The Committee believes that all judicial appointments should be based on merit and is strongly of the view that the merit principle must apply to any appointment process for appeal judges or the post of Lord Chief Justice. In that respect, the Committee supports NIJAC's position, as articulated by its chairman, the Lord Chief Justice, who indicated that when consulted by the Prime Minister on the appointment process, NIJAC will inevitably recommend that the appointments should be made on merit and that there should be a process to ensure that appropriate candidates can apply.

An area that the Committee is very concerned about — I know that other Committee members will wish to address it in the debate — is the fact that, despite the requirement that NIJAC must engage in a programme of action to ensure that, so far as it is reasonably practicable, judicial appointments are reflective of the community in Northern Ireland, that has not been achieved in the higher court tiers with regard to female representation. Although the current Lord Chief Justice and his predecessor, Lord Kerr, expressed their disappointment regarding that situation and NIJAC recognises that it is an issue that needs to be addressed, the Committee is disappointed that no progress appears to have been made in tackling that long-standing issue.

The Committee has recommended that NIJAC must take forward the programme of work that it outlined in its evidence to this review as a matter of urgency and that it must give appropriate priority to this matter. We have highlighted several areas worthy of further consideration and intend to review what progress is made in this area in the future.

Another issue that arose during the review was the delivery of the functions of the Judicial Appointments Ombudsman. The Department of Justice is considering alternative options for the delivery of the functions of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman, so that is an area that the Committee will return to in due course. The Committee has recommended that, when considering other options, the Department of Justice should take account of the views expressed by the Judicial Appointments Ombudsman in his oral evidence to the Committee and, in particular, if consideration is being given to having one justice ombudsman, the current legislative requirements that stipulate that the Judicial Appointments Ombudsman appointee should not be a lawyer nor have sat in a judicial capacity.

The Committee noted that the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman's role is relatively narrow, allowing him to look only at complaints from individuals who have participated in the selection process and preventing him from investigating thematic complaints, looking at wider issues or dealing with complaints from individuals on behalf of someone else. That is an issue that the Committee may return to in the future.

In conclusion, having considered the evidence received — taking account of the fact that the Department of Justice and NIJAC are of the view that the arrangements created by the 2009 Act, although in place for only a relatively short period of time, appear to be working satisfactorily — the Committee has recommended that there should be no changes to the current process for judicial appointments and removals in Northern Ireland at this time. However, the Committee is of the view that there are a number of issues, some of which I have highlighted today, that may merit further consideration. Therefore, we intend to undertake a further review of the judicial appointments and removals process.

At this point, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I thank our Committee staff for their work on behalf of the Committee. The Justice Committee is a very busy Committee. We took on this work from the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, and we were able to put it through the Committee in the time that had been stipulated. I thank the staff for the work that they carried out under Christine Darrah in her role as Clerk of the Committee.

Taking off my hat as Chairman of the Committee, I will speak now in my capacity as a DUP Member. The reasons why the changes in the 2009 Act took place were evident at the time. The party gave the reasons why those changes were necessary at the time. Very clearly, it was because of our concerns in respect of the role that Sinn Féin may have in the appointment and removal of the judiciary. One does not need to go too far into our past to remember when the IRA targeted members of the judiciary; one example being Lord Justice Gibson and the attack that led to his death. Obviously, we had very clear concerns, and changes were then included in the 2009 Act as a result of those. Clearly, the political context in Northern Ireland has led to the changes that have happened. That makes it very difficult for changes to the current system to take place. That having been said, this has given the judiciary a very insulated, protected and privileged position from the political process. That is not an ideal position in a normal democracy. Given the lack of accountability to the people through their politicians, it requires the judiciary to exercise its functions with great care, particularly when making decisions that challenge the Executive.

A number of submissions were made to the Committee that highlighted the movement of the judiciary away from politicians that has occurred across the United Kingdom. That has been flagged up. In 2001, Sir Thomas Legg QC, former permanent secretary to the Lord Chancellor, said:

“appointing judges is not merely a technical and professional exercise ... It is a political act in the broad sense and it should be the responsibility of a political authority. In our constitution that means accountable Ministers.”

That was written prior to the establishment of judicial appointments commissions in England and Northern Ireland. In 2011, with regard to the 2005 Act, Sir Thomas Legg said that it:

“strikes the balance of roles and powers too far towards the judges and too far away from the Executive”.

1.30 pm

It begs the question of what the role is for politicians. It is my view, and the view articulated before the Committee by the Attorney General, that it is the politicians who create the law that governs and seeks to protect our society. The judiciary implements that law. There is a view amongst some that the judiciary is superior to the politicians in respect of this constitutional position. However, in evidence, the Attorney General said:

“There has been a shift — in some ways, an understandable shift — and emphasis put on the role of the judiciary. Members of Parliament and legislatures are, as Sir William Blackstone said, ‘guardians of the constitution’ and have a vital role in that regard. We downplay that role as a community, ultimately, at our peril.”

Sir Declan Morgan, the Lord Chief Justice, in his role as chairman of NIJAC, asked:

“what will politicians bring to selection on merit in a better way than experienced human resources people?”

Very clearly, the answer is accountability. I agree with Lord Justice Etherton, who said in evidence to the Select Committee on the Constitution:

“At some point and in some way the executive or Parliament, or both, must be involved, if only, and at the very least, in the appointment of people other than judges who themselves undertake the selection.”

The pendulum of the political accountability of our judicial appointments process is at the extreme end: it is divorced from the Executive and the legislature. I have made it clear why that reason is the case, and I support that reason as to how it has come about, given the past of Sinn Féin in our troubled times. However, in other western democracies — for example, the United States — politicians have a very direct role, and in many states, judges are directly elected by the people, giving them the strongest authority from the people to act. It is necessary, and indeed a duty, for politicians in Northern Ireland to have a close scrutiny of our judicial system to ensure that the people can have confidence in the judiciary.

Having said that, I support the motion. I have outlined clearly the context as to why the changes took place in the 2009 Act. That context has not changed and, therefore, we will not be supporting changes to that Act. Nevertheless, in a normal democracy, there are issues that a normal democratic institution would be able to consider, but, sadly, in Northern Ireland, we do not have that.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Chair of the Justice Committee, Mr Givan, for bringing this forward.

Clearly, this is something that came about at reasonably short notice and had to be carried through on a reasonably short and sharp timescale. Obviously, some of the issues that have been raised by Mr Givan are relevant to the process. I do not say that we were amused by it, but one thing that heightened the interest of many of us was the difference of opinion between the Attorney General and the Lord Chief Justice.

I note the issues around the Attorney General's point about the interview process. He was indicating that it may not necessarily be the best way of making appointments. You could say that even about the Civil Service, if you wanted to, or about any public appointment. You do not always get the best person just because you have what is termed a “competency interview process”. There is quite often much more to the individual than will be brought out at the interview process. Though I accept that, you must have a means and mechanism for carrying out the process. Obviously, I have some degree of sympathy with that, but if it is going to be for the judicial system, it needs to be on a much wider base as well. I respect and accept the independence of appointments for the judiciary because if you bring that into the political domain, it will become political, and I have significant concerns about that. Obviously, independence is very important.

I would be concerned if there were any indication that NIJAC operated some sort of two-tier system, whereby the judiciary and the lay people in NIJAC were of completely different opinions. However, I do not believe that that is right. I believe that the system co-operates reasonably well together and that it is a good mechanism for taking the process forward. The Ulster Unionist Party supports the current

process. That is not to say that we are not open to continual review and looking at it again in the future — we are quite happy to do that — but, as it stands, it needs to be clear that we want the independence of the process to remain. We do not want any indication of there being two-tier system.

It is important that we continue to hear the opinions of the Lord Chief Justice and the Attorney General. We should try to find a mechanism to bring their thought process closer together or to streamline it to some degree. I hope that the Committee can play a role in that. Irrespective of where the responsibilities ultimately lie, the Department of Justice has a clear role and responsibility. I hope that that will continue.

Mr A Maginness: I pay tribute to the Chair of the Committee, who did an excellent job in guiding us through fairly difficult subjects in a very balanced manner. He promised us double pay and rations at the end of it, but that did not appear. However —

Mr Weir: It must have been money for two counsel. *[Laughter.]*

Mr A Maginness: You know where that would get you. In any event, it was good work that was well done in proper time. The House should note that, at the same time, we were conducting another inquiry into witnesses and victims. It was an enormous amount of work. I echo the Chair's congratulations and thanks to the Committee staff for their very hard work throughout the inquiry.

The Chair very usefully highlighted most of the pertinent issues. He referred to the pendulum in relation to judicial appointments swinging away from political involvement and towards a very neutral situation. That was done for very understandable historical reasons. I am not at one with him on the reasons that he quoted. Nonetheless, for historical reasons, the appointment of judges has been moved to an independent body, and I think that all of us are supportive of that. The question is whether, in the future, there should be any change. I do not see any change in the immediate future, but we should not rule that out absolutely. The stripping away of even the most vestigial involvement of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Assembly in the appointment — as opposed to the selection — of judges may or may not be a good thing; I just do not know. Certainly, however, in the criminal justice review of 2000, it was suggested that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) would have at least a symbolic role in appointments. If we are to become a mature democracy, it may well be that we move to such a situation. There may well be more political involvement, as there is in other healthy political jurisdictions.

Mr Larkin, the Attorney General, raised a number of interesting points. When talking about NIJAC, he said:

“there is at least a danger of the creation of a self-perpetuating mandarin class of judges appointing themselves. Appointing very clever people, bright people, very accomplished lawyers, but doing so in a way that is, to all intents and purposes, immune from broader constitutional scrutiny.”

He also said:

“There is absolutely no impairment of judicial independence or impartiality caused by the appointment being made

by the executive and that appointment by the executive being accountable to the legislature.”

It is interesting that he unilaterally raises that issue. The Lord Chief Justice had an opportunity to respond to that and to questions put by the Chair and me. Sir Declan Morgan did not rule out some legislative involvement. On page 52 of the report, he said:

“Having some legislative involvement is not necessarily contrary to the fundamental principles of judicial independence. However, I wonder what the legislature would bring.”

The Chair has answered that point; he said that it would bring an element of accountability to the appointment process.

These are interesting arguments, some of which remain unanswered. We will return to this as a Committee, as will the Assembly, but I think it has been a useful exercise. We came to the conclusion that —

Mr Givan: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he comment on the difference of views held by Lord Kerr and Lord Etherton in regards to political involvement?

Mr A Maginness: I thought that Lord Etherton's remarks were very interesting; he was on the side of having some greater political involvement. Lord Kerr took a more extreme position by saying that we do not really want politicians next to or near the judicial appointments process. Perhaps that is understandable coming from a senior judge who probably sees political involvement as a threat. Is it a threat or is it a challenge that the judiciary will just have to deal with, and does it add something materially to the appointments process? That question remains unanswered, as the Chair of the Committee has said, and most of the Committee were of that mind. It has to be said that the —

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

Mr A Maginness: I will indeed, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. In conclusion, it has to be said that the arrangements are working satisfactorily, and I think that this is a good report to make to this Assembly.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Chair of the Committee for the way in which the business was conducted, and the staff and others who supported us and came to the Committee with evidence. As the Chair highlighted, the Committee is generally satisfied with the current situation. I genuinely believe that Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission is doing a good job, and that it is producing the right judicial appointments in Northern Ireland.

However, there is one area that raised a matter of concern. Others have referred to the level of future political involvement, but the current issue is the lack of representation of females, particularly in senior appointments. It is an area that, I believe, needs to be addressed to give the appropriate balance in the judicial process.

The argument that we were given was that it was difficult for females gain the appropriate length of experience in court time as many of them will take a break for family and maternity reasons. However, I genuinely believe that we must break away from what is perceived as, if not an old boy's network, then certainly a very male-dominated

profession and area in respect of those who hold those judicial appointments.

Greater efforts need to be made to ensure that there is appropriate female representation in judicial appointments in Northern Ireland. We should not have an area that is exclusively or predominantly male in that respect. Appointments should be made on merit, and I believe that there are as many women as men in the judicial system capable of holding those positions. Although I support the report, I want to flag up that area of concern and would particularly encourage NIJAC and those in the profession to see what can be done to encourage appropriate female representation.

As for the future, I think that the Committee agrees that it needs to re-examine what level of political involvement there should be, whether it is the token involvement that Mr Maginness made reference to in that the appointment is simply ratified by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, or whether there should be some form of hands-on involvement in that process. That remains to be seen. That is a debate for another day, but, at this point, I am satisfied to support the report.

1.45 pm

Mr Weir: I join others in welcoming the report and in thanking the Chairperson and the Committee staff for the examination. As has been indicated, time was limited. However, in going through the evidence and reaching conclusions, I was struck by the lack of a convincing case for very fundamental changes. A number of issues were raised across the spectrum, nuances arose and changes were suggested for the future, but there was no overriding desire either outside or inside the Committee for something fundamentally different to what had been arrived at. The lack of proposed changes is perhaps a salutary lesson for some who, two or three years ago when the devolution of justice was proposed, predicted, particularly on the judicial front, that the sky would fall in. It seems that we have not seen a radical change, and, indeed, some of the fears that at the time were raised — “manufactured” may be a better word — clearly have not materialised.

I will touch on a few aspects of the report. The role of elected representatives has been concentrated on, and I agree with Alban Maginness when he says that it is fairly clear that no one can envisage a fundamental change on that side in the foreseeable future. On the longer-term debate on whether the pendulum should swing, I tend to be on the reasonably sceptical wing and much closer in position to that of the Lord Chief Justice than that of the Attorney General. I have to be careful at this stage not to be too critical of the Attorney General, as I do not want to end up on any criminal charges because of my speech. However, we need to tread very carefully. The Attorney General mentioned the situation in America and Germany, and political involvement there has not been an unalloyed success. We have to be careful about the danger of getting political appointees or, indeed, judges looking with one eye to satisfy political masters. When we decide precisely where that pendulum will be, we need, at all costs, to ensure that the —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: In a second. We need to make sure that that form of judicial independence is protected.

Mr A Maginness: Does the Member accept that NIJAC has a lot of functions, not just on the appointment of judges but on the complement of judges? That is a most unusual function for such a body to have.

Mr Weir: I agree, and that issue is tackled in the report. I am concentrating particularly on paragraphs 107 to 109, which are on the role of elected representatives.

Mr Dickson raised the issue of female representation, and the overall balance is a problem. However, when looking at how we solve that, I was struck by the statistics that showed a vast differentiation between the number of females who enter the legal profession and those who are still in it at 30 or 35. We need to look at the mechanism and at whether there are any barriers that mean that females, in some way, feel forced out. That seems to be the key point in tackling that. Nobody came forward with any evidence to suggest that there was direct discrimination or that people were not being selected on merit. However, over the past 20, 30 or 40 years, the profession has become a lot closer to being gender-balanced. In time, we need to reflect that in the overall process.

There has been some criticism that the composition of NIJAC is too judge-heavy. It is important that judges be appointed fully on merit, and I am struck by the need to have that level of professional input. I have met the representatives of NIJAC who were there as lay members, and they are very impressive individuals. They may not have the judicial or legal background, but they are experts in HR and in a range of other activities, and they can and do make a very valuable contribution to NIJAC.

It is also important to note that when the issue of sponsoring Departments was raised, nobody from NIJAC or the Department of Justice seemed to want to shift that position. From a practical point of view, there is a feeling that the oversight function in the sponsoring Department works well, and I think that that needs to be maintained. There has been mention of the suggestion that the functions of the Judicial Appointments Ombudsman be merged with those of other ombudsmen and that those offices should, effectively, be rolled into one. However, given that the Judicial Appointments Ombudsman needs to be seen as completely independent from the judiciary, that would not be appropriate.

We are missing at least one voice today: Mr Wells, a member of the Committee, is not here to give his unique perspective on the legal profession. Had Mr Wells been here, a strong argument may have been made for politicians not having involvement in judicial appointments.

Broadly speaking, the report shows that the current system is largely correct. We will need to return to this and, given the limited amount of time the Committee had to undertake its review, it flags up the need for a much deeper examination of the system in the future. I welcome the report and believe that it points to a positive way of protecting judicial independence, at least for the time being.

Mr S Anderson: As a member of the Justice Committee, I support the motion and encourage all Members to approve the Committee's report on its review of judicial appointments. At the outset, I express my thanks to the Chair and the Committee staff for their work on the review.

I am aware that in a debate such as this, there is a high risk of repetition. I do not intend to go over too many points; I could perhaps be classed as a repeat offender if I did. Therefore, I will keep my remarks to a minimum.

In the short time that was available to the Committee, we took stock of the operation of the judicial appointments process, as amended by the Northern Ireland Act 2009. As Members will be aware, the Assembly and Executive Review Committee was initially asked to undertake the review. However, after the devolution of justice powers, it was agreed that the Justice Committee should take over that work. Members will also be aware of the tight deadline. We agreed our terms of reference a short time ago and had to complete our work by 30 April. In light of that timescale, we decided to engage in a targeted consultation with the key players and to publicise our work on the Assembly website.

The process of judicial appointments has undergone fairly radical change across the United Kingdom in the past decade or so, and we are aware of the review by the House of Lords. One of the key aims of any judicial reform must be to ensure that the public can have the utmost confidence that the judiciary is completely independent and free from any outside interference. That is fundamental to the preservation and promotion of our constitutional liberties.

The main driver for change in Northern Ireland was the report 'Review of the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland' in 2000, which recommended the establishment of an independent commission to oversee appointments from the level of High Court judge downward. The result was the creation of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission in 2005. NIJAC has a vital role, as it is required to ensure that judicial appointments are based solely on merit. We all aim for that. The Northern Ireland Act 2009 extended NIJAC's remit, and it is now a recommending body for Crown and non-Crown appointments. As I said, the judiciary must be totally independent of any interference and must be seen as such. Therefore, the Committee supports the 2009 provisions, which require that judicial appointments and removals should be the responsibility of NIJAC, and not OFMDFM as was envisaged in 2002.

The current arrangements are not perfect by any means. They arose from the particular experiences of Northern Ireland and the problems that would arise from political input. However, there may be a cheaper, more efficient and accountable mechanism that could and must be considered at some stage in the future.

The Committee was also concerned that the judiciary is still very much a male preserve. That has been mentioned today. The Committee agreed that we should look at that issue in the future and perhaps make some progress on it.

The Committee is grateful to all those who took the time and effort to meet us and to those who made written submissions during our targeted consultation. In view of the overall responses to our review and the limited timescale, we felt that the best way to proceed would be to recommend no change to the current arrangements at this time. That is not to say that we have parked the issue; that is far from being the case. As the motion makes clear, more work needs to be done, and I imagine that it will be done in the coming months and years. Meanwhile, I ask the House to support the motion.

Mr Allister: I broadly support the motion because it holds to the present position, which is not perfect — I will say more about that in a moment. However, it is certainly a huge advance on where the legislation stood when, outside the House, I began to raise issues about the content of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 and the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2004, which would have seen an IRA commander as deputy First Minister with the facility to help in the appointment and removal of judges and in the recommendation of who would become a judge.

Of course, there are those in the House today who cannot admit or ever concede that I had any influence whatsoever when I first raised such issues, and who, when I first broached the subject in their party, were more interested in filling out their sudoku than in looking at the content of the 2002 Act. It is because I am making these points that, although not originally down to contribute, Mr Poots will speak in the debate.

Expert at sudoku as he was, he well knows that he was far more interested in those puzzles than in listening to what the 2002 Act and the 2004 Act meant for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. I take some credit that, ultimately, the Northern Ireland Act 2009 was amended to remove the bulk of those parts. It did not remove the power that allows OFMDFM to nominate people to the body that appoints judges — the Judicial Appointments Commission. It ought to have done that, because there is no nexus between OFMDFM and the judicial process, nor should there be. Where there is one, the nexus is with the Department of Justice. Therefore, it is the Department of Justice and not OFMDFM that should have the power to appoint people to the Judicial Appointments Commission.

I want to comment on where we are perhaps going in the future. I have listened carefully to those who are obviously itching and anxious to get more political involvement; they call it "accountability", but it is really a creeping politicisation. They refer to the fact that, in America, judges are elected: preserve us from such a politicisation of the judiciary. Yes, it is not perfect that judges appoint judges through the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission. However, that is by far the best arrangement attainable, because you need to know what the job of a judge entails from experience before you appoint others.

I shudder at the thought of OFMDFM or the Department of Justice having the power to make such appointments. That would be a very retrograde step indeed; it would result in a corrupting of the judiciary. We would be in the same situation as the Irish Republic, where Fine Gael judges and Fianna Fáil judges were appointed when their respective parties were in government. The judiciary is now, more and more, dealing with issues that touch on government policy and decisions. If we are to maintain the independence of the judiciary, we must expunge from the Executive any political involvement in the appointment of judges. If we create the situation where judicial review after judicial review is examining the rights and wrongs of an Executive decision, the process would be corrupted, or would have the appearance of being corrupted, if those making judicial review decisions are appointed by the Executive or subject to removal by the Executive. So, in the interests of the independence of the judiciary, it is very important that we maintain as great a distance as possible between the Executive and the judiciary.

I certainly do not want to see any terrorist-inclusive Executive ever having that role in respect of our judiciary.

2.00 pm

I will comment on the support in the report for the application of the merit principle to the Court of Appeal. I agree with that, but in the context that there is another principle about judicial appointments, which is that they must be reflective of the community. We are already in the position where the three key legal posts of Lord Chief Justice, Attorney General and Director of Public Prosecutions all come from the one community. We need a counterbalance, as well as appointing on merit, to ensure that our Court of Appeal, the highest court in the land, is reflective of the community.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to an end.

Mr Allister: Let us not forget that. It would be a backward step if we were to end up with a Court of Appeal that is not reflective of the community that it serves.

Mr Poots: I have a document from the Traditional Unionist Voice. I know that we are not allowed to display documents in the House, but, the document, which, I assume, Mr Allister had some role in writing, identifies how Martin McGuinness would have control over the judiciary. I suggest to Mr Allister that, if he ever chooses to do something else in life, he does not take up the role of Mystic Meg, because he does not very often get it right, and I suspect that he would not get much business on that front. Perhaps people do not always give as much attention to Mr Allister as he would like because he does not often get it right in the first instance. He has not got it right today either when he talks about the judiciary in Northern Ireland.

Clearly, we have decided to go down the route that we have because of the past in Northern Ireland. We have a system where we do not appoint judges through the political process, and that is different from the rest of the kingdom. I note that Mr Allister wants a degree of separation from the rest of the kingdom in that he wishes to have judges appointing judges in Northern Ireland but not in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Poots: Yes, I certainly will.

Mr Allister: I am very happy that the Prime Minister makes the recommendations after consultation with our Lord Chief Justice and our other senior judges. I am very happy that we maintain the unity of the United Kingdom.

Mr Poots: That is not what Mr Allister was saying earlier. He was very critical of the role of politicians in the appointment of judges, yet he is just after saying that it is all right. If one goes back to Hansard, one will identify that Mr Allister, throughout his speech, did not indicate that that was the case at all.

As part of the checks and balances and democratic accountability throughout the process, a strong judiciary is very important for a strong democracy and vice versa. In the checks and balances that we have now, the scales are tipped very heavily in favour of the judiciary vis-à-vis the democratic system. That places a greater incumbency on the judiciary to carefully exercise its very significant powers.

It is not the judiciary's role to overturn decisions that it does not like; it is the judiciary's role to ensure that the law is upheld. Nor is it appropriate for the judiciary to be striking down decisions that have been arrived at rationally and, indeed, reasonably on the basis of some technicalities. The judiciary needs to reflect upon that and respect that.

Being a Minister does not make one perfect, and nor does going into a studio as a journalist or a broadcaster make those individuals perfect. Indeed, when a very able Queen's Counsel dons a wig and sits on the bench, that does not make them perfect. We reserve the right to criticise the decision of judges. Judges can be very wise, but that does not make them infallible. They can be very knowledgeable, but that does not make them omniscient. They can be very powerful, but that does not make them omnipotent. Those powers all lie with another judge, whom we will all face one day. We reserve the right to challenge decisions that we do not believe to be good decisions. Last week, indeed, our Director of Public Prosecutions was in conflict with the courts over a decision that was made. On balance, from what I have heard thus far, I am with the Director of Public Prosecutions on the issue that was involved. The law was not fully and, possibly, properly observed in that particular decision-making process.

The Executive have been elected, through the Assembly, to govern. Judicial authority that diminishes the ability of the Executive or, indeed, the Assembly to carry out their role of governance is something that should be exercised with extreme caution. For example, the Executive's number one priority in the last mandate was the economy. That was tested through the Programme for Government. We had all of the consultations, and the commitment was made. However, when Ministers, Departments and arm's-length bodies went about delivering on that commitment, they were, on occasions, undermined by judicial decisions. That was undermining the will of the people of Northern Ireland. That is something, therefore, that we need to be very careful about in the future.

We will have to continue with the system that we have, because of the nature of politics in Northern Ireland. Nonetheless, we need to make it very clear today that, in the delivery of judicial powers, full and proper respect must be given to the politicians and elected Government of Northern Ireland so that they can carry out their duties in a very open, honest and frank way on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland, with as little judicial interference as possible.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. First, I thank the Committee, as the Chairperson did, particularly the Clerks, for putting the report together.

The report represents the fulfilment of the requirement under Standing Order 49A for the Committee for Justice to complete a review of the operation of the amendments made to the judicial appointments and removals processes. As indicated by the Chairman, the Committee, having considered the evidence received, has recommended that there should be no changes to the current process for judicial appointments and removals at this time.

However, the Committee is of the view that there are a number of issues, some of which have been highlighted in Members' contributions, that may merit further consideration. Therefore, the Committee intends to

undertake a further review of the judicial appointments and removals processes.

I turn first to some of the comments by Members before I make some comments from my perspective and that of my party. The Chairman outlined the key issues considered by the Committee. He also set out the context for the current position and highlighted the way that the appointment process has swung towards giving the power to the judiciary, citing the evidence of that that was given to the House of Lords Constitution Committee's inquiry. He said the political role would introduce accountability.

Tom Elliott noted with interest the difference in opinion between the Attorney General and the Lord Chief Justice. He also highlighted some concerns about the likely impact of political involvement.

Alban Maginness did not see any need for immediate change to the process, and outlined the fact that the appointment of judges has been moved to an independent body for historical reasons, which is an important point.

Stewart Dickson also noted the general satisfaction with the current system but acknowledged the benefit of having a debate on the future. He highlighted the lack of female representation at the higher tiers and the need for NIJAC to address that.

Peter Weir highlighted the fact that there is general satisfaction with the current system, according to the submissions made to the Committee, and the fact that there is no overriding desire for change. He also referred to the lack of female representation at the higher court tiers. He indicated that he did not feel that there was discrimination there but said that the issue needed to be explained and explored.

Jim Allister, although broadly supportive of the motion, again used it to show his impartiality, in that he did not object to political interference as long as it was British political interference; he did not want any political interference from elected representatives in the North. Edwin Poots noted that the checks and balances are tipped in favour of the judiciary and that a strong judiciary is important. However, he wants to reserve the right to criticise judges. Those were the comments of individual Members. It was a good debate in which Members gave their opinions.

I will speak now as a Sinn Féin member of the Justice Committee. NIJAC is currently responsible for judicial appointments. It is chaired by the Lord Chief Justice and has a mix of judicial, legal and lay members. The Committee heard from some of those lay members during its inquiry. It is basically — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Givan: Was that Brussels calling?

Ms J McCann: Sorry?

Mr Givan: Was that Brussels calling? *[Laughter.]*

Ms J McCann: It is a statutory duty to engage in the programme for action to ensure that the judiciary in the North of Ireland is reflective of society. What is really important is that the judiciary is not only independent and transparent but reflective of all society.

I will touch on some of the issues raised, particularly the lack of female representation in the higher tiers of the

judiciary. Approximately 43% of the judiciary are women. Although women make up over half of lay magistrates and district civil judges, which are in the lower tier of the judiciary, none are High Court judges. Women County Court and District Magistrates' Court judges do not make up even one quarter of the quota. The under-representation of women is a very serious issue. It may not be discrimination, but NIJAC and other training organisations need to take it on board because gender inequality is a real problem.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member agree with me that one concern arose when, on a separate issue, the Committee got the list of the main recipients of legal aid and found that only one of the top 50 on the Bar side was female?

Ms J McCann: We listened to the people who came before the Committee. Although we are not saying that there is any discrimination, we are saying that the issue has to be resolved and that there has to be equality. Women make up 52% of the population, yet there is not one woman High Court judge. That is a real indictment of the judiciary as a whole.

There is also a glaring gap in respect of people from ethnic minorities. Only 1.35% of the judiciary are non-white. If we are really to have a true reflection of society, we need to get women and people from all community and ethnic backgrounds into those positions in the judiciary. The key issue is how we get an independent judiciary that is reflective of society. People can have different views on how that is achieved, but that is the important thing.

I thank Members for their contributions. I ask the Assembly to approve the recommendation of the Committee for Justice that there be no changes to the current process for judicial appointments and removals in the North and to endorse the intention of the Committee to undertake a further review of the judicial appointments and removal process. The key elements, which were highlighted in Committee, are the glaring gaps that I outlined. The judiciary is still not totally representative of all the community. It is very important that that changes.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Justice on its review of judicial appointments and the recommendation that there should be no changes to the current process for judicial appointments and removals in Northern Ireland at this time; and endorses the intention of the Committee to undertake a further review of the judicial appointments and removals processes.

2.15 pm

Superannuation Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

Mr D Bradley (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 28 September 2012, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Superannuation Bill [NIA 6/11-15].

Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Éirím leis an rún a mholadh. Is é an aidhm atá leis an rún síneadh a chur le Céim an Choiste den Bhille a fhéachann le deireadh a chur leis an riachtanas atá ann faoi láthair toil na gceardchumann a bheith le hathruithe aimhleasacha ar bith a dhéantar le scéim chúitimh na státseirbhíse. The Superannuation Bill, as you know, completed its Second Stage on 26 March 2012 and was referred to the Committee for Finance and Personnel for the Committee Stage.

The Bill has four clauses, and its purpose is to amend the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 to remove the requirement whereby the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) must secure the consent of the trade unions to introduce detrimental changes to the current terms of the civil service compensation scheme; and to introduce new requirements for the Department to consult the trade unions, with the aim of having reached agreement on detrimental changes.

Initially, the Committee heard from the Department on the proposed Bill in June 2011 following the introduction of the Superannuation Act 2010 in Westminster. The Committee then received a pre-introductory stage briefing from the Department on 7 March 2012. By removing the requirement for trade union consent, the Superannuation Bill will allow the Department to amend the Civil Service compensation scheme for Northern Ireland to align the amount of compensation payable to Northern Ireland Civil Service staff and other members of the scheme with that payable to civil servants in Britain. It should be noted that under the current Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972, such amendments to the compensation scheme can be made by subordinate legislation, which is not subject to the usual Assembly control procedures.

The Committee heard evidence from a panel of trade union representatives on 27 March 2012. During that session, members were informed that even though the trade unions had been provided with information and were aware that the Department intended to proceed with the Bill, negotiations had not yet taken place. The Committee subsequently wrote to the Minister to urge the Department to engage with the trade unions on the matter proactively and expeditiously, especially given that the outcome of any negotiations could help to inform the Committee's deliberations during the Bill's Committee Stage. The Department has indicated that it intends to proceed with formal consultation. The dialogue between the Department and the trade unions, as well as the overall outcome, will be directly relevant to the Committee's consideration of the Bill.

On 9 May 2012, the Committee heard evidence from the Equality Commission and the Northern Ireland Human

Rights Commission. During that evidence, equality and human rights issues that will require clarification and careful consideration by the Committee were identified.

The Minister has indicated that the pensions forum will be reconstituted on a more formal basis, specific to consultation on pension and compensation scheme reforms. He also stated that the next meetings of the forum have been scheduled for 15 May and 19 June and that, at the next meeting, departmental officials will propose that a further meeting is dedicated to consultation on the clauses of the Bill.

The Minister also gave an assurance that his officials will provide a further update on the outcome of the consultations in due course. That update is scheduled to take place at the Committee meeting on 4 July 2012. As the outcome of the planned dialogue between DFP and the trade unions could inform the Committee deliberations on the provisions of the Bill, it will be important that the proposed date for extending the Committee Stage provides for that, particularly if the deliberations affect any provisions within or arising from the Bill.

The Committee also invited written submissions in relation to the Bill, which closed on Friday 11 May, and those may lead to further oral evidence sessions. In view of those considerations, the Committee believes that the proposed extension to the Committee Stage of the Bill is necessary to enable it to fulfil its legislative scrutiny functions. I therefore ask the House to support the motion and to extend the Committee Stage of the Superannuation Bill. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 28 September 2012, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Superannuation Bill [NIA 6/11-15].

Assembly Business

Mr Weir: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I wish to raise a point of order in relation to Question Time. I am raising it before Question Time because, although there are a number of, shall we say, culprits in today's Question Time, it is a wider issue, and I do not want to be seen to be having a go at individuals today. The issue relates to the number of particularly late withdrawals of questions from Question Time, which not only is discourteous to the House but has an impact on a number of Departments when they are preparing answers and material for Question Time, which then leads to a waste of effort. I wonder if the matter could be referred to the Speaker's Office to see what action he can take to try to curb the problem through some level of punitive action against those who could be described as repeat offenders. If that is not possible, the Speaker might consider referring the issue to the Committee on Procedures to see what way we can tackle the problem.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: In the past, the Speaker has taken a very dim view of the waste of time that occurs when questions are withdrawn and of the amount of work that went into putting the questions together. It is a matter of a number of different procedures. The Procedures Committee may have to look at that again, but the Whips and the parties also have a responsibility to ensure that Members at least look in advance to see whether they will be here. I know that that is not always possible, but it is certainly recommended. However, I will refer back to the Speaker again to see what further action can be taken.

Mr Weir: I appreciate that the nature of the issue is quite complex in terms of solutions, and I do not expect an instantaneous answer in that regard. Thank you for referring that back.

Lord Morrow: Further to that point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Since you have given an undertaking to the House to have a look at this issue, will you also look at the number of questions that have been withdrawn and those withdrawn just before Question Time in particular?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That will all be part of the review. We do not have enough time to begin the next item of business before Question Time.

The sitting was suspended at 2.23 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair)—

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Speaker: Questions 1, 3, 4, 5 and 10 have been withdrawn and require written answers. I know that the issue was raised in a point of order before this afternoon's Question Time by, I think, Peter Weir and Lord Morrow. I have to say that I have been concerned about it for some time. There are Members who just come to the Table and withdraw questions for whatever reason — sometimes they give no reason — not realising the huge resources that Departments use in formulating answers to questions. It is something that I am going to raise with the Business Committee and have already raised with the Committee on Procedures. It is an issue that I intend to deal with sooner rather than later.

OFMDFM: Outward Investment

2. **Mr I McCrea** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the importance of their Department's involvement in helping companies in the development of outward investment and growth. (AQO 1928/11-15)

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): The Northern Ireland Executive are committed to expanding their reach into the global export market and to ensuring that our local private sector can compete on a global scale. In March this year, we published our Programme for Government and economic strategy, both of which set out a clear framework for rebuilding and rebalancing our economy. Competing in the global economy is a key element of that framework. We have set ourselves ambitious growth targets, including a 20% increase in manufacturing exports and a 60% increase in exports to emerging economies such as India, China and Brazil.

At our request, Invest Northern Ireland has engaged in a comprehensive range of market visits to assist Northern Ireland companies in growing and developing export markets. It is clear, however, that our business base has for too long relied on the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain markets. As a result, the Northern Ireland Executive are determined to do all they can to provide the assistance that our businesses need in establishing a presence in overseas markets. These are instances, particularly in high-value sales propositions, where our personal participation can open doors, especially at a political level. It is important that our Government be seen as fully accessible not just to overseas stakeholders but to Northern Ireland businesses. Ministerial involvement reinforces the message that we are pro-business and are committed to growing the economy.

Invest Northern Ireland will continue to seek to maximise the effective use of Ministers in overseas markets and will combine trade and foreign direct investment elements, where possible. As we go forward, developing our international relations can only help to drive forward our export sales.

The Executive are fully committed to proactively supporting Northern Ireland businesses in their efforts to succeed on the international stage.

Later this year, the deputy First Minister and I will lead a trade delegation to China. China is one of the most important emerging markets in the world today and represents a significant opportunity for local business to expand into a rapidly developing market. Invest Northern Ireland has already undertaken significant work in China, and we are beginning to build significant relations that, I believe, will have a positive effect on our economy.

Mr I McCrea: I am delighted to be here to put forward my question. The First Minister referred to the need to move away from our dependency on the Irish Republic and Great Britain alone for exports. Can the First Minister detail what incentives Invest NI has to help support companies that wish to export?

Mr P Robinson: I think that everybody recognises that the Republic of Ireland is going through a fairly difficult time at present. There has been a drop of, I think, about 19% in exports to the Republic in the past recorded year. Thankfully, trade with Great Britain — it is not described as “exports” because we are all part of the United Kingdom — has increased to take up a lot of that slack. We have had very significant increases in exports, albeit from a lower base, to some emerging economies.

We have a population of 1.7 million people to 1.8 million people. If we really want to grow our economy, we need export-driven growth, by looking at a larger sales market. We should not just concentrate on those markets where we have been fairly successful in the past but should look at emerging economies such as China, the Middle East, the Far East and Brazil, where there is real potential for growth.

In that context, Invest Northern Ireland in the first instance will have seminars in Northern Ireland to encourage local companies to look towards exports. It will do that by having seminars that will indicate locations where there is a potential export market.

It will also then look at sectors where there is a potential for increasing exports and, at the same time, it will obviously look at subject matters, like, for instance, the Olympics, and the potential there is for companies to be able to buy into some of the markets that may emerge, whether it is from the Olympics or other specific subjects. It will then provide companies with research facilities and help with funding to bring companies into emerging markets. It will have trade delegations and exhibition stands at international markets. All of those are substantially funded by Invest Northern Ireland, and we are very interested to hear from companies if there is further assistance that we can give to them, whether on translations or legal fees.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the work that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) is doing on taking advantage of the economic opportunities in all of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) countries. Will the First Minister outline the potential growth opportunities for local companies in the Indian and Chinese marketplace in particular, and perhaps outline the scale of those opportunities?

Mr P Robinson: You only need to look at the size of those countries and the number of people who are living there to know the potential. India has a population of about 1.1 billion people, and China a population of about 1.3 billion people. The size and scale of being able to export into those countries, for a community of 1.7 million or 1.8 million people, are vast. In China, for instance, there is a very considerable need for food to be going into that country, as it can only supply about 80% of the food that is required in China. For a country of our size, which has very significant potential in the agrifood industry, 20% of a market of 1.3 billion people shows just how much we could gain from it. That is why the deputy First Minister and I have been looking at those kinds of markets and trying to encourage companies here to look at them.

I accept that, for companies here, it can often be a bit off-putting trying to get into a market, particularly where there are language barriers, different cultures, different legal requirements and compliance issues that have to be resolved. Invest Northern Ireland is very keen to support local companies to ensure that we get our share of those emerging markets.

Mrs Overend: I thank the First Minister for his answers so far. It is very interesting to hear all that is going on there. Does the First Minister agree that the most easily accessible market is actually the Executive's public sector procurement? Will he outline what he is doing to open up that £2 billion-a-year market to our own microbusinesses and small and medium-sized enterprises?

Mr P Robinson: In terms of our own procurement, we have to recognise that the central procurement unit has to operate within the legal constraints of European regulations. However, there are ways of putting out contracts for procurement that can make it more attractive to local companies. Some of that may be by reducing the size and breaking up some of the contracts so that it is easier for local companies to buy into them. Also, the way that various products are specified can make it more beneficial for local companies to do that. We have been encouraging that.

We have also been encouraging the use of social clauses in procurement, so that there is on-the-ground benefit to people, whether it is through apprenticeships or through taking on long-term unemployed people as part of those contracts. We are looking at that issue and trying to make changes that will make it more beneficial for local companies and give them a better opportunity to be part of the procurement sales.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the First Minister for his detailed answer. I agree with him that the emphasis needs to be on exports for our companies.

What more could the Executive do to assist in the research and development that is necessary for our companies to develop the sort of export goods and services that he is talking about?

Mr P Robinson: I am satisfied that Invest Northern Ireland is doing what is required. What we need to do is ensure that companies know what is available to them. In the first instance, Invest Northern Ireland will have at its headquarters its own database and information on what can be done and what companies they can match people up with. Research is available at Invest Northern

Ireland's local headquarters, and there is also the ability for research projects and programmes to be undertaken. Invest Northern Ireland will give very substantial grants for that and allow elements of those reports to be taken back by the companies. It is also prepared to help to fund companies that want to go into emerging markets to see what can be done. So, a range of assistance can be given.

One factor is that there are companies that are doing enough to be able to sustain the level of labour, maybe just family labour, within their own company, but there is still massive potential for those companies to grow beyond the comfortable level they are at presently. As things get tighter locally, you will find that a lot of companies will start to think that it is beneficial for them to look at a marketplace that is wider than the home market, and by home market I mean the Northern Ireland market plus the surrounding market. If we have a 20% drop in exports to the Republic of Ireland, you can see how attractive it will be for some companies to start looking beyond even the European market to see where they can make sales.

There is, of course, the further role that Invest Northern Ireland can have in bringing various sectors to Northern Ireland and introducing them to companies here that they can do business with. However, when speaking to companies, the big issue always seems to be the same: their lack of confidence in going in for the first time to markets where there are different languages, cultural approaches and legal constraints.

Mr Speaker: Questions 3, 4 and 5 have been withdrawn.

Welfare Reform: Child Poverty

6. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the impact of welfare reform on child poverty levels. (AQO 1932/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer this question.

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Minister for Social Development has indicated that work is still ongoing to develop a more accurate estimate of the combined impact of the proposed welfare reforms. The Department for Social Development's early estimates are based on the application of the calculations of the Department for Work and Pensions to the situation here. Those early estimates suggest that over 10,000 children will be lifted out of poverty as a result of the introduction of universal credit. That would be a real benefit in our fight against child poverty. The Executive recently established a subcommittee to consider the implications of welfare reform. It is considering how to optimise the delivery of welfare reform in Northern within the financial and legislative constraints under which we operate. To date, the subcommittee has met on four occasions since the start of the year, with the next meeting scheduled to take place later today, 14 May.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the junior Minister for his answer. Does the Minister not agree that the estimate of 10,000 is entirely dependent on people taking up employment? Indeed, given the high levels of unemployment and the lack of jobs, is it not the case that

we will see an increase in child poverty because of welfare reform?

Mr Bell: That is a question that we have to tackle. Obviously, welfare reform is primarily within the purview of the Department for Social Development, and it has raised the issue of parity. We know what the problem is in Northern Ireland. We know that somewhere between 120,000 and 130,000 young people live in households with an income that is less than 60% of the UK median income. So, we know what the problem is, but we need to know what we are going to do about it.

2.45 pm

We are concentrating on looking at the things that we know will change. For example, the earnings disregard programme, which is a pilot scheme that has just been cleared and is now set to go out to tender, will look at how we can allow more families to retain the money that comes into their household. We know that we need to lift our young people's educational achievement — the number of young people gaining five good GCSEs. We know that the support offered for young families through the family nurse partnership programme, particularly where there is vulnerability in a family, helps. We know that we need to develop an effective childcare strategy. That is why we set aside £12 million during this mandate for the childcare strategy.

The point that was made is correct. We know that we need to co-ordinate our economic and social policies. We are doing that through the Delivering Social Change framework. We also have an advisory group on alleviating hardship, which is helping us to create the link between the economic strategy and our own social policy. We are committed to pushing through a successful economy that will have benefits across all the community.

The areas in which we will do our best to tackle child poverty are finance, services to children, improving neighbourhoods and environments, and improving parents' employability.

Mr Hamilton: Although we are right to be wary of many of the aspects of welfare reform, some of the impacts are speculative at this stage. Does the junior Minister agree that one thing that is certain is that, if we in Northern Ireland were to breach parity, it would come at an unaffordable cost to Northern Ireland and, consequently, would do more damage to the vulnerable people whom we want to protect?

Mr Bell: My colleague makes his point very well. Obviously, the money that we receive comes centrally. It would be a grave mistake to break parity, because it would leave us having to find considerable sums of money from within our Budget. However, that is not to say that we should be complacent about what we can do. Through the social investment fund and the social protection fund, we have looked at what we can do to ensure that our children get the best opportunities that we can give them. Junior Minister Anderson and I have been chairing bilateral meetings with each Minister to see how we can lift our young people out of poverty, particularly where there are synergies, such as between health and education, and how we can maximise those.

Our main strategy will be Delivering Social Change, which we hope will deliver a sustained reduction in poverty. We have a twin goal. The first one is just to reduce the number of children in poverty. Secondly, we want to break inter-

generational poverty. Therefore, Delivering Social Change will be key. We have taken key officials from every Department, and we are chairing those meetings. We want to support the mainstreaming of education, health, employment and justice programmes to get a co-ordinated effort to tackle the long-term problems of deprivation, particularly where there are geographical clusters of deprivation that prevent progress in each of the programmes and that damage communities, exacerbate social tensions and impact on the economy and the wider population. It will be about improving employability, ensuring that parents and children's caregivers have better access to higher-value jobs, and seeing where we can allow parents and families to keep more money in their home.

Mr Agnew: I thank the junior Minister for his answers. I know that this is an area that he has a keen interest in.

Will he give an assurance that the figures of 120,000 to 130,000 children who live in households that are below the 60% median UK income will not simply be reduced by changing how we measure and define child poverty as some way of trying to improve how the figures look?

Mr Bell: The absolute determination is to do what we can to reduce child poverty. We can debate child poverty through a statistical analysis. We can start with a relative low-income target. We can then talk about an absolute income target. We can talk about a persistent poverty target. We can also talk about an amalgamation of each of those targets.

The target used in the Child Poverty Act 2010 is 60% of the UK median average. There will be no attempt to manipulate that figure. That is the figure set down in the Act.

Although statistics are important and inform what we are doing, what we do know is that getting our children to achieve five good GCSEs is absolutely critical to their employability. That is why, at a bilateral meeting with the Education Minister, junior Minister Anderson and I focused particularly on what we know and on the evidence base of what works. How do we get those children to achieve five good GCSEs? We know that provision between the ages of nought and six is absolutely critical. Therefore, health programmes, Sure Start and Home-Start schemes, family nurse partnerships or the scheme in Londonderry that looks at a family hub to provide social support directly to a family in need are key to laying the foundations in early years to getting five good GCSEs. We will target our energies at ensuring that, where possible, families can retain more of their income and that children have the right foundation and building blocks in life to get the five good GCSEs that will allow them to raise themselves out of poverty, which is, in many cases, inter-generational.

Summer Intervention Fund

7. **Mr Easton** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they intend to provide summer intervention funding this year. (AQO 1933/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: We are committed to working with all young people to build a united community in which everyone can play a positive role in shaping a brighter, better future. Young people will play a critical role as we continue to move forward in building a shared future in Northern Ireland.

Unfortunately, every year, a small minority of young people are at risk of being caught up in tensions, and some get involved in antisocial behaviour. Every year, we provide a total of £0.5 million for distribution across the education and library boards and by Belfast City Council to address those issues. The projects involve work with young people to reduce and eliminate the risks involved, including taking young people off the streets and away from tensions, along with programmes designed to encourage greater understanding and relationship-building across the community. The initiatives are rolled out in partnership with the local community and are targeted at key areas and groups at particular sensitive times of the year. We know that the work is welcomed by local communities and helps alleviate a range of local problems. The deputy First Minister and I recognise that interventions need to be longer term and strategic. That will form part of our approach to young people in the good relations strategy and action plan.

Mr Easton: I thank the First Minister for his answer. Does he agree that bonfire management schemes are to be welcomed and that the Community Relations Council and local councils should continue to use OFMDFM for good relations funding to support them, especially in communities such as Kilcooley, Whitehill and Rathgael? Does he agree that that should be included in the cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI) strategy?

Mr P Robinson: I have personal experience, from a local government standpoint, of supporting the schemes. They are valuable in ensuring that the bonfire season — if I can call it that — is turned into a wider festivity, that keeping estates as clean as possible during that time is encouraged and that health and safety issues are paramount. I therefore encourage the scheme. Some councils will not involve themselves, or have not involved themselves thus far. I encourage them to do so. I am glad to hear that Kilcooley is getting support from, I think, North Down Borough Council and the Community Relations Council. That is good to see. I can see many benefits in that, and I hope that it is encouraged.

As far as the CSI strategy is concerned, I think it unfortunate that some people are trying to posture and party-politicise on the issues. It is sadly the case that some of those who publicly make the most noise are making the least contribution. Perhaps the Alliance Party in particular will try to focus more on getting an agreed result instead of going out and trying to indicate that it is somehow leading the way, when, in fact, it is dragging its feet on the issue. Perhaps its Members can get their head out of the sand, start attending more meetings, stop trying to delay meetings from taking place and make more of a contribution at the meetings.

Ms Ruane: An féidir leis an Chéad-Aire eolas a thabhairt dúinn faoin straitéis CSI? Will the First Minister provide us with an update on the CSI strategy?

Mr P Robinson: During the time of the Labour Administration, we had the 'A Shared Future' document. It was recognised by many that it fell short in a number of respects. We particularly need an action plan of specific interventions that can be made and for how progress can be made.

Of course, we have an Executive of five parties and there is a need to ensure that we have a programme that everyone can buy into. Of necessity, that means that we must

recognise that not everything that every party wants will be in the final document. Any one party might say, "Here is our strategy; take it or leave it; there are red lines all around this, and unless you do exactly what we want, we will not buy into it and we will rubbish the overall strategy when it comes out." Not only is that a childish attitude to adopt, it does little service to the future of good relations in Northern Ireland. There are many areas where I would like to see more in the strategy than will ultimately be agreed. Many other parties will feel the same. However, I believe that we are making real progress in that Committee in respect of getting an overall document. It will be a document that everyone would like to be slightly different, but, at least at the end of it, we should have a document that will have the widest degree of acceptance, not just in the Executive and Assembly, but in our society as a whole.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the Minister's response on the summer intervention scheme, which is what the original question was about. Will the Minister, in his usual spirit of goodwill, tell us how much money will be available for it? Are the outward bound trips organised on a cross-community basis, and is the PSNI involved?

Mr P Robinson: At the moment, we are putting about £500,000 a year into the schemes. However, in good relations overall, we spend about £10 million or £11 million a year. I think it better that a lot of that money is put through local government, where there is grassroots recognition of what can be done. In some cases, that will mean having activities in a local area, and in others it will take people from one area away from that vicinity for a period. That is best addressed by people in the local area, and that is why councils are the best vehicles for it. If there are specific requirements from any of the councils around Northern Ireland for more funding for specific purposes, we will consider that and attempt to address those needs.

Mr Nesbitt: I am sure that the First Minister is aware that there are those who feel that intervention funding of this nature is tantamount to a reward for bad behaviour. Does he accept that that is a valid perception?

Mr P Robinson: Yes. There are those who feel that, and there is always a difficulty, should there be violence in an area, in going in to see what has caused the violence and what contribution can be made to prevent it from happening again. That, for many decades, has been the case.

At the same time, if there are social problems or problems that have arisen because of interface difficulties, it seems to me that those have to be addressed. Simply to ignore them and allow them to be repeated does not seem to be a sensible course for government to take. However, we need to be mindful that we should not be doing anything that encourages more violence in that or in other areas. It is a conundrum that we all have to face, and we have to be careful to address those issues in such a way that no groups are funded but that interventions in the area are funded. That is the best way for it to be done. It is about how it is delivered to make change.

European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations

8. **Mr Weir** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action their Department is taking to progress the European year of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity. (AQO 1934/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will ask my colleague junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer that question.

3.00 pm

Mr Bell: To progress the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, we are driving forward a range of measures, including a small grant scheme, proposals for legislation to help to tackle age discrimination, and, of course, the revised older people's strategy. That will improve older people's quality of life and help to tackle the inequalities that they face. We have committed £100,000 to a small grant scheme for projects to promote active ageing and solidarity between the generations. Our legislation and revised older people's strategy will be progressed in the Delivering Social Change framework.

In the autumn, we will consult on our revised older people's strategy. At the same time, we will consult on proposals for legislation to outlaw unfair discrimination on the grounds of age in the provision of goods, facilities and services. We will continue to take account of the views of the Commissioner for Older People and the older people's advisory panel as we finalise our proposals. We are also taking their advice to ensure that our consultations are appropriately timed and targeted and are designed to facilitate the participation of our older people, who play such a valuable role in our society.

Third sector organisations, the Equality Commission, the Commissioner for Older People and the older people's advisory panel are all involved in developing a programme of events that will showcase the principles of the year. Those will include an event to mark Older People's Day in October. The calendar for those events is on the OFMDFM website. It will be regularly updated with information from our stakeholder organisations.

Education

Nursery Schools: North Down

1. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to address the lack of nursery school places in the North Down area. (AQO 1942/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Funded preschool places are available in statutory nursery schools and units and in voluntary and private settings that participate in the preschool education expansion programme. The process for placing children in preschool settings from September 2012 is not yet complete. However, the South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that, at the conclusion of stage 1 of the open enrolment admissions process, 72 children who live in BT19 and BT20 did not secure a preschool place. A total of 56 of those parents nominated further preferences from the list of settings that had vacancies. Those parents will be advised of the outcome of their further applications when stage 2 of the process concludes on 1 June. The 16 children whose parents chose not to nominate further preferences remain unplaced. Their applications will remain on the list of those settings that were unable to offer them a place. If a vacancy occurs, their application will be reconsidered.

There have been 22,800 applications for places across the North. Of those, 94% in their final preschool year have already secured a place, and 84% secured a place in their first preference setting. As I stated in the recent debate on preschool admissions, education and library boards have taken steps to address the need for additional places and have brought in new providers from the voluntary and private sectors. Existing providers have also made further places available. The education and library boards are working to ensure that as many children as possible, including those in the North Down area, are placed.

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for his answer. I know of several parents whose children do not yet have a preschool place. Every year, we seem to have exactly the same problem. Will the Minister tell us what plans he has for future years so that we do not have the same problem, with many children left without preschool places?

Mr O'Dowd: As I emphasised, 94%, or thereabouts, have already been placed. The process is still under way, and ends on 1 June. My officials and board officials have had a number of meetings. There have been ongoing engagements with the boards to see how and where we need to put in further resources. I have made available £1.2 million this year for preschool places.

I have some anecdotal evidence that a number of parents put only one preference on their form. If those children do not get that preference, they will remain unplaced, which is regrettable. In some circumstances, parents may mistakenly believe that if they put down more than one preference, their first preference is somewhat disregarded because they have put down more than one and have less opportunity to get the first preference. That is not the case at all. There are lessons to be learned from last year and this year. The system is improving all the time, and I want to see further improvements.

I believe that the investment of time and finances in this year will pay dividends over coming years. I am at an advanced stage of preparing legislation for the July/August birthday criteria, which will be presented to the Education Committee within the next number of weeks.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for the work that he is doing to try to address the situation. Will he update the House on whether he has explored the flexibility in the statutory sector to see whether it could have a temporary ratio of 14:1 for this year?

Mr O'Dowd: I have examined all matters pertaining to this. I work in a highly legislated Department. Legislation covers every move I make and every move my officials make; rightly so in some circumstances, particularly in health and safety matters. Where leeway in the legislation allows providers to take in greater numbers while ensuring a child's safety, we will allow that, but there may be health and safety concerns about stretching the ratio of adults to children. However, we will judge each provider on its circumstances.

Mrs Dobson: Has the Minister's Department carried out any work to identify black spots of nursery-school provision, where there are no available nursery places for 10, 20 or 30 miles?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes, that work regularly takes place through the preschool education advisory groups, which are attached to each education board. My Department and board officials

have, as I said in my original answer, engaged regularly over the past weeks, and we have asked boards to identify hotspots with limited or no access to preschool places for young people. We have asked the boards what proposals they have to correct that. That work is ongoing, and I will meet my officials again in the morning to discuss those plans.

I do not think that we are working on scales of 10, 20 or 30 miles, but we are working in some areas where pupils must travel a significant distance, which I want to be reduced. We will put new providers in place where we can. As I said to the previous questioner, where there is flexibility in the legislation, I can assure you that we will use it.

Mr McDevitt: Further to the commitment that the Minister made on the issue in the Programme for Government, will he outline specifically how many development proposals for the creation of new or additional preschool places in areas of high demand are on his desk?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not have the exact figures in front of me. I regularly judge and assess development proposals for preschool places. I judge and make decisions on each case on its merits as it comes before me. It is not up to the Department of Education to produce development proposals for preschool settings; it is up to individual settings and boards. When they do so, those proposals are acted on as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Schools: Admissions

2. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Education what support or appeals mechanism is in place for schools which are oversubscribed but could possibly take in more pupils.

(AQO 1943/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My statement to the Assembly on 26 September 2011 made clear my intention that popular schools should be allowed to grow in the context of the area plan. This process will shape the future pattern of education delivery by identifying the projected need and proposals to meet that need. If the planning process points to the need for the growth of a particular school in an area, a development proposal is currently required. However, I will keep this under review.

Until the area plans are approved, all admissions and enrolment numbers will continue to be administered in the usual way, which means that schools must use the mechanisms already in place to manage their numbers. If a school is oversubscribed, it can make an application to the Department for a temporary variation of its approved numbers to accommodate extra pupils. If there is pressure for places in a given area, the Department will ensure that every family gets a place in their preferred category of school. However, the Department cannot guarantee that a pupil will get a place in one particular school.

There is no mechanism for schools to appeal the Department's statutory responsibility to determine admissions and enrolment numbers. However, before setting the numbers, the Department consults with the board of governors, the relevant education and library board and, where appropriate, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. At times, schools — unfortunately or fortunately depending on how you view the school and its popularity — have to

apply distance to their criteria to have future pupils qualify. That will always discriminate against rural dwellers. Does the Minister realise and accept that that will discriminate against rural dwellers even though a school could be the closest one to those people?

Mr O'Dowd: I certainly do not want to have any policies on our statutes that discriminate against rural dwellers, and if the Member wants to bring cases to my attention, I am more than happy to look at them in more detail.

It is the statutory obligation of each board of governors to set entry criteria. That is a matter for those boards. They have to take credence of a number of legislative matters when they do that, and, if they do, the entrance criteria are legal.

It is always difficult at this time of year, and I understand that Members are being lobbied by parents who are disappointed that children have not gotten into schools. However, by and large, we want to ensure that we have a sustainable schools estate and that schools have adequate numbers attending to make them sustainable. I have brought forward area planning, and we are looking at the area plans of the boards to ensure that the current make-up of our schools estate meets the needs of the broader community. Those area plans are now being looked at by my Department, and they will then go back to the boards and out to public consultation. At that stage, there will be ample opportunity for all those issues to be fully debated and corrected through area planning.

Mr Swann: What action is taken against schools that allow themselves to become oversubscribed without receiving temporary variation either from an education and library board or the Department?

Mr O'Dowd: It depends on the level and on how often a school is involved in that practice. A school may receive a warning letter in the first year. Following that, it can have finances deducted for any pupils that it has taken in over and above its allocated quota. We do not want to be in confrontational position with the schools on that, and my officials regularly engage with schools that are in that position and try to work through those matters. However, when schools breach the rules that govern this, there are measures that the Department can take. It has taken those in the past and, if need be, will continue to take them in the future.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister has outlined the position on schools, as institutions, that are seeking additional numbers, but what appeals mechanism is in place for individual parents whose child has not gained a place at an oversubscribed school?

Mr O'Dowd: For applications to primary and post-primary school, parents can apply to the independent appeal tribunal convened by the local education and library board. That tribunal will test whether the admissions criteria of the schools were applied correctly. If it finds that the criteria have not been correctly applied, it can direct the school in question to admit the pupil. There is also the exceptional circumstances body that looks at exceptional circumstances for pupils in that case. So, there are a number of appeal mechanisms in place for parents.

Teachers: Employment

3. **Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Education how many teachers in the Western Education and Library Board area took a retirement package and are now back teaching on a full-time or part-time basis. (AQO 1944/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are 11 teachers employed on a permanent basis who were prematurely retired from schools in the Western Education and Library Board area. Those teachers are employed on a part-time basis on contracts ranging from 10 to 20 hours a week. A further 128 teachers who were prematurely retired from schools in the Western Board area have been employed on a temporary basis between September 2011 and March 2012.

I should point out, however, that the decision on whom to appoint to a particular post rests entirely with the board of governors of an individual school. However, my Department has, over the years, encouraged employers to maximise the employment opportunity for newly qualified and experienced non-retired teachers. From 1 September 2011, prematurely retired teachers seeking re-employment are now paid a flat rate of pay equivalent to that of a newly qualified teacher. That is intended to act as a disincentive to such teachers in seeking re-employment on a substitute basis. In addition, changes have been made to the common funding scheme to incentivise schools to employ newly qualified and experienced non-retired teachers.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his response, and he has more or less answered part of my supplementary question. What mechanism will he put in place to ensure that newly qualified teachers at least get priority over those who have been in the teaching profession for many years, have retired and have then taken up posts again?

3.15 pm

Mr O'Dowd: As the Member acknowledged, I have responded to those points. We have made it less favourable for newly retired teachers to return to the teaching profession. They are now paid at the flat rate, when they were previously paid at the rate they received when they retired, which, due to their length of service, would have been higher in many instances. My Department and the employing authorities also challenge boards of governors. We receive regular feedback and reports from boards of governors on employment matters and the use of substitute teachers, and when it is found that retired teachers have been used, the boards and schools are asked why that is the case. However, the power lies with the boards of governors. The issue has been raised time and again by me and other Members, and I again appeal to boards of governors to give newly qualified teachers the opportunity to enter the workforce and to gain the much-needed experience they require to fulfil their careers as teachers.

Mr Kinahan: What discussions has the Minister had with the Minister for Employment and Learning on the numbers of graduate teachers who are struggling to find suitable employment through no fault of their own? What is the Department doing to match vacancies and places in the future?

Mr O'Dowd: As is my duty, I have had discussions with the Employment and Learning Minister about the teacher-training numbers for this year. Those numbers will be announced in due course.

Many young people leave our universities, etc, and are unable to find employment in their given fields. The question that I and other Members have to ask is to what degree we should cut back on our teacher-training numbers. In the past six years, there has been a reduction of almost 25% in teacher-training numbers, and if we continue to reduce the number of teacher trainees, the future viability of our teacher-training colleges will be brought into question. That is a matter for the Employment and Learning Minister. The Assembly will have to decide whether it wants to remove our teacher-training colleges and whether it wants our young people to travel to England and elsewhere to be trained as teachers.

Despite all the negative publicity about the employment opportunities for newly qualified teachers, I can assure you that, this year, teacher training courses will again be heavily oversubscribed by young people wishing to become teachers. That is the reality that we face. I ask those who are choosing careers to have long discussions with their careers teachers and to think carefully about what direction their careers will take. There is no guarantee of employment in any field today, but I would caution anyone who plans to go into teacher training to think about it carefully. There is no doubt that teaching is a rewarding career, but they should think carefully before they enter that career.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister has outlined the measures the Department is taking to limit the re-employment of prematurely retired teachers. How successful have those measures, including the changes to the common funding scheme, proved to be? What limitations does he face in what he can do on that issue?

Mr O'Dowd: We have seen a year-on-year reduction in the employment of prematurely retired teachers in our schools; there is a continuing downward trend. We are limited in what we can do by employment legislation, and we would be in breach of that legislation if we were to bar qualified teachers who had recently retired from returning to the service. That is just the reality of the situation. However, we are looking at all measures under the legislation and are having a positive impact on that matter.

Mr Storey: Number 5, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Four?

Mr Storey: Four, even.

Educational Underachievement

4. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Education, in the light of the success of the Achieving Belfast initiative, what plans he has to extend this type of programme to other areas to address the issue of underachievement. (AQO 1945/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The aim of Achieving Belfast was to raise standards in schools that serve disadvantaged areas. I have no plans to introduce similar programmes elsewhere. However, I have asked for a major review of the common funding scheme, as I do not believe it adequately takes account of targeting social need. That work will take on board the lessons learned from Achieving Belfast and the similar Achieving Derry.

The inspectorate published 'An Evaluation of the Early Progress of the Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry/Bright

Futures Programmes' in May 2010. That evaluation report highlighted strengths in both programmes. Those included the work undertaken by the Belfast Board and the Western Board in supporting and challenging schools to improve their work with other statutory and community partners in raising standards. Areas for improvement were also identified, and they included the needs to develop more effective school development planning processes and to disseminate more effectively and widely best practice across participating schools.

Mr Storey: I am disappointed that the Minister has no plans to roll out the template given in the Belfast initiative, given that the gap reduced under the Belfast initiative. [Interruption.]

That sound in the background is like a boat coming into harbour.

A Member: It is the Titanic.

Mr Storey: I hope not. [Laughter.]

Given that the gap between schools reduced from 13% to 2%, why is he discounting the fact that this programme was successful and what —

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

Mr Storey: — has he to say to those 10 teachers who lost their job at the end of March as a result of his Department's failure to secure the funding to keep this project alive?

Mr O'Dowd: There may be a danger of the Member's new adviser looking at the past through rose-tinted glasses. The Belfast Board has made inroads in tackling underachievement in socially deprived areas, but much more work is required before we can say that we have had a success story. We will learn the lessons from Achieving Belfast, and there are some good lessons.

As with any project, we want to ensure that we learn from mistakes made, opportunities missed, or issues thrown up that were not envisaged before the project was put in place. However, let us be sure of this: my Department is not simply interested in planting initiatives to tackle a specific geographical area. My Department's policies are in place to tackle educational underachievement across the board; to have in place a coherent set of policies that will ensure that all young people out there, regardless of their socio-economic background, have an opportunity to succeed in education. In that regard, I believe that we are going in the right direction. As I said, looking to the past through rose-tinted glass is not always the best way to look forward.

Mr A Maginness: The Minister referred to lessons to be learned from the Achieving Belfast initiative. Will he outline what lessons he believes have been learned that can be applied to this and other schemes?

Mr O'Dowd: Whether the lessons are from Achieving Belfast or elsewhere, it has been shown that strong leadership in the classroom, school and community ensures that educational achievement rises. Communities left behind due to whatever reason, whether through generations of discrimination or generations of deprivation, are also left behind educationally. However, there are also fine examples in socially deprived areas of schools that are shining lights of educational attainment. When we examine those schools, we find strong leadership in the principal's office and in the classroom and a connection with the community, which

shows that that community wants to take on the challenges of education.

Those are the lessons to be learned from Achieving Belfast and the project in Derry or anywhere else. I believe that the policies that we now have in place will allow us to move forward in that mindset. Strong leadership — in the principal's office, the classroom or the community — will assist young people to move away from educational under-attainment.

Mr McGimpsey: In areas of disadvantage in south Belfast, such as the Village, Donegall Road, Sandy Row, Donegall Pass, the Markets and lower Ormeau, schools are attaining rates of truancy of over 30%. Is that not an example of Achieving Belfast underachieving, and could the Department and the Minister not take a major step in addressing that by lifting the current blockage on the process to provide the new consolidated primary school on the Donegall Road?

Mr O'Dowd: I will take the latter part of your question first. There is no blockage to providing a new school for south Belfast. The blockage is that no site has been identified or is in the ownership of the board or the Department. Truancy in areas such as south Belfast, particularly where there is deprivation, is a matter of deep concern, but education alone will not tackle that. I talked about strong links with the community, and there are also strong interagency links and links between Departments that work together.

When young people do not attend school, other elements are found to be at play in the family home, and those issues need to be tackled. In some cases, families need intervention and support to ensure that young people have an opportunity to be everything that they can be. In other instances, deprivation, young people feeling divorced from education and a lack of understanding of the need for education prevail throughout a community. There is a need for strong leadership on education from the community sector, the business sector and politicians. There are challenges, but there is an opportunity in our education system for all young people to succeed. We must grasp again the gift of education and ensure that everyone understands the need for education and the opportunities that it can provide.

Area Learning Communities

5. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Education whether he intends to make any additional resources available to area learning communities following the cessation of entitlement framework support. (AQO 1946/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I acknowledge the role of all 29 area learning communities and have observed for myself in a number of them the valuable joint working, good relationships and quality engagement that has developed, all of which benefit all young people in an area. An area learning community is the forum in which schools can plan a coherent curricular offer for that area. It can be the locus for the sharing of good practice and expertise, and it can ensure the avoidance of courses running with small class sizes or duplication of provision. I am keen that this model continues to be supported and am pleased to have recently agreed that funding of £500,000 is set aside in each of the next three years to ensure the development of a new, more

strategic role for area learning communities in the context of area planning.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer, and I welcome his confirmation of the funding package for area learning communities. Will he also outline the role that they play in collaboration and in delivering the entitlement framework?

Mr O'Dowd: The area learning communities have been in place for several years. Although some got off to a shaky start, it has been proven to me that they are very effective in building up relationships between schools and communities. By and large, I have been very impressed by the professionalism and drive of the area learning communities that I have met and by the co-operation between schools. They are putting in place the much sought-after shared education. A lot can be learned from the area learning communities. They set an example for how schools can share resources, teachers, coursework and best practice, and that has to be commended. Their ultimate objective is to work towards the entitlement framework, with which all schools must be compliant by 2014-15. That, too, has been a driving force behind the area learning communities. A lot more work can be done in them, and that is why I have set aside £1.5 million to support that work over the next three years.

Mr Campbell: In light of the Wolf report, will the Minister give an assurance that consideration will be given to the review of the demand in the entitlement framework for access to 24 courses followed by access to 27 courses?

Mr O'Dowd: I missed the first part of your question, sorry.

Mr Campbell: Will the Minister give serious consideration to a review of the demand in the entitlement framework for access to 24 courses followed by access to 27 courses?

Mr O'Dowd: No is the simple answer. The entitlement framework will come into place in 2014-15. I have taken into account the current budgetary circumstances that schools face, and I have delayed full implementation by a year, but the entitlement framework is the only show in town, and that is what we are working towards. As I said in response to the Member previously, area learning communities have allowed schools to work towards that.

Schools have been working individually towards compliance with the entitlement framework. The entitlement framework is now in legislation: the commencement order was signed off in December last year, and it will be in force by 2014-15.

3.30 pm

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. It is obvious that there are many schools that, despite their best efforts, will not be able to deliver the minimum requirements of the entitlement framework. How does the Minister intend to help and support those schools so that they meet the requirements of the framework?

Mr O'Dowd: Schools have had since 2006 to prepare for the introduction of the entitlement framework. It could be argued that that was too long a run-in period, because there was a scenario where people were asking whether it would happen or not. It is happening. The legislation has been signed off and the framework will become reality in 2014-15.

The majority of our schools are working actively towards compliance, and I have no doubt that they will reach compliance with the entitlement framework. In the small minority of cases in which schools do not reach compliance with the curriculum, they will be audited to establish why they were not able to reach the curriculum, and then decisions will be made on the future of the school. That may lead to future support for the school and more interventions in the school.

However, if a school is not able to deliver the curriculum by 2014-15, it is not the school that is important; it is the young people who attend the school. What do we do about their education? That will be the deciding factor in the future of any school. What will happen to the quality of the education given to the young people attending that school?

Private Members' Business

Crime: Farming Community

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 to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr D McIlveen: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the impact of agricide on our farming community; calls on the Minister of Justice to ensure that the perpetrators of such crimes receive the maximum possible sentences; and further calls on the Minister to ensure that clear advice is provided by the Department on the extent to which landowners are permitted to defend their property, and that this is reflected in the forthcoming Justice Bill.

I thank the Business Committee and the Business Office for facilitating this debate. In some ways, I am very pleased to be able to table this motion, although I do so with an element of regret, because this is an issue that does not bring any pleasure.

I will start by defining "agricrime". In the motion, we have deliberately not used the term "rural crime". The reason for that is very simple. Rural crime, as far as the PSNI is concerned, is any crime that takes place outside the greater Belfast area. So, although we criticise without question shoplifting from shopping centres in Newry, Ballymena or wherever it happens to be, that is not the type of crime that we want to focus on today. We are talking specifically about thefts that, on the whole, target our farming community and involve plant and machinery, materials and livestock. Such crime is zapping the lifeblood from many of our farming communities at the moment. So, as a point of clarity, it is important that we get that across. We cannot underestimate the impact of agricide.

I represent a constituency that has farming and rural life at its very heart. Indeed, the biggest towns in my constituency, Ballymena and Ballymoney, began as farming market communities. I am sure that Members will agree that I could be talking about almost any constituency in Northern Ireland. Farming and the agricultural sector is a vital part of life in Northern Ireland and its economy. We are heavily reliant on the work of our farmers and what they produce. Some of us, including me, are over-reliant on what they produce. It is important that we send out a very strong message of support to our farming community because it has supported the economy through thick and thin over very many years.

Some farmers from my constituency plan to be here to listen to part of the debate. Each of them has been a victim of agricide. Each of them wants to know what we, as an Assembly, intends to do about it. For that reason, I ask the Assembly to unite in expressing its deep concern about the impact of increasing agricide on our farming community. In many ways, the figures speak for themselves. The National Farmers' Union (NFU) estimates that the cost of theft to farmers was £3.8 million in 2010, which is up 28% from 2009.

Notwithstanding the huge loss to our farmers, what I find most concerning is how isolated and disengaged our farming community feels as a result of agricrime. Unfortunately, a huge issue is the feeling that the police response is completely inadequate. A number of my Policing Board colleagues and I are trying to address that directly with the PSNI. I have heard numerous reports from across the country of farmers who have caught thieves in the act and, on phoning the police, are often told that the on-duty officers are too busy to make a rapid response. I recently heard evidence from one farmer in my constituency who, in one instance, was given the sterling advice that he should take the name of the criminal and let him go. That is not exactly an ideal response.

The PSNI response is a huge issue. I am not going to miss this opportunity to say in public that I do not believe that now is the time to consider the closure of rural police stations. Crime is on the up, and it is vital that there is a focus and a visible police presence in particular areas.

Mr Dickson: Does the Member agree with me that the physical presence of a police building is of less benefit to those who suffer crime than the availability of police officers in vehicles who are able to conduct pursuits and that if a police officer is inside a police building, it is virtually impossible for him or her to leave it?

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Member for his intervention. No, I do not agree. The presence of a police station in a village is proof that the police care about that village. That is the way that our constituents look at it at the minute, and I do not think that that will change in the foreseeable future.

I also want to touch on sentencing. It is always slightly contentious to talk in the Assembly about any sort of meddling with the judiciary, but that is not really what I propose. I can assure you that the confidence of our farming community is being affected by agricrime. I am encouraging the Minister of Justice, in the interests of community confidence, to advise the judiciary to impose maximum sentences where possible when the perpetrators of these crimes are caught. At the moment, farmers see the people involved in these crimes arrested, brought before the courts, but out on bail and back in the community within a couple of days. In fact, in one instance, a person was back at a farmers' market two nights after he was arrested. That sends out a very damaging message to our farming communities. We have to be very aware of that and be seen to be doing something about it.

The other part of the motion is about advice to landowners. I believe that the Department of Justice must take action to help rural communities counter this trend. In the course of the debate, I am quite sure that we will hear about such schemes as Farmwatch, the community safety strategy, trailer-marking schemes and other initiatives. All those initiatives are to be welcomed, but, quite frankly, the feeling from local farmers is that it is not good enough. Overall, farmers are fed up; they feel let down. If we do not address the problem now, I fear that some farmers will start to take matters into their own hands. It may shock the Minister to hear that some farmers have come to me saying that they have to patrol their own land at night in an effort to protect livestock and machinery. That is not good enough.

Recently, I have been researching how best the Department could address the problem. There are initiatives happening in other parts of the United Kingdom to which I feel we should give consideration today. One initiative is helping farmers provide their land for the training of specialist police units and putting up large signs to show that the police are there. That shows potential criminals and thieves that the police are in the area. In another part of England, there is a ride-along scheme in which farmers accompany local police on night patrols. The farmers can show the police the back routes and byways used by criminals. That may also help response rates. In other parts of the United Kingdom, trespass warning signs and technology, such as night vision goggles for police personnel, are funded. I encourage the Minister to give some thought to those measures.

Those simple measures are some examples of how I believe the Department can guide farmers on sensible and safe ways to protect their land. However, I call on the Minister to ensure that any forthcoming Justice Bill adequately reflects the growing incidence of rural crime. I ask also that he ensures that landowners are clear on how best to legally and safely protect their land. I have serious concerns that a type of vigilante justice could be emerging.

The reality is that the current advice of, "Lock up your tractor", which is coming from the Department, is simply not enough. I truly believe that people have a moral right to defend their land and home and that the law should be a reflection of that. I know that the law of self-defence has been debated extensively at Westminster, and I agree with Paul Mendelle QC who said that the law should always encourage people to be reasonable, not unreasonable, and to be proportionate, not disproportionate. I know that there have been calls for the law on self-defence to be changed from the current standard of reasonable force to a different standard of grossly disproportionate force. Although it may be tempting to consider that course of action, I am not advocating vigilante justice or encouraging people to arm themselves to protect their property. However, as I said, the issue has been extensively covered in Westminster, and I believe that the current standard is acceptable.

Minister, I have laid out some of the issues that are before us —

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

Mr D McIlveen: I think the Assembly will unite behind the seriousness of the issue. As the debate widens out, I would encourage a response to the points that have been raised.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank those who brought the motion today. The agriculture industry here employs over 48,000 people and has a turnover of billions, but we still do not have a proper process of looking at agriculture crime. I agree with what the Member who has just spoken said about the PSNI's current system, and it is something I would like the Minister to think about. At present, the PSNI puts everything together under the category "rural crime". That could be break-ins, antisocial behaviour or car crime, etc. I would like to see a specific category of agriculture crime, and I ask the Minister to look at that. However, I will come back to that in a minute.

There are livestock thefts every year; that is nothing new. Also the same every year are the suspects we hear about and the types of thefts. The NFU Mutual estimated that 6,000 sheep and cattle could have been stolen last year.

Exact figures are not known. One of the reasons for that is the fact that, due to the current economic climate, farmers cannot afford to pay their high insurance premiums.

That is possibly one of the reasons why we do not have an exact figure. However, the figure of 6,000 sheep and cattle does not take into account pigs or game birds, or, believe it or not, the theft of dogs, which are a vital part of any farm. Those animals are not stolen to be pets or to be given away. There is a clear and defined reason why they are stolen. The majority of the animals go back into the food chain. Once stolen, they go straight to the meat plants or the abattoirs. The people who steal the animals know who to go to and who to sell to, and, in turn, those people know where to go to get the animals slaughtered.

3.45 pm

Nobody is stealing 20 cows or sheep and keeping them for days. They are being stolen to order. If they are stolen tonight, they will most likely be slaughtered in the morning. Therefore, somebody must know exactly what is going on. That is where the Minister comes in. If we are really serious about tackling stock theft, which I believe the House is, we should not start when the theft takes place. We need to go to where the animals end up; that is, meat plants, abattoirs, and so forth. Somebody there must be turning a blind eye. You cannot have a lorry load of animals come in and go straight to slaughter without somebody knowing something about them.

Sheep are electronically tagged. Are the tags not working? Are the sheep going in there with one ear missing or with no ears at all? People can come out with all the excuses that they want, but people are turning their back on an industry that is costing what I call the proper farmer millions, because that is what it evolves into.

People must be getting paid to turn a blind eye. Nobody is doing this for nothing. There is a gamut of things going on. People know what is going on, and I appeal to them to come forward. It is only when we have the information that we can break down the system of theft.

The previous Agriculture Minister, Michelle Gildernew, and the present Minister have had meetings with the Justice Minister and the Chief Constable, but the PSNI still does not treat rural crime seriously enough. Up until last year, information that was gathered by the PSNI was lumped together. It is time for the police to make inexpensive changes.

In 2011, the Minister's officials wrote to the PSNI regarding crime recording and statistics. The response was that it did not have specific stats on rural crime. It is all recorded nationally. At the minute, the police use closing codes. I plead to the Minister to get that changed. If that were done, it would allow elected representatives to go into a police station and ask for the stats.

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

Mr McMullan: At the minute, the PSNI's one excuse is that it has to work with closing codes.

Mrs Dobson: I also welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion. The timing is expedient, given that this week marks what many people in the agriculture industry regard as the highlight of the year — the Balmoral show. However, as

visitor numbers to that wonderful event continue to exceed 70,000, the issue of rural crime and security of property and possessions is a growing concern for many in rural society.

Rural crime, especially agrcrime, to which the motion specifically refers, has been steadily increasing in Northern Ireland over the past decade, particularly in the past three to four years. There is still no widely agreed definition of what constitutes "rural" in crime statistics, and, unfortunately, that has led to the exact level of the problem across Northern Ireland remaining unclear. Nevertheless, the increasing trend was confirmed last year, with the publication of the NFU Mutual rural crime survey, which revealed that there had been a staggering 28% rise in thefts from farms in Northern Ireland over the previous two years.

Indeed, where there are figures for recorded thefts of livestock and farm machinery, they have more than doubled from 66 in 2007-08 to 137 in 2010-11. Thefts of agricultural machinery alone cost the industry millions of pounds annually, with recent years witnessing a large hike in the number of tractors being stolen to order, often for immediate export.

In recent months, my constituency of Upper Bann has witnessed farm thefts in Donaghcloney and Waringstown and in rural areas outside Banbridge. I am sure that Members can and will give countless further examples of rural crime in other areas. Those incidents highlight the magnitude of the issue and, therefore, the importance that the Executive should attach to tackling rural crime.

All too often, farmers are seen as soft targets by criminals because of their dependency on costly machinery. Farm quads and tractors prove particularly lucrative for rural criminals, and, therefore, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the PSNI must urgently review the current protections. Marking trailers and other machinery is all fine and well, but unless they are recovered, those markings are worth little.

Livestock rustling is a growing problem in certain areas of Northern Ireland. It is unfortunate for farmers, rural dwellers and businesses that there is not yet an effective deterrent in place to stem the tide in rural crime. Stolen equipment is rarely recovered, and few people, as touched on in the motion, are ever brought to book. There is certainly an impression that many involved in criminal activity in rural areas often get off scot-free, with little effort made to track them down, and I would appreciate the Justice Minister shining some light on that in his comments later.

Although the motion calls on perpetrators to be given the maximum possible sentences, the priority should be catching them in the first place. From talking to farmers and many people involved in farm security across Northern Ireland, the same old problems keep coming up again and again. If the PSNI were to review how it records crimes committed in agricultural and rural areas, it might be possible to identify hotspots in which specific crimes occur. Therefore, resources could be better targeted. Rural crime, whether it is the theft of machinery or livestock, can have a devastating impact on the livelihoods of the farmers affected.

It is totally unfair to expect farmers to pay increased costs, including higher insurance premiums, just because criminals regard the countryside as some sort of play area where they can operate with immunity. Many neighbouring farmers have told me that they feel socially isolated and are suspicious

of strangers who arrive on their farms. That was not the case in the past, and it is sad to say that an atmosphere of openness and hospitality has gradually changed to one of caution and hostility. The Executive have a duty to restore people's faith in human nature by bringing to book those involved in rural crime. Successful convictions are the best security mechanism that rural communities can have. Clear action is needed: the industry needs to be reassured that agricroime is being adequately tackled by the PSNI.

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

Mrs Dobson: Thank you.

Mr Rogers: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. In recent weeks, thieves have removed lead from schools in Downpatrick and the safety buffers from the historic railway line. Road signs and manhole covers have been stolen throughout the country. Car batteries, farm machinery, 4x4s and scrap metal are being taken out of farmyards daily. There is an increase in the theft of copper pipes, cylinders and radiators from homes and clubs. The nature of agricroime has changed from being largely opportunistic to a highly organised activity, and it is not all committed by strangers. Farmers' sheds are entered when farmers are out in the fields during the day; the 4x4s are taken away and stripped down; tractors, quads and livestock trailers are stolen and hidden in remote locations and left for a few days to see whether the PSNI will come looking for them — in other words, to check whether they have hidden tracker devices.

A very sinister type of agricroime happened in January 2010 when a brucellosis-infected carcass was dumped in Lislea in south Armagh and infected another farmer's livestock. I just wonder what progress has been made on that.

I acknowledge the good work done by the PSNI in association with farming organisations. However, there is a greater need for PSNI visibility in rural areas to deter thieves. In addition, farmers should consider installing tracking devices. Above all, I believe that the real action required is a joint strategy from the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Department of the Environment, the Department for Regional Development, and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development which recognises the problem and establishes measures to prevent this type of crime.

Mr Dickson: I begin by saying that all of us stand with Northern Ireland's farming community against any form of criminality. There is no doubt that so-called agricroime is a problem in Northern Ireland. Evidence shows that there has been an increase in the amount claimed in insurance for stolen livestock and expensive farming machinery, some of which has, indeed, been tracked down in Europe, Africa and even as far away as Australia. It is, indeed, a topical point at this time as it is currently a storyline in 'The Archers'; those who listen to 'The Archers' will be aware of that. We know that the effects go far beyond the loss of property. We cannot claim to fully understand the feelings of isolation and fear experienced by those in our farming community who have been the victims of this sort of criminality. Only they know its full extent and impact. The stress and anxiety caused, the financial detriment to those affected, and the simple violation of one's right to live free from harm and intrusion should, indeed, be a cause of concern for us all. In that respect, I can find something in the DUP motion to support.

The second part of the motion calls on the Minister to ensure that perpetrators receive the maximum possible sentence. I am beginning to lose count of the number of times that I have spoken in the Chamber about motions that call on the Minister of Justice to do things that are neither appropriate nor, indeed, within his remit. Either the Member who brought this forward needs to make much more effort to understand the roles and responsibilities of the Minister or, if he already knows that, he is potentially playing politics.

Crimes against our farming community must be met with sentences that appropriately reflect their severity and the disgust felt by our community. With that in mind, we should recognise that such decisions must remain a matter for the judiciary, which looks at all the circumstances of each case within the context of the legal framework and the sentencing guidelines. Indeed, the judiciary's independence was reaffirmed in an earlier debate in the House today. We have already had a discussion in the Assembly about mandatory sentences and have heard from a number of Members about why such a course is problematic. We must let the judiciary exercise the appropriate discretion. For those reasons, I cannot support the second part of the motion.

I think that we have to be very careful with the motion's concluding section, as the issue of defence of property is very sensitive. Reasonable force can be used when defending one's self and property. It is my understanding that the question of whether force is reasonable is looked at on the basis of the householder's perception of the danger and circumstances he or she faced, even if it is deemed that he or she was mistaken, and latitude may be given in such circumstances. I cannot think of any circumstance where there has been a major problem with how the current system works, and so I cannot see any grounds for changing the law. If it is deemed that more clarity is needed, perhaps we should consider remedying that by providing more information directly to the public.

It is important that the Assembly is not polarised on the issue. We must focus on finding more effective ways of dealing with rural crime and agricroime appropriately. The motion is, therefore, problematic because it misses the point that we should be focused on encouraging Departments and agencies to work together to prevent rural crime. The Alliance Party has consistently argued that Departments need to collaborate to solve problems and deliver effective governance and government. I am pleased that DOJ and DARD are co-operating on those issues. I am also encouraged by the rural crime prevention events that have taken place across Northern Ireland, including one recent initiative launched in March in Carnlough in my constituency of East Antrim.

In conclusion, although I agree with the first part of the motion and express my concern at the effect of agricroime on rural communities, I think that we are on the right track and are taking the right steps. We must not forget that crime, in general, is on the decrease in Northern Ireland.

Once again, Members of the Assembly are asking the Minister of Justice to do something that he cannot do and are asking that we take away the ability of the judiciary to exercise its discretion and common sense. For those reasons, my party is not in a position to support the motion.

4.00 pm

Mr Frew: I welcome the chance to debate this very serious issue, and I applaud my colleagues for bringing it forward in the manner in which they have. It is certainly a very topical issue. It is something that I have been abreast of for many years. Rural crime has increased and got worse. First of all, it is vital that I emphasise the impact that rural theft/agricrime has on individual farmers, their families, their workforce and even their communities. It is very clear that criminals target the countryside because it is not as heavily populated; it is more sparse; they think they can get away with so many crimes; they feel invisible; crime is harder to detect; they can get away quicker; there are not as many police about; and, even if there are police about, they will not know the area as well. Those are all reasons why criminals feel that they can get away with much more in the countryside.

Of course, a lot of crimes are committed at night. It is clear in my mind that that sort of criminal activity has increased. It has become even more organised. That is the point that should be emphasised. There is absolutely no doubt that members of the farming community are at a level that can only be described as palpable anger. They are so frustrated, because they see the same thing happening again to their own farm holdings or to their neighbours' that happened to them a few weeks before, and they feel in their heart of hearts that it could be the same individual or criminal gang but that nothing is being done to really tackle the issue.

If someone is arrested for that alleged crime, it is very clear that they get out on bail or are walking about the markets and even walking about the very farms that they have been accused of stealing from. That is a frustration that I do not think any of us could quantify. A farmer could actually contemplate someone who has been arrested previously, maybe even a few nights before, for a suspected crime on their farm, and then see the suspect on their land again.

It is very clear that the farming community needs something to happen. It sees the police force retreating from the countryside. That is the only way that I can describe the closure of some of those rural police stations. There is no doubt that there are rural police stations that need to close. They are not doing anything. They are empty shells. They are only open for so many hours, and the police have made it very clear over a number of years that they just do not want that part of their estate. However, there are so many rural police stations on the list for closure that are vital, or should be vital, and should be used more by the police in so many ways — some new ways — in order to tackle agricroime or rural theft and general crime in our countryside.

There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that there is a retreat from our countryside by the PSNI. That is felt no more so than in my constituency of North Antrim, and, in particular, in Ballymena. It is vital that the two remaining rural police stations in the Ballymena borough should remain open, because they are serving the communities in some very isolated areas in the east and the west. It is clear, because it has been raised here, that rural stations are sometimes shells or bricks and mortar, but they can be hubs for the police that serve a certain area. If all of the police are withdrawn into our towns, we will get other police officers who do not know the area and cannot serve the people to the best of their ability.

I would like a task force to be set up to tackle this type of crime. So many millions of pounds — £11 million, I think, in the past three years — have been taken out of agriculture and the economy of our country.

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

Mr Frew: I believe that a task force, similar to the one set up to deal with carjacking in Belfast, could be set up to tackle rural crime and agricroime. That would serve the people in the countryside well.

Mr Elliott: I thank Mr McIlveen and his colleagues for bringing the motion to the House today. We have heard figures quoted in the Chamber, and it is quite clear that, while the police are indicating that some crime in Northern Ireland is decreasing, rural crime is on the increase.

It is interesting to note how some of the perpetrators carry out their crimes. They come and target the homes, premises and farms of the farmer while the farmer is actually there. At times, they even speak to the farmer when they are targeting his buildings and equipment, and they then come back that night or perhaps a night in the near future to steal and thieve. That is an absolute shame.

So many of these criminals are known to the local community. They are known to the police and, as people say, to the dogs in the streets. However, there sometimes appears to be a lack of will to do anything about the crimes, and that is why people get so frustrated. Equipment, tractors, and machinery are stolen from them, things of very high value, yet they believe that nothing of significance is being done about it. I know of one particular incident — others may know of it, too — where a farmer recovered his stolen tractor himself. Just a few nights later, it was stolen from him again. He wanted the police to put in place a surveillance operation to catch the criminals, but they refused to do it. That is why there is frustration in the community.

I and many others believe that the sentences do not fit the crimes. There needs to be tougher sentences, and the community needs to be given clear guidance on how they can deal with matters themselves if they feel that the law enforcement agencies are not doing it. I agree with Mr Dickson, my colleague from the Alliance Party, who said that things should be left to the law enforcement agencies and the judiciary. However, many people feel that they are not doing enough about it; often, people indicate that they are doing very little about it. That is the difficulty, and that is why there is frustration in the community.

I agree that there needs to be a joined-up approach from the entire community, not just between the Agriculture Department and the Department of Justice. There needs to be an overall community aspect. When people who have been victimised feel that they are not getting proper justice, they want to be able to do something about it, and they want people to do something about it for them.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that one very good piece of joined-up government would be for the current policing plan to mention the words "rural crime" even once? Perhaps he could comment on that.

Mr Elliott: I think that every document, no matter what it is, should mention the word "rural" and that any document to do with justice should mention the words "rural crime".

I hear talk of the closure of police stations and the significance that that has for the area and the community. Mr Frew may find the situation in the Ballymena area difficult, but if he lived in County Fermanagh and was over 20 miles from the nearest police station, he might find the situation even more difficult. People in rural areas who already feel isolated feel even more isolated when they do not have a police presence nearby. I would love to see more visible policing, and I have talked to the police commanders regularly. If an area is not going to have a police station, the police need to make sure that they have a visible presence in that area. Landowners feel that, when they catch a criminal in the act of stealing something from their property, there should be some allowance for them to act on it themselves, without having to phone the police just to be told that they cannot come for a period of time.

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

I note that in Fermanagh quite recently — I am sure it also exists in other areas — we had the launch of the Farmwatch initiative. That will involve the police working in conjunction with the local communities, the Ulster Farmers' Union and farmers to put markers and tracking devices on machinery. That is fine, and I praise the big effort being made in the rural community to help protect property and, hopefully, in the end, solve crimes. I appeal to the wider rural community not to just leave it up to the police and the forces of law and order but to please look out for their neighbours. If people see anything suspicious, they should raise it with the police and the local community. That is very important. Those people are the eyes and ears of the entire community, and I think that they have a responsibility not only to themselves but to the wider area and the people who live in it.

Mr Givan: I commend my colleagues for tabling the motion and everyone who contributed to the debate so far. People mentioned that it is not just about an opportunistic-type thief but that crimes of an organised nature are taking place in rural communities where equipment is being dismantled and found in far-flung corners of the world. So, serious organised crime gangs are involved in that type of activity. The question then has to be this: why do they feel that rural communities are prime target areas? It is because they are very vulnerable target areas, and that people realise that the opportunity there is great and that police activity is not what it should be. Potentially, there is the need for greater protection by farm owners and landowners as well.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that, in some areas, the police still have difficulty taking action and being proactive simply because of the ongoing terrorist difficulties in some locations throughout Northern Ireland?

Mr Givan: Yes; I agree. It is a sad state of affairs that that is still the position in some parts of Northern Ireland. However, that should never be a reason why the police do not get into those communities. There should be no no-go areas in Northern Ireland, whether in urban or rural areas, where there is a republican-related threat. The police should get involved.

One of the issues that I want to touch on is about the need for more specifics around rural crime. The draft rural strategy mentions the need to deal with rural crime. I notice that the Agriculture Committee has expressed concern that it is not specific enough and that there should be more

references to that issue. We relayed that to the Department on the Committee's behalf.

When it comes to the police and how they measure crime, we need specific measurements around agriculture-related crime. It is not sufficient to lump crimes of this nature under the heading "rural crime". There are large villages, and, if thefts take place on domestic properties, it will count as a rural crime. We need a specific target for agriculture-related crime and to have it broken down. What you find, certainly in Civil Service-related bureaucracy, is that unless there is a specific measurement, specific attention will not be paid to it. If the police could come forward with specific measurements on agriculture-related crime, and people were then able to point to the true extent of the problem, the police would have a much greater focus on it because they will want to drive down the number because people will be able to criticise or praise their activities. So, if we have specific measurements, it will go a long way. It would certainly build upon the different interventions that are taking place, including those by the community safety partnerships, which are spending money on the trailer-marking schemes. Such schemes are good. We also need to have the Farmwatch-type scheme that Mr Elliott touched on. I know that, in other areas of Northern Ireland, there are similar schemes where there are great networks within the farming community, and, if the police can properly harness those, we will get the information that would allow the police to respond much more quickly than is the case currently.

The farming community and farming union have said that they are very much up for this. They know that there is a problem affecting their people, and they want to be involved. The police are knocking on an open door. However, the police need to be much more proactive in opening up the opportunities being presented to them and finding ways in which they can help to reduce this type of crime. We, in this Assembly, should do all that we can to support the farming community in tackling what is a very serious criminal activity that impacts upon it.

4.15 pm

Mr Irwin: I commend my colleagues for bringing this issue before the House. Agricultural crime, or rural crime as it has been referred to, concerns a lot of people in the rural community. As a farmer who has experienced theft from his own farmyard, I know how it feels to have someone come onto your farm and take machinery that you heavily rely on for your everyday business. I had my Land Rover and trailer stolen two years ago, and, more recently, an attempt was made to steal the main tractor from the farm. However, a well-placed grass mower prevented the theft, as its blade sliced through the tyre and the thieves abandoned their attempt to take the machine.

The problem is rife in Northern Ireland. Rarely a week passes without some incident of farm theft, be it tractors, machinery or livestock. There is a very real cost to the farming industry. People may think that this is a victimless crime; however, the facts speak differently. It costs around £3.8 million a year to cover the insurance bill for stolen farm machinery. That has a direct effect on the industry and, indeed, insurance premiums. Machinery is being stolen and shipped across the world by criminals who are obviously making huge sums of money through the illegal practice of

selling complete machines and in stripping tractors, to try to avoid detection, and selling the most valuable parts.

Farmers are taking on board the advice of the police. A number of events have been put in place to ensure that farmers are doing what they can to prevent theft. I believe that farmers are doing their utmost to try to make it as difficult as possible for machinery to be taken. However, such is the lucrative nature of the crime, criminals are getting more and more bold in their attempts to take it. Just a few weeks ago, I heard of a neighbouring farmer who had dismounted his quad bike as he went to check his sheep in the field. He went to the far end of the field and, as he came back, saw a young guy driving his bike through the gate. It disappeared for the first time in his very eyes.

My colleagues rightly referred in the motion to the rights of the victim to defend their property. This, indeed, is a grey area. I would welcome Minister Ford's comments in this regard. I know of incidents in my constituency where farmers have been able to react to try to stop the theft of their property. I think particularly of the late Mr Stuart Whitcroft, a constituent of mine from Derrynoose who sadly passed away on 13 May last year after thieves stole his prized vintage tractor. Stuart's son was alerted to the theft as the thieves made off with the tractor, and he gave chase. Alarmed by the incident, Stuart also gave chase, but sadly suffered a heart attack and passed away in his vehicle a short distance from the farm. At the time, I said that those behind the theft were the lowest of the low. This was a shocking incident that stunned the whole local community. That theft was certainly not a victimless crime for the Whitcrofts, who lost a member of their family as a direct result of such criminality. To protect your property is a very natural reaction; a reaction that most people would have if placed in that situation. Therefore, it is vital that the Minister gives clear guidance on this important issue.

Rural crime continues to occur. With prices of metal rocketing recently, we now have the problem of metal theft, from not only farms but from all manner of buildings, including churches and community venues.

I cannot remember a period so rife with theft than the past couple of years in the rural farming community. I have met police locally. They have, in recent months, had a number of successes against those behind these types of crimes, especially in my own area. However, it continues to be a great worry for local farmers. Hopefully, the PSNI will continue to focus on this important issue and step up their efforts to combat agricultural crime. I support the motion.

Mr Allister: I regret that I have had to attend to another matter for some minutes, so I missed some of this debate. I heard most of the proposer's speech. Certainly, the issue has been causing rising tension and resentment among the farming community.

If you are a farmer, you are likely to have put indescribably long hours into building up what you have, expending any profit you make and ploughing it back into the business, and upgrading your machinery, plant and equipment. To see it wilfully stolen by some who have probably never worked an honest day in their life or taken by those who are part of organised crime gangs, is truly a sickening experience and one which leaves a great trail of anger and resentment. That is frankly not helped by the manifestation of a police

attitude that, on occasions, amounts to little more than a shrugging of shoulders. We need a lot more than the shrugging of shoulders to root out this crime. We need active police pursuit. We will not get that by closing police stations, that is for sure.

I heard Mr Dickson's pitiful intervention, suggesting that, as long as the police had a vehicle, they could get to you and it did not really matter whether they had a police station. That is absolute nonsense. A police station is a sign that builds confidence within the community. That, along with the proximity that it provides, indicates that, if you are up the Braid valley stealing, you are far more likely to be caught if the police are in Broughshane than if they are in Ballymena. It is basic common sense. So, catching the criminal —

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: I will give way.

Mr Dickson: Does the Member not agree with me that it is not the building that catches the criminal but active policing and active police officers?

Mr Allister: The two go hand in hand. Having a police presence in the community is a priority and a prerequisite to having a police presence out in the community where the police operate. There is no point in sending a policeman from a distant police station who has to stop and ask, "Where is such-and-such a lane? Where is such-and-such a road?" The local policeman in Broughshane or Portglenone will know where it is. He will not be wasting time and he may also have a fair idea who is likely to be doing the pilfering and stealing. It really is pretty pitiful that, in support of the closure of police stations, which the Alliance Party seems more than happy with, we have that line of argument.

It is not just about catching the criminal; it is about punishing him. It is right that the sentence has to match the crime. It has to match it in terms of the scale of what is stolen, the circumstances in which it is stolen and, if it is an organised crime theft, we need to see follow-up by the Serious Organised Crime Agency. We need to see that the assets of those who are profiting from organised crime — the transporting of tractors and other vehicles across the world as part of a network — are pursued as part of asset recovery. That can only happen if you have the detection in the first place, the conviction in the second and the sentence to go with it. Then, assets recovery can follow. Only if that sort of action is taken will we begin to restore confidence to the farming community, which has suffered far too much already.

The motion most certainly has my support and I recommend it to the House.

Mr Givan: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Does he wish to comment on the need for the Minister to give much more clarity and guidance as to what force can be used by farmers when individuals come on to their property to steal?

Mr Allister: There is the common law and the statutory position on people being entitled to defend themselves with reasonable force; however, we need amplification on how that applies to the defence of property. Often, of course, the two dovetail: you may be defending your person when you are defending your property. The Minister needs to

stiffen the law in that regard and give confidence to the rural community. Too often, the concern seems to be about the perpetrator and whether someone was over-vigorous with them, with little regard to the victim. That is wrong, and it needs to be tackled robustly in the law.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak on today's debate, as it is a very important issue to many people across Northern Ireland. I commend my party colleagues for bringing the motion to the Assembly.

Unfortunately, rural crime is an ever-increasing problem across this country, and we must actively look to address it. Agricrime has been an increasing problem recently in my constituency of North Down. Many who live in the Holywood hills, rural parts of Bangor and the wider Donaghadee and Millisle areas have been targets of crime recently and have become much more worried about the potential for crime involving their machinery, livestock, property and fuel. Fuel, in particular, has become a big target area recently because of increased costs.

Gone are the days when you could leave machinery in the field or the remote farmyard. Unfortunately, trust and integrity have all but gone. Having spoken to farmers and rural dwellers recently, I know that agricrime has become the number-one issue of concern for them. Agricrime can be devastating; it affects the victims and has a crippling effect on the neighbourhood around the scene of the crime. It is often the elderly who are most affected by such crime. I spoke recently to one farmer who has a large dairy farm with valuable machinery and livestock; his biggest concern was for his vulnerable elderly parents who live on their own farm.

Attacks on our elderly and on our farming communities must stop; a strong message must be sent out to deter the organised criminals who are blighting our countryside communities. Good work has been done in many areas. The Farmwatch watch scheme, the rural text service, trailer marking projects and the Ulster Farmers' Union members' discount on security products are all examples of practical and effective measures that must be encouraged to help to reduce the risk and impact of agricrime across our countryside.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank my colleague for giving way. I note with interest that the Minister has released a press statement that he will give further advice on reasonable force. Does the Member agree that it is important that the Minister spell out clearly what is meant by reasonable force? Does he also agree that that is definitely a sign that our farmers have a right to protect their property?

Mr Dunne: I thank the Member for that. We will be looking forward to the clarification from the Minister later on that issue.

Our rural economy is one of our growing and vibrant economic sectors; it must be fully supported and protected. Crime can have a devastating effect on the sector, and we must ensure that maximum sentences are given to the perpetrators of such crimes. Figures released by the National Farmers' Union show that the cost of agricrime was £4 million in 2010 and 2011, which was a rise from £2.9 million in 2009. That shows the serious nature of the crime and highlights the need for effective action to counter the problem. Clear advice must be provided by the Department of Justice to landowners on their rights to defend their property. There is also room for improvement on cross-departmental action on

improving public awareness on what measures can be taken to secure gates, barriers and farm property.

Unfortunately, there is no quick solution to the problem. However, we must ensure that the right support network is in place in our rural communities. A joined-up approach that involves the PSNI, local communities and organisations must be implemented across the country, not just in some areas.

The lack of a visible police presence in rural areas has continually been raised with me by farmers in my constituency. Unfortunately, our rural communities appear to have become easy targets for criminals, and we must do all we can to ensure that this worrying trend stops. I support the motion.

4.30 pm

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I welcome the Assembly's interest in this important issue. I congratulate David McIlveen and Lord Morrow for succeeding in securing the debate today.

Building safer rural communities is a key issue for my Department. I also recognise the importance for the Executive and Members who spoke today of addressing the key issues and challenges facing rural communities. We are all agreed that rural communities across Northern Ireland have specific needs and it is essential that those needs are addressed. There is no doubt that although all crime has a negative impact on victims, the impact of agricrime on farming families goes beyond the loss of property. It can make rural farming communities feel even more isolated and lead to an increased fear of crime, particularly among older members of the community, as highlighted by a number of Members, notably Paul Frew, Stewart Dickson and Gordon Dunne.

In the current economic climate, agricrime can also have significant financial implications for the income of farming families and the future sustainability of their businesses. Other issues that were raised such as metal theft, which was referred to by Sean Rogers, are being closely worked on by the PSNI in co-operation with other agencies, including the Department of the Environment, Crimestoppers and the Garda Síochána. However, I think they are beyond the precise remit of the debate today.

The visibility of policing in rural areas was noted by a number of Members. I fail to see how those who live in rural areas and who want a police response benefit from having police officers tied up behind the desks of police stations where very few people call and where they are unable to leave if there are issues of concern. I remember a shop directly across the street from the police station being burgled in one of our villages last year. That does not suggest that the station was much of a deterrent. A greater deterrent would have been to have the two or three officers who were manning the station out and about in a response car instead. They would have been able to provide the visible presence that was mentioned by a number of Members, including Sean Rogers and Tom Elliott. They would have been able to respond to concerns and provide the reassurance that comes from seeing police officers active on the ground rather than in buildings that are empty for many hours a week.

Today's motion calls for the perpetrators of agricrimes to receive the maximum possible sentences and further calls

for clear advice on the extent to which landowners are permitted to defend their property. On the first issue of sentencing, Members have called for maximum possible sentences for those convicted of crimes. They actually called on me, as Minister, to ensure the maximum possible sentences. However, as Stewart Dickson pointed out, and as I thought had been reasonably well established in the Assembly, it is not my function to give sentences. Similarly, it is not my function to carry out many other operational parts of the justice system. However, I will treat that as an issue of goodwill rather than be pernicky on the detail. It is absolutely clear from what was said on all sides of the House that punishment has to reflect society's abhorrence of such crimes, which can cause fear and anxiety in rural communities, especially among older people, as well as having a financial impact on the victim.

Sentencing in individual cases is and must remain a matter for the independent judiciary, immune from partisan or political interest. In making sentencing decisions, judges have to take account of the relevant law, sentencing guidelines and the circumstances of each individual case. As has been pointed out in this Chamber before, sentencing guidelines indicate that the courts should treat the age and vulnerability of the victim as an aggravating factor when determining an appropriate sentence. That is because the purpose of the sentence is not only to punish the particular perpetrator but to act as a deterrent to discourage other potential offenders from committing similar offences in the future.

Deterrence must be an underlying principle of all sentencing decisions. I know how seriously judges take their responsibilities, and it is important that their discretion is maintained consistent with the work that is being done and led at the moment by the Lord Chief Justice on sentencing guidelines. The key issue is the knowledge that offenders will be caught and given appropriate sentences; that is what helps to promote safer communities.

Members made a number of suggestions about potential police actions to improve the chance of offenders being caught. Indeed, those suggestions started with the proposer's speech. I have no doubt that David McIlveen, in his role as a member of the Policing Board, will be in a position to take those views to the Policing Board, which will take them to the Chief Constable, because they are issues for him and not for me as Minister.

I will turn to the second substantive part of the motion, which is the issue of how individuals can defend themselves. The motion calls for me to ensure that clear advice is provided by the Department on the extent to which landowners are permitted to defend their property and to ensure that that is reflected in a forthcoming Justice Bill. William Irwin described that as one of the grey areas, although I suspect that Jim Allister will think that he gave clear and coherent guidance, as a QC, on how the law is, and I notice that he did not charge us a fee for it.

It is not my role, as Minister, to provide legal advice to individuals, but I can give an interpretation of the general legal position. Along with the common law defence of self-defence, section 3(1) of the Criminal Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1967 provides:

"A person may use such force as is reasonable in the circumstances in the prevention of crime, or in effecting or assisting in the lawful arrest of offenders or suspected offenders".

The common law defence of property permits use of such force as is reasonable in the circumstances to ward off an unlawful or criminal act. The key word is "reasonable", and what is reasonable is ultimately a matter for the courts to decide.

The current law does, however, offer principles to assist. First, the defence applies to the prevention of crime in domestic law, and that is property crime as well crime against persons. However, what is reasonable force may well depend on the type of threat involved. I should make it clear that I find it very hard to imagine any circumstances in which the use of deadly force would be justified in the defence of property, but reasonable force could be used to prevent such crime. Secondly, a person could rely on self-defence if he or she honestly believed that it was necessary to use force and if the degree of force was proportionate to how the person viewed the circumstances. So even if an individual was wrong about the threat, and, for example, honestly thought that a replica gun was real, such an honest mistake would not be held against him or her. Thirdly, people are not expected to judge precisely what action is called for in the heat of moment. A degree of latitude may be given to a person who did only what he or she honestly and instinctively thought was necessary.

So in looking at the potential need to change the criminal law, it is critical that any action taken should meet the actual concerns. We need to ensure that we do not legislate simply for legislation's sake. Indeed, in the previous mandate, the Justice Committee was very concerned about that. The Member who will make the winding-up speech on the motion chaired the Committee at that time and made it clear to the Minister and the Department that we needed to be careful. We need to look at the issue, and I am prepared to look at the possibility of a change, but I am not sure that we are necessarily at that stage yet. I have, however, noticed that, in England and Wales, the Government have provided guidance about the use of force against intruders, and that now appears on the Directgov website. I intend to consider the possibility of providing similar guidance here, and I will consult the Justice Committee on whether it thinks that that is a worthwhile action.

One of the key factors in addressing the needs of rural communities and the agricultural sector is partnership working. Rural crime has been the subject of ongoing engagement between my Department and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development as it develops the rural White Paper action plan. I had bilateral discussions with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development last year, and, since then, my Department has been represented on DARD's rural White Paper project board to ensure that rural crime issues are reflected in the action plan. Similarly, DARD is part of the steering group for the community safety strategy led by my Department.

A number of Members, notably Oliver McMullan and Jo-Anne Dobson, referred to the difficulty that was previously perceived with the statistics that show how rural crime is affected. Until last year, many of the statistics were simply presented as relating to the urban region or the rural

region. The Police Service has now disaggregated crime and produced a specific figure for agricrime, as we have termed it this afternoon, which shows that it accounted for 4% of all crime in 2011. The fact that there are now specific statistics on that means that it is possible for the board and the Chief Constable to develop targets if that is their wish.

I will shortly launch the new community safety strategy, which will outline the importance of partnership working in supporting efforts to make rural communities safer through preventing and reducing rural crime. The Ulster Farmers' Union is represented on the delivery group that will be responsible for dealing with rural crime.

The strategy will encourage policing and community safety partnerships (PCSPs) to build on initiatives taken to date, to which a number of Members referred. Those include neighbourhood watch and rural watch schemes, trailer-marking schemes and construction and agricultural equipment, security and registration (CESAR) tractor security marking. Initiatives have been introduced across a number of rural areas, and I want to highlight a couple for the benefit of those Members who proposed the motion. For David McIlveen's benefit, I want to highlight the fact that trailer-marking sessions have taken place across North Antrim, in Ballymoney, Moyle and Ballymena — he referred to those — and a series of CESAR tractor security-marking events in the area. There is also an initiative called Farm Gate, which involves the rural neighbourhood policing team in Ballymoney calling with as many farmers as possible to glean any useful information about who is involved in rural crime, as well as providing crime prevention advice and reassurance to the farming community. There are also individual neighbourhood officers with responsibility for particular rural areas.

In Lord Morrow's constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, trailer-marking schemes in Dungannon have significantly reduced the number of trailers stolen. Those schemes have been extended to other machinery and equipment, including quads and sit-on mowers. A crime prevention session is held each year in the local agricultural college, and the Fermanagh Business Watch programme provides crime prevention training and issues alerts by e-mail, text or voice message via the Business Watch ringmaster messaging system.

Paul Givan mentioned Farmwatch. Members should be aware that the Agriculture Minister recently launched that scheme in Fermanagh and South Tyrone and that it is an extension of the neighbourhood watch schemes. That scheme provides signage, retinal scanning of sheep, Business Watch messaging and property marking. Indeed, an event to promote Farmwatch was held in Clogher Mart just last weekend.

Those types of rural crime prevention initiatives, such as text alerts, are being rolled out across Northern Ireland. Much good work is ongoing at a local level, and the newly established PCSPs can build on that. They can work with the local rural community to support efforts to make rural communities safer and to prevent and reduce rural and agricultural crime.

I understand Members' concerns about the impact of agricrime on the farming community, and I appreciate the reasons for tabling the motion. I welcome the opportunity to

address those important issues and to provide the clarity, which I hope that I have, on sentencing decisions, including judicial discretion; my proposals to consider developing guidance on the law on the use of reasonable force, on which I will consult with the Committee; the circumstances in which reasonable force may be used and the role of the courts in deciding what is reasonable; and the need for partnership working across government and locally through PCSPs to tackle rural crime. Finally, I want to express my thanks and appreciation to all Members who sought to show their interest in the debate and for the range of views expressed.

Lord Morrow: I listened carefully to what the Minister said, and I am still not sure whether he supports the motion or takes the same line as his party colleague Mr Dickson, who said that he could not support it. That is regrettable. Aside from Mr Dickson and his colleague, there has been universal support for the motion around the House.

Mr Ford: I thank Lord Morrow for giving way. I thought that I made it clear that although I am not happy with the precise wording of the motion, in keeping with the spirit in which the debate was conducted, I will not oppose it.

Lord Morrow: I am still not sure whether he supports the motion. However, that is normally the way that the Alliance Party delivers. That party leaves it up to the person, who can then pick and choose and decide. At least Mr Dickson made it clear that he would not support the motion. When you hear the likes of what Mr Dickson trotted out today, is it any wonder that this country is in the state that it is? Mr Dickson feels that he can support about one third of a motion that deals with a real issue but that he cannot go the distance. There is nothing new there: the Alliance Party never goes the distance on anything.

The Minister spoke about the Justice Committee. I suspect that he thinks that this is payback time. I think that he referred to my time as the Chair of the Justice Committee, when I did not support one of his forlorn hopes. However, there was a really good reason why that did not happen, which he conveniently left in abeyance. It concerned the use of alcohol at sporting events.

The Minister did not say what was said to him loud and clear at that time, because I have the printed paper here in front of me that illustrates it very clearly, and I am glad that I brought it because I suspected that there would be a whack somewhere along the line. That is the way that he works. We have got to know him. We still have not got to like him.

4.45 pm

Anyway, the paper that I have says:

"we want to turn to three sports clauses that the Committee opposes".

Those were clauses 41, 42 and 43, which related to the possession of alcohol. That is what the Minister was talking about. The Committee remained unconvinced of the necessity for those three provisions, and the Minister was told that in clear, unambiguous terms at the time, but he plodded on with his proposals, about which the Committee was not enthusiastic. I thought that he was big enough to move past that, because, you know, Mr Ford, that was then and this is now. It is to be regretted that —

Mr Ford: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: Right, come on, let us hear you.

Mr Ford: Sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to apologise to the House that I made a joke.

Lord Morrow: No, I am not castigating you for making a joke. We treat you as a joke, full stop. The thing about it is that what I think you have to do, Minister, with no disrespect, is to clearly show on whose side you are when it comes down to crime, because, quite frankly, you have failed to do that on so many occasions. Here was a golden opportunity to do it here again today, but, alas, he failed.

Does the Minister, Deputy Speaker, accept or not accept that we have organised crime in this country and that the legislation in place seems to be totally inadequate to deal with it? I accept the point that he made about sentencing not being his function. We accept that. However, maybe he could have said to the House today that he too has some concerns, or otherwise, about sentencing. Again, he skirted and danced round that one and made no comment whatsoever. That, again, was to be regretted.

I had hoped that the Minister would stand up and play the man today, and say, "Look, we have a serious crime problem in rural communities". We have called it agricide; we do not mind what he calls it. He can call it whatever he pleases, and I suspect that he will not call it agricide now, because we have called it that. He is entitled to do that. Maybe he could have been a wee bit more precise and more exact and said, "Look, we do have a real issue here and we need to settle down and tackle it", because, frankly, that is not happening. Whether the Minister thinks it or not, it is right to say that.

I do not want this to be seen just as an attack on the Minister, because we could spend all day and tomorrow on the Minister. However, it has to be said that he thinks that the closure of rural police stations will play no part whatsoever — it does not impact, it has no influence, it means nothing. That could not be further from the truth. The presence of police stations is a factor and a confidence-building measure in this country. Maybe the Minister knows of another raft of police stations that are going to be closed, so he has say what he has to say. There are police stations that I think should have been retained, but alas they were not.

Mr Elliott: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: This is the third one. Right, come on.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member. It will be brief, given that what he has said about the Minister has taken up quite a bit of time. Is the member suggesting — because I am sure that it would get widespread support in the House — that he has no confidence in the Minister of Justice and that maybe we should look for another Member as Minister of Justice?

Lord Morrow: A change would just be the same old soup on a different plate, because we would be changing from one Alliance Party Member to another. I suspect that that would not do a lot of good. Therefore, we may just put up with what we have got in the meantime. However, if the Minister feels that he should resign on this issue, then I will say "well done" to him, and we will not be shedding any tears as

he disappears into oblivion. Please, though, do not put Mr Dickson in, because that would just be infinitely worse.

The issue of agricide is far more than just crime in rural areas. It is not just a matter of products and goods being stolen from farmers, which of course is a big issue. The lack of confidence that is now throughout our community is palpable, and someone else used that word. Some good things are happening. We heard about the trailer-marking scheme, and such things are all good in their own right. However, they are not the answer. They are not the full solution, and if anyone thinks that that is the case, I ask them to rethink. Many farms are situated close to the border, which makes escape easier for metal and machinery theft. We are told continually that border security and co-operation between the gardaí and the police here is excellent. I am prepared to listen to that but I have my doubts about it when I see exactly what goes on. We have a long, porous border and we know what activities were carried out in the past. Now, it seems that another crime has started and that the border is also being used for that. There is also the deliberate polluting of farmland and waterways by dumping illegal, laundered fuel. I thought that the Minister might have commented on that, but he decided not to. Maybe he thinks that it is not very relevant.

We are told that the level of agricide in Northern Ireland is relatively low. That may be the case, but try telling that to the person who has had his tractor or machinery to the value of £50,000 or £60,000 stolen from his farm. It is very little comfort to him to know that, in fact, agricide is very low. I am aware of a farmer whose shed was broken into. Some valuable equipment was stolen, and when he contacted the insurance company, it visited the farm and advised him to make modifications to protect the property in future. The farmer carried out all the alterations at considerable cost, and the insurance company declared itself satisfied to reinsure him. Around three months later, the same farm was broken into again. His property was trashed and vital equipment was stolen. He described it almost as defiance on the part of those responsible to show that they would not be thwarted. Now, he cannot get insurance for his farm machinery. If, according to the Minister, agricide is not as bad as we seem to be making out, he needs to come down to the country and visit some of those farms —

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

Lord Morrow: I will draw my remarks to a close. He should come down and visit those farms and meet some of those farmers. We have even had experience from some of them in the Chamber during the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the impact of agricide on our farming community; calls on the Minister of Justice to ensure that the perpetrators of such crimes receive the maximum possible sentences; and further calls on the Minister to ensure that clear advice is provided by the Department on the extent to which landowners are permitted to defend their property, and that this is reflected in the forthcoming Justice Bill.

Adjourned at 4.53 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 15 May 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Dickson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I ask you to compare the public record of my party's attendance at the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy working group with the First Minister's comments in the House yesterday, as recorded in Hansard. Following your examination of the records, will you advise the House whether you consider that the First Minister misled the House in his description of our attendance record?

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. First, I assure the Member that I do not dwell on Executive business; that is not my responsibility as Speaker. Secondly, I read the First Minister's remarks yesterday in Hansard and have to say to the Member, with the greatest respect, that that is very much the cut and thrust of debate in the Chamber. What I read yesterday and this morning in Hansard tells me that there was nothing out of order in what the First Minister said yesterday. As the issue raised concerns Executive business, I respectfully tell the Member to raise it at Executive level, as that is where it sits.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Transport

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Mr Speaker, in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the twelfth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in transport sectoral format held in Armagh on Friday 20 April 2012.

I attended the meeting with the Environment Minister, Alex Attwood MLA, who will make a separate statement covering issues that relate to his Department. That will follow directly after my statement and question-and-answer session. I chaired the meeting, and Alex Attwood MLA, Minister of the Environment, and Leo Varadkar TD, Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, were in attendance.

On the Belfast-Dublin rail link, the Council discussed progress by Northern Ireland Railways (NIR) and Irish Rail on improving the performance of the Enterprise service and noted the following: reliability and punctuality had improved significantly in recent months; the companies are exploring the possibility of providing an hourly timetable, although that will require additional subvention beyond what is available within current budgets; further short-term improvements to the service are due for completion in 2012, including work to improve locomotive reliability, reduce fuel consumption and equip Enterprise trains with Wi-Fi; subject to the availability of funding, NIR has plans in the medium term to improve existing track quality; NIR is developing a business case for a multi-modal transport hub in Belfast's Great Victoria Street, which would improve city centre access for Enterprise passengers; and longer-term investment possibilities could be considered in the context of forthcoming EU decisions on the next Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) programme.

We discussed progress on the work of the All Island Freight Forum and noted the actions that were taken by the steering group following the plenary event, which was held in Belfast on 7 November 2011.

We also discussed sustainable travel and transport. We noted continued co-operation between the National Sustainable Travel Office and the Travelwise initiative in promoting walking, cycling, public transport and car sharing throughout both jurisdictions. The success of the Walk to School Week 2011 cross-border schools' challenge event was mentioned, and planning is under way for the 2012 event, which is scheduled for 23 May 2012. We noted the

growth of car sharing throughout both jurisdictions and noted the recent launch of the carsharing.ie website and joint promotions on car sharing. We also discussed the progression of workplace travel planning throughout both jurisdictions and noted that a pilot personalised travel plan initiative is under way in Galliagh and that one has been undertaken in Adamstown. A new personalised travel project is to be launched in late 2012. An active travel strategy for Northern Ireland under the title 'Building an Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland' will be finalised shortly. We also noted the success of all-island Bike Week 2011, which was held between 18 June and 26 June. Partnership arrangements are being put in place for a 2012 event, which will be held between 16 June and 24 June 2012.

Some £3 million will be invested in active travel demonstration projects in Northern Ireland from 2012 to 2015, and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS) will invest €23 million in three smarter travel areas between 2012 and 2016 to identify and develop best practice. Some €13 million will be invested in infrastructure to support active travel towns in the same period.

I am fascinated by the conversation to my right, Mr Speaker. It is far more interesting than what I am saying, clearly, but anyway.

The Council also discussed the success of the Dublinbikes public bike hire scheme and the commitment to seek to extend the Dublinbikes scheme across the wider Dublin area and to other cities. It was noted that a similar project is under consideration in Belfast. We also discussed the official opening of the Waterside Greenway project, the Canal Way and the Great Western Greenway and the co-operation of the Departments for Regional Development (DRD) and the Environment and the Electricity Supply Board in managing the installation of electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

The Council approved the appointment of Éamonn Ó Gribín to the board of the North/South Language Body, with responsibility for the exercise of the functions of the body through Foras na Gaeilge — I think that was put in deliberately — and the appointment of John Corbett to the board of InterTradelreland.

The Council agreed to hold its next NSMC transport meeting in October 2012.

Mr Doherty (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. I note that he discussed progress on the work of the All Ireland Freight Forum and noted the actions agreed by the steering group. Perhaps, the Minister will give us more detail on what those actions are. I am sure he is aware that the Committee was in Europe recently for meetings on the potential of the TEN-T programme, particularly in relation to the movement of freight. Europe feels that, by and large, freight should be moved by rail, but the reality is that on the island of Ireland freight moves by road. The Committee was concerned that the opportunity of attending the stakeholders' meeting was not taken up by your Department, but, thankfully, it took up the opportunity that the Committee identified in making the submission, on 8 May. We have a view that we simply cannot have enough engagement with Europe and that the question of over-egging the dialogue with Europe does not exist. Will you make some comment on that?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. The organisations involved in the freight forum are DRD, DTTAS, the Department of the Environment, the Freight Transport Association, the Road Safety Authority, the Irish Exporters Association, the Irish Maritime Development Office and the Central Statistics Office in Dublin. An administrative steering group meets quarterly to receive updates from each of the working groups. This is important work that is being carried forward, and I hope that it will continue.

In relation to the issue that the Member raised on engagement at European level on TEN-T matters, the Committee Clerk, the Deputy Chair and I have had discussions over recent days about the event that was held in Brussels yesterday. My Department and I, as Minister, did not receive a formal invitation to attend that event, although the Committee managed to get one on its recent trip to Europe. It was described as a key stakeholders' event, and my understanding is that no representatives at departmental or ministerial level were present from the Welsh devolved Administration or from the Scottish devolved Administration. Therefore, I welcome the fact that two members of the Committee attended the briefing yesterday, along with the Clerk, and I am very interested in getting an update on that.

I can tell the House that, entirely separate to the arrangements that the Committee had, it is my intention to visit Strasbourg early next week to meet senior officials and MEPs in relation to TEN-T issues. Therefore, there will be a combined strength in the representations. I take the point that it is important that we, as an Assembly, and, indeed, as an Executive, punch above our weight, if possible, on European matters.

I am happy to continue to work with the Committee in respect of these issues, and I assure the Member that, yet again, I will be putting strong representations — I think for the third time as Minister — on behalf of Northern Ireland's position in respect of TEN-T issues at the heart of Europe early next week.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Stephen Moutray, I wish to say to the House that Pat Doherty has had some latitude this morning as Deputy Chair of the Committee, and rightly so. It is the convention that Chairs or Deputy Chairs have some latitude when it comes to formulating their questions to the Minister, but that is where the latitude ends. There is a pattern in the House where Members feel that they also should deliver statements before they come to their question, but that applies only to the Chairs or vice-chairs of Committees. From here on in, it is one question to the statement, not further statements.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for bringing the statement to the House. I welcome the improvements that have been made in relation to the Enterprise service and the timings of it. Will the Minister outline what discussions there were in respect of minimising delays for road users and pedestrians at level crossings? I am thinking particularly of the William Street crossing in Lurgan, which is in my constituency, and its daily impact on the people who live and trade there.

Mr Speaker: I insist that the Member finishes.

Mr Moutray: Yes. What plans does the Minister have to alleviate problems at that crossing, given that we are now

talking about the possibility of an hourly service from Belfast to Dublin?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member who has not missed his opportunity to raise a key constituency issue. The honourable lady to my right, Mrs Dobson, and other Assembly colleagues, including Sam Gardiner, continually remind me about the difficulties of the William Street junction, and rightly so. At this point, we are a very long way from the North/South ministerial sectoral meeting, at which the specific case of Lurgan railway station was not raised. However, I will undertake to update the Member on current plans, and, if that is helpful, we will do that as quickly as possible.

10.45 am

Mr Beggs: In his statement, the Minister indicated that consideration is being given to an hourly service for the Enterprise but that that would require significant investment that he does not have. Does the Minister acknowledge that there is already considerable pressure on Translink, and will he assure us that existing rail services, such as Whitehead to Larne and other rural transport routes, will not suffer as a result of some sort of political direction of investment in improving our rail service?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. Yes, he is right: Translink, in conjunction with officials from my Department, is looking at the challenging financial scenario over the next two years. I know that the Regional Development Committee is due to receive presentations again from Translink on that situation. It is my hope and expectation that we can work through those issues and that any necessary finance can be found to maintain the level of services. However, it is challenging, and it may well be that I will have to turn to Executive colleagues and the Finance Minister for some additional relief on those matters. Nevertheless, we will continue to constructively work to ensure that front line services are not impacted on.

Mr Dallat: The Minister has identified all the things that need to be done to improve cross-border rail services. Does he agree that it is time to build up a head of steam in Europe to ensure that we have a decent service not only between Belfast and Dublin but between Derry and Dublin?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his pun and his supplementary question. As Minister, I have already proved my commitment to rail and to improving links between Belfast and Londonderry. Work is scheduled to commence in July to upgrade the Coleraine to Londonderry section of line. Obviously, we will also look for further improvements, not only to that section but to other sections. If it is at all possible, we will avail ourselves of any possible opportunity that Europe may provide to do that. Hence, it is important for the Committee to be involved, as they are and as members of the Committee were yesterday. When I go to Strasbourg, hopefully next week, I will further advance the claims on behalf of the Executive and the Assembly to improve our rail and road infrastructure.

Mr Dickson: Minister, you commented in your statement on the Active Travel strategy. Do you accept that one of the main barriers to active travel is the lack of adequate infrastructure? Will you commit yourself to formulating a detailed plan for the development of infrastructure to

facilitate more walking and cycling and integration with public transport?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I very much agree that active travel should be to the fore. Not only will it enhance travel as we know it, it will also enhance the health of our population. I am pleased that DRD will provide £3 million in the current financial year in capital funding to support the development of innovative demonstration projects. Sorry — not just £3 million in one year, but over the three years between 2012 and 2015. I realise that that is not an enormous sum of money. Nevertheless, it is clear that our intent is there. Even in financially challenging days, we see the benefit of the Active Travel strategy, and I am particularly interested in carrying it forward.

Mr Campbell: I do not know whether it is coincidental that the Minister is talking about transport today after his Stig-like performance at Parliament Buildings yesterday. My question is specifically on the comment in the statement regarding the Belfast to Dublin service between this country and the Republic, which everyone supports. The Minister said that providing an hourly service:

“will require additional subvention beyond what is available within current budgets”.

Can he assure the House, particularly those of us who represent the north-west, that if that occurs, it will not be at the expense of services to the north-west?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his compliments. Dressing up, it seems, is sometimes popular.

The Member makes a very good point. Certainly, when seeking to avail myself of additional funds, be it from Europe or the Executive, I as transport Minister look at how we can enhance the entire rail network, and not at the expense of one area. As I said earlier, I think that I have shown a very strong commitment to the north-west through the upgrade of the Coleraine to Londonderry line. It seemed that that scheme was not going to take place. However, we were able to bring it forward, and with Executive agreement and approval, work will commence on it later this year. It will hopefully be completed early on in the celebration of Londonderry as the UK City of Culture. I hope that that ongoing commitment not only to the north-west but to rail, and to transport generally, will be a hallmark of my tenure as Minister.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his extensive statement. Given the tone of his response to Mr Moutray, I fully expect him to pay tribute to his former party leader, who has just entered the Chamber, as I ask this constituency-related question. On the topic of the growth in car sharing, which he raised, there have been limited improvements made to the A4. Although those improvements are to be welcomed, perhaps further improvements could be made to the A4/N16, as set out in the regional development strategy. Can the Minister provide an update on the publication of a preferred route for the Enniskillen bypass?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. I am happy to confirm that his constituency colleague Tom Elliott has very often raised the issue of the Enniskillen bypass and, indeed, of every road that starts and finishes in County Fermanagh. That is not unhelpful.

The matter that the Member raises was not discussed in detail at the NSMC. I will provide him with a written update as quickly as possible.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the Minister's statement. On a number of occasions, he referred to the north-west, and rightly so, particularly the upgrade of the Derry to Coleraine line. Will the Minister indicate to the House whether there was any discussion about the proposed new terminal in Derry? Given the developments in the lead-up to the City of Culture celebrations and for its legacy, such a terminal in the city would maximise cross-border trade and passenger flow. Can the Minister indicate whether that is being brought forward at all?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. Again, we seem to be straying from that which was talked about in Armagh. I can say — I might as well share the congratulations here this morning — that the Speaker himself asked for a meeting with me to discuss the railway station in Londonderry. It is difficult, given the financial situation in which Translink finds itself. I know that a study being undertaken at the moment is identifying options. We will seek to get an update on where that is and likely timescales, and provide that information to the Member.

Mr Allister: Did the Minister find time to discuss the continuing blight on the freight industry, caused by the widespread use of illegal fuel and by contraband smuggling, which is driving honest operators out of business, because they refuse to so subsidise their business?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. That is indeed a very significant issue and, representing a border constituency as I do, I am well aware of the abuse that takes place and the impact on not only the environment but the Exchequer. Because it covers issues of the law and therefore of justice, there was no detailed discussion at the North/South sub-plenary in Armagh on this occasion. However, I am happy to raise it at the next plenary and subsequent meetings of the NSMC to ensure that proper attention is given to it.

Mr Speaker: I call Conor McKevitt.

Mrs McKevitt: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The McDevitt and McKevitt names sound alike. I also thank the Minister for his statement this morning and the extensive list of things that were discussed at the meeting, including walking, cycling, public transport and car sharing throughout the island. I will pick on car sharing, with the website and the joint promotions of car sharing. Has the Minister any plans to extend existing and more popular car sharing schemes throughout the jurisdictions, particularly around Sheepbridge in Newry?

Mr Kennedy: I am very grateful to the Member. Tip O'Neill was absolutely right: "all politics is local". As the Member knows, and wants me to explain again, I recently met her in relation to that issue of park-and-share and park-and-ride facilities at Sheepbridge off the A1 bypass. I also had the opportunity to meet members of Newry and Mourne District Council — of which she is a former member, like me — to discuss the issue. Officials are looking at how we can improve the existing situation, given the financial constraints that we face, and I will seek to update the Member accordingly.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Minister for his statement. I am glad to see that he is as nimble as ever, even without his crash helmet on today. When he was discussing the Belfast to Dublin rail link, were salary increases and job losses for Translink employees on the agenda? If they were not, does he expect them to be on the agenda soon?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I regard such issues as matters to be dealt with primarily by Translink, and therefore they would not, and should not, fall under the remit of North/South ministerial sectoral meetings. I can tell the Member, as I think I indicated last week at Question Time, that, so far, Translink has successfully avoided compulsory redundancies in all of the changes that it has brought forward and efficiency drives that it has had. I hope that, by working with Translink through my departmental officials, we can ensure that that remains the case.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answers. In relation to the electric vehicle charging infrastructure, are there any proposals to increase the number of provincial towns that will be used as charging points like Strabane and Omagh? Secondly, what proposals are there to have any joint promotion for the greater use of electric vehicles on the whole of the island?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. The Member will know that we have publicly launched the e-car. Alex Attwood and I had the opportunity to use the vehicles, and they are very impressive, both in terms of their low emissions and their driving capacity. We have installed charging points at various locations all over Northern Ireland, and we will be seeking to extend that over the next few months.

I note the Member's particular interest in Strabane and Omagh, which, conveniently fall in his constituency. I will seek to update him with the number and location of sites, as well as proposals for any increase.

11.00 am

North/South Ministerial Council: Road Safety

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): In compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I, too, wish to make a statement on the twelfth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in transport sectoral format, which was held in Armagh at Council headquarters on Friday 20 April 2012. As you heard, the meeting was chaired by the Regional Development Minister, my colleague Danny Kennedy, and attended by Minister Varadkar TD, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and me. I will address the agenda items for which my Department has responsibility: road user safety, vehicle safety and the mutual recognition of penalty points.

The Council welcomed continuing collaboration on the delivery of road safety strategies and the complementary approach to the Crashed Lives road safety campaign. On my behalf and, clearly, that of the House, I convey sympathy to the families who have lost a loved one in recent days in road collisions. At the same time, I acknowledge that, in the North and in Ireland, significant reductions are now being demonstrated in the number of road traffic fatalities and serious injuries. In my view, that is all influenced and encouraged by the complementary approach to road safety campaigns, North and South.

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

At the meeting, we discussed the recent introduction in Ireland of lower blood:alcohol concentration levels for drivers, which came into force on the October bank holiday last year. I also set out the primary objectives of the draft road traffic amendment Bill. Subject to Executive agreement, I will issue the relevant provisions of the Bill for consultation soon. Hopefully, that will be imminent. As Members know, the Bill will provide the powers that are necessary to introduce similar lower blood:alcohol concentration levels in Northern Ireland for, on the one hand, novice and professional drivers and, on the other hand, all other drivers at appropriate concentration levels.

The Council welcomed the sharing of knowledge and experience to improve new driver safety. There is strong mutual interest in driver training and testing and in graduated driver licensing, as well as in the effectiveness of measures in those areas and how best to implement and evaluate them. I intend to make an announcement very shortly on additional driver licensing changes, further to those that have already been announced, in an effort to ensure that driver licensing is upgraded to improve safety and provide opportunities for drivers.

The Council welcomed the ongoing work to implement the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010.

On vehicle safety, the Council welcomed the continuing co-operation to proactively target a wide range of illegal activity in the goods haulage and passenger transport industries. That includes an increased enforcement focus on bus and coach operators; discussions on a further series of cross-border enforcement operations in 2012 in both jurisdictions,

of which at this time it is intended there will be eight; co-operation on vehicle standards, including the mutual recognition of vehicle type approval, review of the use of agricultural vehicles in Ireland and the exchange of data on unroadworthy foreign vehicles; and excellent co-operation on the enforcement of EU tachograph and driver hours rules and proposed training exchanges for enforcement officers.

There was a further conversation on proposals from the London Government on charging for foreign haulage coming into Britain and Northern Ireland. Given the particular circumstances on the island, where there is a land border, and the movement of vehicles north and south, the London proposals to charge foreign hauliers using roads in Britain and Northern Ireland will be more testing and challenging in our circumstances than might be the case in Britain.

The Council also noted that nominations to joint steering and working groups have been sought from representatives of relevant interests in both jurisdictions to take forward work on the mutual recognition of penalty points. It was further noted that the terms of reference for the joint steering and working groups have been prepared and that the timetable for delivery and implementation by 2014 will be prepared following the first steering and working group meetings.

Minister Kennedy will confirm Minister Varadkar's strong and growing commitment to achieving the proposed recognition of penalty points by 2014. I welcomed that. I also welcomed the advance on that work, and progress will be reported to the next NSMC transport meeting, to which Minister Kennedy referred, in October of this year.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister of the Environment. Sorry: I call the Chairperson of the Environment Committee, Ms Anna Lo. That was a promotion for you, Anna.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

I thank the Minister for his statement. I very much welcome the forthcoming consultation on a Bill to reduce blood:alcohol concentration levels for drivers. Did the Minister discuss with his counterpart advances in detecting the increasing problem of people driving under the influence of drugs and deterring them from doing so?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for her question and for her support for the consultation that is about to commence on the Executive-endorsed proposals to reduce the blood:alcohol limits for novice and professional drivers and all other categories of driver.

At the meeting, there was no particular discussion about drug testing. However, as Members will be aware, proposals are emanating from London that, it is hoped, will be in place within the next two or three years to facilitate the roadside testing of people who are believed to be under the influence of drugs. I want to make it very clear, because there may be some confusion, that it is already an offence to have drugs in your system, whether illegal or prescription, if they impair your ability to drive. However, it is difficult to assess whether someone is suffering from impairment. It is part of our road safety strategy, the Department's commitment and London's commitment that, within the next two or three years, there will be sufficient scientific advances to allow the roadside

testing of drivers' saliva. Four pilots of equipment are being worked through. People would be tested at the side of the road and, on that basis, a judgement made on whether they were under the influence of drugs. Therefore, we will move beyond a test of impairment to a test of science, and that saliva-based test will give rise to potential prosecutions. However, that is still work in progress. How, for example, will you differentiate between people who legitimately have prescription drugs in their system and those who have taken illegal drugs; what drugs will be covered; and what further tests will be carried out when someone is brought back to a police station? Those are issues of science. However, I welcome the fact that the London Government agree that we need to get to a point at which roadside science-based tests determine whether someone is under the influence of drugs and that penalties will arise in those circumstances.

Mr Weir: I welcome the statement and the Minister's indication that, in the near future, he will provide more information on the driver licensing system. I will not press him directly on that today.

What timetable does the Minister envisage for the implementation of the change to the blood:alcohol level?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member. I intend to have consultation on the blood:alcohol proposal within the month. The consequence of that is to have legislation in the House by the autumn so that we will have the First Reading and the other stages of the Bill thereafter as part of the road traffic amendment Bill that I propose to bring forward. I have an ambition to have a second road traffic amendment Bill further in the mandate. If that arises, it is in that legislation that we would park any further legislative requirements in respect of drug testing for driver capability.

I do not mind touching on the issue of changes in the driver licensing regime. We have an opportunity to have the most radical reconfiguration of driver testing in a way that potentially can work itself through in reduced insurance costs for everybody, particularly new drivers, and improve road safety and driver capacity. For example, I am inclined to go down the road of allowing learner and restricted drivers to drive at a speed of 70 mph rather than 45 mph. I am inclined to agree that learner drivers should be able to go on a motorway in a dual-controlled vehicle with a qualified driver instructor in order to learn how to drive on motorways. When Mr Weir and I and everybody else in the House passed the driving test, we could have been on a motorway within five minutes, having never been on a motorway before. That does not seem to be a sensible way to proceed. I am looking at more radical changes, including the potential to allow people to get a licence before the age of 17 but not being allowed to take a test for a period, potentially up to a year, after they get their licence. In all those ways, we can create opportunities for young drivers to drive and have a better training regime in preparation for qualification in a way that can work itself through to reduce insurance costs.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I take the opportunity to offer my sincere sympathy and condolences to the family of young Gary McNaughton, who was tragically killed on the roads over the weekend in Armagh city and district.

Minister, you talked about graduated driver licences, and you explained some of the measures that you intend to

introduce. You mentioned 70 mph on motorways and that type of testing for learner drivers. Will you consider looking at a speed inhibitor in some cases? You talked about introducing the tests to young people, perhaps of 16 years of age. Will you look at speed inhibitors being fitted to some cars?

11.15 am

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member. As I indicated in my opening remarks, I, too, send my condolences to all those who have recently lost a family member as a result of a road traffic accident, particularly given that, in the first four months of this calendar year, there was a further demonstrable shift downwards in the number of road fatalities and serious injuries arising from road collisions. There seemed to be a further shift in driver behaviour. As part of that, on 23 May, my Department will roll out the next phase of the Crashed Lives 45-second slot TV advertisements, which, on this occasion, will be about the risk to pedestrians. There was evidence of a spike in recent times — certainly during the course of last year — of pedestrians, especially on unlit rural roads, being at higher risk and with higher levels of fatalities. I hope to be joined on that occasion by the Minister of Justice and the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Kennedy, to show a corporate responsibility across Departments in that regard.

I noted what the Member said about speed inhibitors. They need to be considered by car manufacturers. Mr Kennedy referred to the option of driving an e-car. One thing about e-cars is that they are so silent that you cannot hear them, inside or outside. In America, they have begun to fit noise boxes to electric cars to let people know that there is a car about. It is not just our sight that guides us in road safety but our hearing. If you do not hear something, there is an increased risk. I think that issues around speed inhibitors and other manufacturing interventions can be part of the roll-out of increased road safety measures.

I am looking at driver behaviour, which is a variation on Mr Boylan's proposal. There is greater opportunity to put black boxes in cars that monitor driver behaviour, especially that of a novice. There is evidence that insurance companies will reduce premiums where they are satisfied that a newly qualified driver such as Mr Eastwood — despite his longevity, he is a recently qualified driver — is of a sufficient standard. There was an article in 'The Irish Times' yesterday — I cut it out but did not read it — about how advances in technology mean that black boxes can be put in cars in an effort to monitor driver behaviour, especially that of young and novice drivers. That could result in reduced premiums for young and novice drivers as a result of high standards of driving. Those are the technologies of today that we need to have in the cars of today.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for the detailed information. I note that his statement mentioned a review of the use of agricultural vehicles, and I wonder exactly what that entails. My ears light up when I hear that, simply because we sometimes feel that there is too much legislation on that. I want to get to the bottom of what the review will entail.

Mr Attwood: When I was referring to that in my statement, I knew that there was bound to be a question. I have not had any briefing on it, so I will have to go on recall. One issue raised by Mr Varadkar, subject to Mr Kennedy's recollection, was that there is evidence of agricultural vehicles being

used for non-agricultural purposes in difficult times, although I think that the evidence comes from the Republic and not here. That has an impact on other vehicle suppliers — for example, suppliers for the construction industry — because, if agricultural vehicles are used, generally or widely, on public roads for the movement of building materials, there are issues around road safety and whether that constitutes proper use. Mr Varadkar raised that issue, although we do not seem to have the scale of problem that appears to exist in the Republic. Further assessments are being made on that issue, but they escape my mind at the moment. I will have to write to the Member.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the Minister's statement and his indication that there is collaboration with the Republic. Does he agree that there should be no opportunity for people on either side of the border to take the life of others or cause serious injury? Will he indicate how, through collaboration, we will arrive at a situation in which the border will not be an excuse for lawbreakers to take other people's lives?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question, and I fully endorse the sentiment that he expresses. It may seem beyond our reach, but the target should be zero road deaths. In a place like here, given the ability to roll out public policy on an all-Ireland basis, the aspiration should be to have zero deaths on the roads. In parts of Europe, the ambition to have zero deaths on the road is publicly stated, and, whilst that might be seen to be overreaching, I have no doubt that, if you look at the figures from when they were first collected and go back over the decades, when hundreds of people were being killed on our roads, you will see that it seemed beyond our capacity and ambition to get down to where we are today. Over the past two years, there have been fewer than 60, and, in the first four months of this year, there was a further appreciable shift in the volume of deaths on our roads. I say that cautiously, because it only takes one tragedy or a series of tragedies, as we have had in recent days, for those figures to begin to spike again.

I acknowledge that there is a lot of joined-up work on road safety. The Republic of Ireland has learned from our Crashed Lives campaign, and we have learned from the fact that it introduced lower alcohol limits in October last year. The Road Safety Authority in the Republic is led by Gay Byrne, and I hope that there might be some event for which Mr Byrne might come north to further manifest and give expression to the shared strategy and workings that we have on an all-Ireland basis. All that work is ongoing day and daily, but, to escalate that work, we are taking forward the mutual recognition of penalty points, not for every offence but for the critical offences of drink-driving, car phone use, no seat belt, excess speed and careless driving. Careless driving is the single biggest factor that gives rise to serious injury and death on our roads. That is why, Mr Dallat, we are taking that forward, despite some initial advice to me that we could not do this working with Dublin. I checked out the legal advice and found out that we could do it. I then spoke with Mr Penning, one of the Ministers in the Department for Transport in London, to invite him into a shared enterprise with Dublin and ourselves to have all-islands recognition of penalty points. He was not inclined to go in that direction this time, but he offered his support and said that he would watch it closely. So, Mr Varadkar and I have taken the initiative forward to have mutual recognition of penalty points for critical driving issues on the island of Ireland. That, allied with mutual recognition of driver disqualification

and other interventions, will, hopefully, fulfil the ambition of Mr Dallat's question.

Mr P Ramsey: I commend the Department and the Minister for the Crashed Lives programmes, which he has spoken about a few times. I particularly commend the participants in the programmes whose testimony and witness has been a powerful message in itself. In my constituency, there is a family who lost their son and a young lady who is quite badly disabled and in a wheelchair. As someone who has lost a brother and his wife, killed by a drunk driver, I understand the trauma and difficulties experienced by families. Is the Minister confident that the recognition of penalty points North/South will be firmly in place before 2014?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. Personally, he speaks with more power and eloquence than arguably anybody in the Chamber about the impact on families of road traffic collisions. I also agree with him about the testimonies of the two young people in the Crashed Lives ads who will carry with them a severe disability for the rest of their life and of the two sets of parents who will carry with them the tragedy and trauma of the loss of a young child: they are very powerful. I had the honour of meeting all of them, including the people from Derry, when the Crashed Lives advertisements were launched earlier this year. It leaves you speechless. The scale of their trauma and the power of their message are so great that, even when the adverts come on TV now, you stop to hear the message from the voices of those parents and young people.

It will not be an easy task to have all this in place by 2014. There are legal issues and administrative arrangements, and there is a requirement to share data and to have the IT architecture in place to ensure that we can go live in 2014. However, for an idea that was only born six months ago, it is clear that, at an official level, the Administrations North and South have interrogated what needs to be done and have developed work streams to make sure that it gets done. There are no ifs or doubts in the views of Minister Varadkar, Minister Kennedy and me: we want to get it done and to send out the message that there will be enforcement of the penalty point regime across the island for anyone who is guilty of serious offences.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas a rinne sé. Ba mhaith liomsa a fhiafraí den Aire cad iad na tionscnaimh nua a bheas sa phacáiste nua aige le feabhas a chur ar shábháilteacht ar bhóithre do thiománaithe nua agus an mbeidh dea-thionchar ag na moltaí seo ar chostas árachas gluaisteán do na tiománaithe nua? What initiatives will be included in the Minister's forthcoming package of measures to improve road safety for new drivers? Is it likely that such measures will contribute beneficially to a reduction in insurance premiums for young drivers?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. I touched on some of the question in earlier replies, and I will enlarge on some of those replies. Other initiatives that I am inclined to bring forward would be, for example, to increase the restriction period from one year to two years. If there is to be a more liberal approach in some aspects of novice driving — for example being able to drive at 70 mph — it may be necessary to extend by a year the period of restriction to fully and better monitor new drivers' performance. In that way, we can give some flexibility to

new drivers while creating new discipline. There will also be a proposal — newer drivers are much more aware of this than my generation — to have a syllabus-led training regime, whereby people would be obliged to record how their training proceeds in order to self-assess and be externally assessed on the quality of their driving during the training period. I also intend to change R-plates to N-plates to demonstrate that drivers are new drivers and give expression to that in that way.

There are other more controversial proposals that I will think about, but I am far from satisfied that they are the right way to go in our particular circumstances. For example, in other jurisdictions, there is a ban on night-time driving for new drivers, let us say between 1.00 am and 6.00 am, and there is an argument and evidence from Australia, New Zealand and states in America that that has an appreciable impact on road safety, especially for new drivers. However, in our circumstances, our diverse rural community and the need for younger people, in particular, to work part time at night, it seems hard to see how that could work.

11.30 am

A proposal strongly made to me by insurance companies is to put restrictions on whom new drivers can carry. That is, again, because there is good evidence that new drivers carrying people of their own age group are involved disproportionately in serious and fatal road traffic accidents. To consider restricting who new drivers can carry, particularly applying it to their own age group, and the number of passengers they would be allowed is a bold step. That is the radical, bold, cutting edge of a driver regime, and I am considering those proposals. Whatever I come up with in the coming weeks will be measured by the concern for road safety, flexibility for new drivers and reducing insurance costs.

Lord Morrow: The Minister speaks about driver training and testing. Does he envisage a part of testing being carried out in the hours of darkness, as driving in daylight and at night are entirely different? Does he plan to increase the motorway speed limit from 70 miles per hour to 80?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. The speed limit on motorways is Mr Kennedy's responsibility. Without presuming to speak for him, I think that our common view is that increasing the speed limit to 80 is not desirable. The evidence from Britain is that the consequences in a motorway collision of moving to 80 miles per hour are disproportionate to the increase of just 10 miles per hour. I know that London has been thinking about changing it, but I am not inclined to agree with it. I have stated that publicly; Mr Kennedy can answer for himself in the fullness of time, but I think that we probably share that view.

In respect of night-time driving: 21 proposals were brought forward to me. My officials were inclined to recommend six. I have gone beyond those six to bring forward probably 12, 13 or 14 of the various recommendations that arise from the consultation. Among them is whether we can operationally, logistically and managerially introduce night-time driving as part of the training regime. You will hear further about all that in the near future.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister of the Environment on his statement.

Education: Funding 2012-13

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. A Phríomh-Leas Cheann Comhairle, Ba mhaith liom ráiteas a dhéanamh ar na Leithdháiltí Breise Cistithe atá á ndéanamh in earnáil an oideachais i 2012-13. I would like to make a statement on further funding allocations that I am making to the education sector for the 2012-13 financial year and a number of announcements for the period beyond that.

In January this year, following discussions with the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and the Finance Minister, I announced that I had secured an additional £120 million over the next three years to be allocated directly to schools. The underlying details of this were notified to the chairpersons of all grant-aided schools at that time. The following month, I advised schools of their individual delegated budgets, distributed under the common funding scheme arrangements, for the 2012-13 financial year.

Although I was able to provide early notification to schools in January of the overall delegated budgets available to them over the next three years, it was equally important that the remaining 40% of my budget was reviewed to ensure that resources were being utilised in the best way. In that context, I had previously announced that I had asked my officials to carry out an internal review of budget allocations to identify further savings for allocations to priority funding areas. This review has now been completed, and I am announcing the results today.

The review has released funding for key areas through further reductions in bureaucracy and savings from other educational services. Today's allocations have been made possible only by my efforts to drive out inefficiencies. The internal budgetary review identified a range of funding areas where further savings can be delivered. All the savings that have been identified are over and above those already published in my Department's savings delivery plan. For example, I am tasking the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) with delivering a further £2.9 million of savings this financial year. In addition, £1 million is to be realised from the entitlement framework budget in 2012-13. Other areas where savings have been identified in 2012-13 are a saving of £0.5 million from the school improvement programme and a saving of £1.4 million from the school development fund. I will arrange for details of the revised budget lines to be sent to the Education Committee in due course.

However, let me be clear: despite announcing these further funding allocations today, education continues to face tough financial challenges. As Minister, I am fully committed to ensuring that I make the best use of the funds that are available to me. I have repeatedly made it clear that I will continue to seek further funding for education. However, I do not simply look towards the Executive for extra funds. I fully recognise the fiscal climate in which allocations across the Budget 2010 period were set, so I have reassessed my own planned budget allocations to allow me to identify further savings so that I can reinvest them in front line education and youth services and in areas where real differences can be achieved.

Our children deserve the best environment in which to learn. However, the maintenance backlog in schools

remains significant, and failure to progress work now will compound the problem through further deterioration of the education estate. I am, therefore, ring-fencing £27 million for that purpose in 2012-13 in the education and library boards' resource allocation plans. That will allow early commissioning of work in this area, and it will also go some way to providing support to the construction industry.

I recognise fully the benefits of early intervention for the educational outcomes of our children, and in support of that, I announced a range of measures in the Assembly last month. As well as providing an additional £150 per annum for each preschool place in the voluntary and private sector and expanding the Sure Start programme to reach 25% of the most disadvantaged areas, I am providing the funding that is necessary to allow me to meet the Executive's commitment in the Programme for Government of providing at least one year of preschool education for every family who wants it. Those measures amount to a further £13 million, which is broken down as follows: a total of £3.9 million over the next three years to fund an additional £150 payment to the voluntary and private sector; a total of £4.4 million over the next three years to fund the expansion of the Sure Start scheme; and a total of £4.8 million over the next three years to provide at least one year's preschool education. If it is established that further investment is needed to deliver this Programme for Government commitment, I will not be found wanting.

I am also allocating an additional £1.2 million per annum, amounting to £3.6 million over the next three years, for the extended schools programme. That will allow for a co-ordinated approach to involving parents in the life of the school and will provide programmes to allow parents to support the development of their child's literacy and numeracy skills. For youth services, I am providing an increased investment of £1 million this year, rising to £2 million per annum from 2013-14. That is a total of £5 million of additional investment over the next three years. That additional funding will be used to support youth services in disadvantaged areas by increasing access to mainstream youth services and outreach and detached youth work. It will also target provision to help meet the needs of specific groups of young people, such as those in the section 75 groupings or those who may be at greater risk of social exclusion, marginalisation or isolation because they experience a combination of barriers to learning.

I remain fully committed to tackling social need and disadvantage. Hence, I am providing a further £1.3 million over each of the next three years, which is some £3.9 million in total, to ensure that the rising numbers of children in lower-income families receive the uniform grants and free school meals to which they are entitled. I strongly encourage those families to claim their full entitlements to ease the financial burden that is placed upon them.

I have been impressed by the work of the area learning communities and the potential contribution that they can make to the education system, particularly as we move forward with area-based planning. I have set aside £0.5 million per annum, amounting to £1.5 million over the next three years, to develop a more meaningful role, and I have asked my officials to work up proposals for that.

The role performed by our school governors should not be underestimated. I will give these volunteers the help and

support that they need to carry out their crucial role. Hence I am setting aside funding of £0.5 million per annum — up to £1.5 million over the next three years — to improve the quality and responsiveness of training and support to help governors in their focus on raising standards and promoting effective management within schools.

Today, I am also announcing financial support for a number of other areas. That support includes a total of £2.2 million over the next three years to ensure that all dedicated school buses have the appropriate signage and lighting; setting aside provision of up to £6 million per annum for special schools to recognise increasing demand and costs in that area; and support of up to £0.5 million per annum for a project in Belfast that focuses on raising standards and achieving the Programme for Government commitment on tackling disadvantage.

On capital allocations, I am looking at how best to allocate the reduced funding available to me. I propose to announce the outcome of that shortly.

Real progress has been made in delivering the savings delivery plan targets to date, but it is clear that we still face significant challenges over the next three years in balancing the books. It will be important in the weeks and months ahead that school budgets are closely managed and that boards of governors continue to exercise good financial management.

By announcing these further allocations today, I have demonstrated my commitment to ensuring that the funding available to me is directed to areas where the greatest benefit can be achieved. At the heart of my proposals are the twin aims of raising standards and providing for the most vulnerable in society. However, let me assure you that I will not rest on my laurels and that I will constantly seek to increase the funding available to education to ensure that our young people get the world-class education they so richly deserve.

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): On behalf of the Committee, I thank the Minister for the briefing that he gave to me and the Deputy Chair prior to his coming to the House this morning. I also thank him for giving a commitment that his officials will send the details of the revised budget lines to the Education Committee so that they can be further scrutinised.

I would caution the Minister that neither he nor we should make the mistake of trying to link the additional money that he secured in 2012 as a result of the intervention of the First Minister and the Finance Minister with the reallocation of the 40% of his budget that he had delayed allocating. We should make that clear distinction because the Minister is, I think, trying to link two things that are not inextricably linked.

However, in light of what the Minister has said to the House today, will he clearly explain to the House, on the back of what he told us a few weeks ago, how this particular reallocation will deal with the disparity around the percentage figure relating to the delegated budget, which, according to his own words, was somewhere in the region of 59%? How will he ensure that that money will go directly to schools? On the one hand, he says that it will, but on the other hand, he tells us today that another £1.3 million is to be released from the entitlement framework budget, which will put additional financial pressure on schools. That is not

a help, and that is not welcome. However, no doubt much more will be said about the statement made to the House today.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Chairperson for his question. It covers a wide range of issues. I often find it remarkable that when he refers to the meeting that took place between the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and the Finance Minister, he cannot bring himself to mention the deputy First Minister. The deputy First Minister and the First Minister are inextricably linked, and they were both present at the meeting with the Finance Minister.

I can assure the Member and the House that I am fully conscious of the terms upon which that agreement was reached. I welcome the fact that the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and the Finance Minister recognised the reality that, without their intervention of £120 million for education, education would be in a worse place than it is now. I am in no way using that investment so that I can footer about with the other funds within my budget and make allocations. That £120 million is there for schools and is going directly to schools. However, schools on their own cannot deliver education, as strange as that may sound. It is widely recognised that 80% of learning takes place outside the school environment and 20% within the school environment. I believe that the initiatives that I announced today will make schools' task of delivering education to young people that bit easier and allow them to raise their standards, which will allow young people to be everything that they can be.

11.45 am

This is not new money. I have never suggested that it is new money. When I came into office approximately one year ago this week, I said that I was going to review my budget. I reviewed my budget — the 40% of the budget that does not go directly to schools. Through that review, I identified moneys that I believe should be spent elsewhere. I stand by the decisions that I made. Those moneys have now been identified for areas that will assist in the education of our young people and improve their lives and assist our schools in delivering education.

I reassure the Member and the House that I am fully conscious of the terms of the £120 million funding. I have no intention to move away from those terms. I also want to make it clear that, by the end of this financial term, this comprehensive spending review (CSR) period, education will have £216 million less to spend than it did at the start.

As Education Minister, I could come into office, sit back, allow things to happen and accept that we live in very difficult circumstances. Or, as Education Minister, I could come into office and make interventions where I can. I believe that the interventions that I announced today are the correct ones.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement. I believe that it will also be welcomed by low- to middle-income families and a beleaguered construction industry because of the £27 million investment in maintenance. On that point, how important was it for the maintenance funding to be ring-fenced?

The Minister also mentioned capital funding in his statement. Will he let us know when that capital funding is likely to be announced?

Mr O'Dowd: Last year, I think that we allocated £17 million to the boards for maintenance programmes. Through the monitoring rounds, we achieved an extra £10 million. The boards have leeway around how they spend funding, which is allocated to them through the assessment of relative needs (ARNE) formula. However, I believe that the school maintenance programme is in a dire state. That is why I announced today that £27 million has been set aside. I used £10 million of my own budget; I did not rely on the monitoring rounds. I made a definite decision that the £17 million that was available last year will be available this year and I included £10 million from my own budget; I did not rely on the Executive or on monitoring rounds. I made the decision to put £27 million into school maintenance, and I ring-fenced it to ensure that the boards are aware that it has to be spent on school maintenance. That allows the boards to start planning school maintenance programmes that can be rolled out over the summer and into the autumn so that the money is spent in a planned way.

I accept that the boards, being the delivery agents of education, have their own financial difficulties and issues. I will work with them throughout the year, as I did last year, to assist them with the financial pressures that bear down upon them.

I am continuing to engage with my officials about the capital builds programme. I am looking at how we can make an announcement as regards capital builds in line with the principles of area planning, but it will be ahead of area planning because of the time frames involved. I want to be assured that the capital budget, limited as it is, will be spent in its entirety before the end of this CSR period.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for the meeting beforehand and for the statement. I very much welcome a great deal that is in it. It is good to see a Department constantly reviewing its spend. However, it would be better if it were done earlier so that people could budget properly for some of the things that they want to do. However, that is not what I want to go into today.

I welcome the announcement of £27 million for maintenance. I wonder how much of that money is going to go to which boards. When you spend that money and look at area planning at the same time, it will become evident that certain schools will not be getting money for their maintenance, which will show that those schools are threatened with closure. As I have gone round schools and met people, I have noticed that there is a feeling that the Department is not talking to or communicating with teachers and the boards.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question.

Mr Kinahan: Will some of the money be used to make sure that the Department communicates properly with boards and teachers before the consultation stage to ensure that the threat hovering over so many schools is lessened?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his question. The boards, through their work and engagement with schools over many years, have information available to them on which schools are priorities as far as maintenance

programmes are concerned. A number of schools have question marks over their future. However, they may still require health and safety work to be carried out, and that work should go ahead. It is right and proper that boards, when planning significant spends on schools, take into account their own information and data on whether particular schools have a future. We are talking about only a small number of schools at this stage.

The area plans that have been drawn up are with my Department, which is scrutinising them and will ask the boards to issue them for public consultation. Not only will schools, teachers and parents have an opportunity to engage, and have all the information and facts in front of them, but the broader community will be able to engage in the area planning process. Everyone will have the plans in front of them and will be able to comment on them. The area planning process has been, and will be, open and transparent.

Of course, if there are communication issues between boards and schools, I would like there to be improvement. Good communication between schools and boards is vital and, I believe, exists in the vast majority of cases. However, if there are issues pertaining to a number of schools, and the Member would like to bring those to my attention, I would be happy to discuss them with him.

Mr Rogers: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Minister for his statement. I, too, welcome more money for schools, but if you really want to raise standards, the money must get to the classroom. I hope that the Minister will look at the age-weighted pupil unit in future. I would like clarification on whether there is any additional funding for special units.

Mr O'Dowd: My response to the Member's first point is that we have to come at raising standards from a multifaceted point of view. It is almost equivalent to asking the Health Minister to improve health and imposing on him a method of building a new hospital in every town. Health will not be improved by building hospitals in every town, and education will not be improved simply by concentrating all resources in the classroom. I would like more resources to put into the classroom — I am in no way stating that enough funds go there — but I have to deal with the budget in front of me and use it in a strategic way. The money made available by the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and the Finance Minister has gone some way to alleviating the pressures on schools, but it by no means eradicates them. Today's allocations to the broader education regime will assist in delivering and supporting young people through their educational journey.

The Member asked a specific question about the age-weighted pupil unit. I have asked a number of people, whose names I will announce in the time ahead, to conduct an independent review of the common funding formula. They will engage with stakeholders and the various sectors and come back to me with a report on the best way to use my current budget to support my Department's policies. One criterion that I will place in the terms of reference is the more effective and efficient targeting of social need.

All areas of my budget have been or will be reviewed. Indeed, my budget will be constantly under review. I review programmes of work as they progress, and if not

satisfied with their progress, I may change budget lines. I may also decide that a programme of work requires further investment to move forward. So it is important that Ministers are given the flexibility to review their budgets and make changes when they believe it necessary to do so.

Mr Lunn: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I welcome the Minister's statement today. I will never be disappointed to hear that a Minister is squeezing money out of bureaucracy and putting it into front line services. I want to ask the Minister specifically about the section in his statement about setting aside £6 million per annum for special schools. There is a demand from some special schools to establish post-16 provision. Could some of that £6 million be used for that purpose?

Mr O'Dowd: A number of boards have identified to the Department that pressures are bearing down on them in respect of special education. The Belfast Board has reported significant pressures that are bearing down on it. I have set aside the £6 million for the boards to deal with those pressures. As far as I am aware, there are no proposals before me at this stage for special schools to expand beyond 16. I will look favourably at any proposal that comes to me. We will look at the budgetary lines and requirements when proposals are made.

The Member who asked the previous question referred to special units in schools. I have to say that I do not like that term. I am not criticising the Member for using it, as it is in the dialogue of education, but I do not favour it overly. The £6 million has been set aside to assist the pressures that are being felt in special education provision, whether in mainstream schools or special schools.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister outline whether there are any plans in his capital allocations for new school builds at Millburn Primary School in Coleraine, which is very deserving and long overdue a newbuild, and Rossmar special needs school in Limavady, which is also very deserving of a newbuild? I welcome the funding of preschool provision and urge the Minister to look at Harpur's Hill preschool, which does so much good work.

Mr O'Dowd: The Member is perfectly entitled to raise schools in his constituency; that is the role of an MLA. I have not made any announcements of capital allocations today. I am involved in discussions with my departmental officials. We are looking at all the applications for newbuilds on my desk to see how we can use my very limited budget to fulfil a demand that far outstretches the budget available to me. Newbuilds will be announced when I make my statement. The building programme will facilitate the schools that are announced, and, of course, there will be disappointment among the schools that are not announced at that time.

Each school will be allocated its early years funding through a recognised and accepted funding formula.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I join other Members in welcoming the Minister's announcement of the allocation of funding. Will he clarify the impact that it will have on the viability audit that commenced following his statement to the House in September, given that the main assessment to date has been in financial terms? Will this allocation of additional funding have any impact on that process?

Mr O'Dowd: No, it will have no direct impact on that funding. The viability audit was carried out using three criteria: financial, exams and enrolment. The funding that I announced today is for the broader family of education. For instance, extended schools funding will go to schools, but it is not directly associated with the aggregated schools budget connected with schools. What I have done today is to set out a package of funding for the broader remit of education. I believe that all of that will be for front line services and will assist in the improvement of educational outcomes for young people. It does not have a negative or positive impact on the viability audits.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his statement. I, too, welcome extra funding going into education through Sure Start, the extended schools programme, youth services and preschool education. However, the Minister will be aware of the low educational attainment in the greater Shankill. He responded to my colleague on capital allocation. He will be aware that two schools in the greater Shankill area, Springhill and Glenwood, have been waiting for newbuilds for some time. Those would be a massive boost for the local communities, the boards of governors, the parents and, most importantly, the children of those schools. Can the Minister give any comfort to those schools that have been waiting for new schools for a long time?

Mr O'Dowd: Let me clarify this on the record. I have not announced extra funding today. I have announced the reallocation of funding, which has come as a result of a review of my budgets. There will be winners and losers, as there are in all such matters. I am dealing with a budget. I have reviewed it very closely and looked at where we need to inject finances to make programmes of work more effective and efficient. I have also looked at areas in which we can reduce bureaucracy.

I am aware of the proposal for the Shankill. My response to the Member is the same as it was to his colleague. I have not made capital announcements today. I will make capital announcements in the future, but I do not have the capital resources available to fulfil the demand that is out there.

In broader terms, I would say that we have to get to a system in which the building and capital programme is much more streamlined than it is now.

It can become a very complex and convoluted process to work your way through. The way it happens is that the schools that can go ahead are those that are built, and the projects for schools that are caught up in a multitude of planning matters, discussions between schools, discussions between Departments, and land swaps, etc, face further delay. I am working on that with my Department. I appeal to all: let us make the process of building new schools as streamlined as possible to ensure that, when moneys become available, the schools are put on the ground as quickly as possible.

12.00 noon

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the additional funding announced today, especially that targeted at preschools. However, does the Minister agree that a piecemeal approach is not the best way forward for our education system? I have been contacted by principals who have already set their budgets. Therefore, a back-of-the-sofa approach to funding education is potentially

damaging for its long-term health. I also note, Minister, that £6 million of savings are detailed in the review. Can you provide further clarity on how it has come to that amount?

Mr O'Dowd: I will begin by addressing your last point. I am going to provide the Education Committee with the full list of new budget lines that have come about as a result of my review.

You referred to this as a piecemeal approach. I have been in Ministry for just going on a year. I made it clear when I came into Ministry that I required more funding to deliver education. In fairness to the Executive, they stepped up to the mark on that, and they are also dealing with a very restricted Budget. I also said that I wanted to review my own budget, and I have done so. I have made funding available to education. That comes from my own budget, and, as I said to other Members, there will be winners and losers in this. If there are school principals out there who are saying that this is no way to run the Department or that giving them money late in the year is not the way to work, they can return it to me if they want. I will then give it to a principal who can spend it. That is the harsh reality of the matter.

Announcements of funding are welcome to schools at any time of the year. I believe that my approach here today, in the second week in May, allows the notification to go out to all the funding authorities so that everyone knows what the funding picture is over the next three years. I will issue a caveat with that by saying that I will keep my budgets under review constantly, and if I believe that a programme is not delivering to its ability or that it requires further funding, I will adjust my budgets accordingly.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. I particularly welcome the £5 million support for youth services over the next three years. Are there any plans in the outreach/detached youth work to address good relations and sectarian issues among young people in our schools?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes. The community relations and equality diversity (CRED) policy, which is at the centre of my Department's work, facilitates that ongoing work. The additional £5 million for youth services is recognition that those services are an integral part of our education system. They are there, and they provide education in a different way, but they also provide fulfilment to young people and give many young people who are perhaps detached from formal education an opportunity to grow as an individual. The way in which that money will be spent will be outlined in discussions with providers, and my Department will be entering into discussions with them. We want that funding to be targeted specifically in areas of social disadvantage to assist not only the young people in those areas but the communities in those areas where there may have been a breakdown in relationships between young people and the overall community. Community relations work is an integral part of youth work, as it is an integral part of education, and that will certainly feature in it as well.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Thank you very much Mr. Principal Deputy Speaker. Siar i Mí na Samhna, d'fhógair an tAire go gcuirfeadh sé airgead breise ar fáil sa dóigh is nach mbeadh ar mhúinteoirí atá ar pá íseal an t-ardú sa liúntas pinsin a íoc. Ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí den Aire anois, ar cuireadh an t-airgead sin ar fáil go fóill? Back in November, the Minister

announced that he would make money available to remove the costs of increased pension contributions for lower paid teachers. What progress has the Minister made on that issue, and when can we expect an announcement? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an chomhalta as an cheist. I am not sure what package the Member refers to. If I have picked the Member up wrong, I will clarify it for him at a later stage. He may be referring to proposals that I brought forward in regard to the Executive's decision to implement pension changes as a result of those being imposed on the Executive by the British Government. I brought forward proposals for discussion during the consultation period that we could place teachers in a number of bands, protecting those lower paid teachers and teachers who are just coming into the service. However, I regret to report that the unions rejected my proposals outright. Indeed, I could not make any progress around those proposals with the unions, and I took them off the table. There was no point in me moving forward with proposals that I could not receive agreement with the unions on.

I am trying to resolve a dispute with the trade unions over industrial action that they are taking regarding their concerns over pensions, but the Executive have decided what path they are going to follow because of the severe financial restraints that have been placed on them by the British Government's decision. I am still willing to engage with the unions on how to resolve the current industrial action, but the proposals that I made during the consultation process were rejected by the unions. I hope that I have picked the Member up right, but if I have not, I will be more than happy to clarify the matter for him later.

Mr McQuillan: I also thank the Minister for his statement. What impact will it have on schools when he removes £2.9 million from the budget of CCEA, given the interaction that it has with schools?

Mr O'Dowd: Any savings that I have announced today have been made on the basis that services can continue to be delivered effectively and efficiently in the absence of the moneys that I have removed from that allocated fund. Therefore, I do not believe that the redistribution of the moneys that I have made today will have a detrimental impact on any of the services. I have reviewed the budgets closely. My officials have been engaged in discussions with internal and external bodies, and I do not expect a downgrading of any service to our schools.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister's statement and the reallocation of money to different services. In relation to the £5 million for youth services, can the Minister confirm that existing well-managed and well-run youth clubs will be able to avail themselves of that extra money? Can it be used to sustain existing services in those youth clubs?

Mr O'Dowd: In principle, yes. Why would we not fund well-run and well-managed youth providers? I have visited a number of youth providers in the Member's constituency, and the work that they were involved in impressed me greatly. I have set out broad criteria under which I would like to see the money spent, and it is to assist youth in areas of social deprivation. That is the only broad criteria that I have put on

that. My Department will speak to the funding bodies, and we will work from there.

Ms P Bradley: I also thank the Minister for his statement. Will the Minister confirm that the £0.5 million for a project based in Belfast to tackle disadvantage is not part of Making Belfast Work but is a new idea based in west Belfast?

Mr O'Dowd: I have not finished the specifications for the programme yet. The Department of Education funds integrated services in west Belfast, which covers west Belfast and the Shankill area. I am looking at how we will fund similar projects in the future. West Belfast, the Shankill area and north Belfast throw up areas where we have serious concerns about educational underachievement, particularly among socially deprived communities. I have put my cards on the table and said that I will make £0.5 million available each year for the next three years to assist in tackling that. I am open to discussions with my Executive colleagues if any of them want to come on board or feel that it is worthwhile coming on board with a project to cover whatever geographical area we believe is in most need at that time.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister's decision to require the inspectorate to spy on primary schools lest they should meet the expectations of their parents in preparing children for post-primary transfer add any costs? Are there any budgetary implications, or does this bully-boy approach come free at the point of delivery?

Mr O'Dowd: I am sure that the Member, who, I believe, is also a barrister of some renown — I will not mention what that renown is — will ensure that I, as a Minister of the Executive, live up to my ministerial code and uphold the law. The curriculum is the law. Therefore, I am sure that the Member would be the first to challenge me in the House if I were to have a quiet word in the ear of one of the agencies in my Department and say, "By the way, I want you to ignore the law when you are inspecting schools". Surely, the Member would be on his feet, there would be points of order and written questions, there would be all sorts of materials flowing from the Member's office demanding to know why I had told anyone to ignore the law. Therefore, I have taken the responsible measure, I have lived up to my Pledge of Office, and I have said to all agencies of my Department, "When you are carrying out your duties, ensure you carry out those duties to the letter of the law".

Committee Business

Tyres: Committee for the Environment Report

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 15 minutes to propose the motion and 15 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the interim report of the Committee for the Environment on its inquiry into the management of used tyres in Northern Ireland and calls on the Minister of the Environment to bring forward a timetable for implementing the recommendations contained in the report.

I am delighted to open this debate on behalf of the Committee for the Environment. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Committee's inquiry into the management of used tyres. The issue was brought to the Committee's attention by the legacy report of the previous Committee. Towards the end of the mandate, it had started to look into the problem of tyres being dumped, but it was very quickly clear to me and my colleagues on the current Committee that more needed to be done to address the issue. Every member had experience of tyres being dumped inappropriately, and some had even witnessed major tyre fires in their constituency.

However, no sooner did the Committee announce its intention to conduct an inquiry into the management of used tyres than the Department of the Environment (DOE) announced that it was going to conduct a survey of used tyres and prepare an action plan for their management. The Committee agreed to wait until the Department had gathered that information, but as that was back in September 2011 and it looks unlikely that we will see the data for another few months, members agreed that we should go ahead with an interim report and seek your support for the recommendations that we are making on the basis of the current information available, with the caveat that we will review the recommendations should the updated information indicate that that is necessary.

The report makes 20 recommendations. Some are general and call for a more proactive approach from the Department, but most are for specific targeted actions to improve the way used tyres are managed in Northern Ireland. In fact, we might expect that many of the recommendations would be happening already, but they are not. For example:

“the Department should establish a robust method of quantifying the amount of waste tyres arising in Northern Ireland on an ongoing basis with a clear current indication of what proportion of these is not recovered”.

12.15 pm

The Committee was horrified — horrified — to learn at the outset of the inquiry that the latest information the Department had on the number of used tyres in Northern Ireland was well over 10 years old. I urge the Minister today

to remedy that quickly, so that we all know the full extent of the problem we are trying to address.

The need for better information was a regular theme raised by stakeholders and, consequently, the Committee recommends that the Department should raise awareness of the need for better management of used tyres through a communications campaign and should ensure that people can readily identify those who are fully licensed to carry, reprocess or properly dispose of used tyres, by publishing lists of those holding the relevant licence on its website.

Tyre depots were a key area of concern. The risks to human health and the environment from fires in such stores are of paramount importance. The Committee heard that two major tyre depot fires in 2009-2010 cost the emergency services well over a quarter of a million pounds to extinguish. Consequently, the Committee recommends that tyre depots should be required to report annually to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), which should then conduct adequate checks to ensure that all tyres are accounted for. In addition, public bodies should be required to quantify the number of used tyres they have to remove from their premises, rather than just classifying them as fly-tipped material. In relation to fly-tipping, the Committee stresses the need for the Department to finalise its protocol for dealing with fly-tipped waste between itself and councils.

More generally, the Committee would like to see the Environment Agency develop a risk-based approach to enforcement, so that resources can be more focused on illegal activity than on monitoring compliance. The Committee felt that much of the necessary legislation was already in place but that it needed to be better implemented in order to ensure proper management of used tyres. To progress this approach, the Committee recommends that all sectors of the used tyre chain be required to register with a compliance scheme. That should include manufacturers, carriers, importers, reprocessors and even second-hand car dealers. Although that appears to be taking place voluntarily elsewhere in the UK, it is not happening here in Northern Ireland. The Committee believes that the introduction of a mandatory registration scheme would free up the Environment Agency to focus on unregistered used tyre activity rather than checking up on those complying.

One of the reasons given to the Committee by stakeholders for the failure of voluntary schemes in Northern Ireland compared with GB is the ease with which tyres can be taken or brought over the border. The Committee recognised that it is important for the success of any measures introduced in Northern Ireland that used tyre management schemes in the Republic be taken into account. The Committee, therefore, notes that when considering any scheme for the better management of used tyres in Northern Ireland, there must be liaison with the Republic of Ireland to ensure that whatever approaches are taken on both sides of the border are compatible with each other.

The Committee saw considerable merit in a producer responsibility scheme, whereby responsibility for used tyres is given to those who manufacture, import or sell them. The Committee found out that producer responsibility is the approach most favoured by most other European countries. Although some stakeholders felt that the market was too diverse for such a scheme to work here in Northern Ireland, members felt that, provided that the definition of producer

included all those involved in the tyre supply chain, the introduction of a producer responsibility scheme should be looked at in the longer term. However, as I mentioned earlier, it is essential that the Department liaises closely with the Republic when considering that approach to ensure that such a scheme would not end up being counterproductive.

Also on the subject of liaison, another of the Committee's recommendations is that the Department needs to liaise better with the police and local councils when issuing licences for carrying, holding and reprocessing tyres in their area. The Committee believes that that will help to ensure better monitoring and, should the need arise, more effective enforcement.

The Committee noted with concern the ease with which a waste carrier licence can be obtained. It is currently set at £132 and can be applied for over the internet. With an average collection charge in Northern Ireland of around £1 for a car tyre, it would not take long for an unscrupulous operator to recoup that cost by setting up as a licensed collector of tyres with no verified, or verifiable, means of disposing of the tyres properly. The Committee would, therefore, like the process of obtaining a waste carrier licence to be made much more robust so that individuals could not simply present a waste carrier licence, charge to take tyres away and then dump them and run.

The Committee also felt that there was a lack of accountability on tyre retailers who charge a levy for the safe disposal of old tyres when replacing them with new ones. It seems that such charges are significantly higher in Northern Ireland than in most other parts of the UK, and the Committee recommends that the Department asks the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) to investigate that apparent discrepancy.

The Committee was also concerned about the complexity of exemptions to waste management licensing, several of which apply to the storing of tyres, and recommended that this be reviewed and updated to reduce the unsafe storage of tyres. Although the Committee stopped short of calling for farms to register with a compliance scheme, as required in the Republic of Ireland, it felt that farmers should be asked to indicate how many tyres they had on their farms on their annual integrated administration and control system (IACS) form.

One of the areas that most interested the Committee during the inquiry was what measures could be taken to encourage the better management of used tyres, rather than just putting in place more legislation. It soon became very clear that the existence and value of end-of-life tyre markets was critical in that process. Lucrative end uses for the recovered component parts of tyres or products created from them will pull used tyres through the system and encourage their proper disposal. However, that can easily be disrupted by global events, such as the tsunami back in 2010, which the Committee heard had a knock-on effect on some used tyre markets and access to them.

It may seem that such incidents are totally outside the control of any measures put in place here in Northern Ireland, but research suggests that other parts of the UK are more proactive in determining the conditions under which used tyres and their by-products can be used, and, as a result, reprocessors are in a better position to take advantage of new and changing markets.

The Committee is, therefore, urging the Department to carefully, clearly and quickly identify definitions of "end of waste" in a proactive way so that recyclers can plan their marketing strategies confidently and respond rapidly to changing global markets. This will help used tyres be pulled through the market rather than being stockpiled while people wait for the market to recover.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I have covered most of the Committee's recommendations. I hope that I have demonstrated the importance of the issue. I urge the Assembly to support the measures we are proposing to address the problem. I look forward to the rest of the debate.

Lord Morrow: At the outset, I want to pay tribute to the Chair, who led the Committee very valiantly on this issue. I also pay tribute to the Clerk and other staff involved —

Mr Hamilton: And the Deputy Chair.

Lord Morrow: I will include you, the Deputy Chair. It is due in no small part to their tenacity and leadership that we are able to come to the House today with this interim report. Like the Chair, I commend the report to the House.

The depositing of tyres means that tyres very often find their way into many and various places. We find them in our rivers and streams. We find them on our bonfires. We find them, unfortunately, illegally dumped across our beautiful landscape. A greater awareness is part of the way forward on this issue. We have to be very proactive. We have to get the message across to the public at large, in particular to those who indulge in this sort of activity, of the real damage that this causes to our environment.

Tyres are burned on fires — I certainly do not encourage that, and I ask anyone listening who may be doing so to desist from that — but that is not the only place that they end up causing a nuisance.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I speak as a member of a local council. Does the Member agree that councils throughout Northern Ireland deserve great credit for the work that they have done hitherto in reducing by a large volume the unlawful burning of tyres on bonfires?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Lord Morrow: The point is well made. I have no hesitation in agreeing with the Member. Councils are doing great work, but there is much more to be done. They cannot do it all on their own.

If enforcement is going to mean anything, it must be robust and tackle the real issue. If that can be stepped up, I hope that, in the not too distant future, we will see the problem, if not totally eradicated, at a level at which we feel we have it under control and are beginning to manage it.

Although there is rightly concern about the number of tyres being deposited illegally, it seems, from the evidence that the Committee garnered, that the situation is not as serious or bad as it once was. We do not take any great comfort from that. However, it is worth saying. For instance, one council in its submission said that the issue of the illegal burning of tyres had, over the past five years, reduced by something like 80%. That is considerable, but it does not

mean that the problem is now resolved. However, we have to acknowledge that the issue is going in the right way.

I am concerned about the enforcement of the rules around burning tyres. I believe that responsibility for the investigating and enforcement aspect of those rules lies with NIEA. In some cases, NIEA has not stepped up to the mark. It may well say that it does not have the resources, and maybe that is correct, but the point I want to make is that the Committee, the Assembly and the people of Northern Ireland are looking for more from NIEA in relation to this matter.

12.30 pm

I want to draw the House's attention to another part of the report. One submission from a council was quite startling and yet encouraging. That council intimated:

"Incidents of large scale illegal dumping of tyres such as 300+ tyres dumped ... are always passed through to the NIEA as the agency responsible for investigating and prosecuting ... Unfortunately in this case the NIEA failed to react to the matter."

I think that that is quite telling. If you have a pile of tyres accumulating to a total of some 300, just imagine what the outcry would be if it were another type of waste. Those are not my words; they are from a submission addressed to the Chair of the Committee. It is their words, the Committee says, but the NIEA did not deal with the issue in this particular instance.

If you cannot deal with an issue as glaring and large as that, I suspect that the ones, twos and dozens of tyres, here and there, will be much less successfully dealt with. That is regrettable, and these are the issues that the Committee will be looking into as the inquiry goes on, because it must be remembered that, as the Chair has already stated, this is an interim report. We felt that it was proper that we should come to the House with it at this stage. We are only at an interim stage, and we will be coming to the House with a further report in relation to this.

Chair, are you going to tell me that my time is up?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Yes, your time is up.

Lord Morrow: I thought that. I was under the misguided impression that I had at least 10 minutes. There are so many other things that I would like to have said and which I have prepared. However, I have misjudged it, and I did not realise that I was confined to five minutes. Thank you.

Mr Principal Deputy 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 on our return will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.32 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Mr Speaker: Before we move into Question Time, I remind the whole House once again of a convention in the Assembly. Members still seem to have some problems with rising in their place continually to catch the eye of the Speaker or Deputy Speaker to be allowed in for a supplementary question. There is no point, Members, in rising once in your place and then not rising again. Some Members rise in their place, and they get up and almost sit down again. Members must continually rise in their place because, if they do not, I believe that their question has been answered. Some Members believe that, once they have caught the Speaker's eye, that should be good enough and they should not have to rise again. The convention, by now, should be very clear. Secondly, I warn Members that supplementary questions must be short, focused, clear and relevant to the lead question. That is very important.

I remind all Ministers of the new Standing Order that was created some time ago. It was agreed by the Committee on Procedures and then by the House that a Minister has two minutes to answer a question. I understand that, sometimes, Ministers need more time to provide clarity around the question because of its nature. Members will know that I do not like interrupting Ministers when they are making a contribution in the House. However, I remind all Ministers — this is not identifying any Minister — of the two-minute rule. Standing Orders are also clear that, if a Minister needs extra time and they indicate that to the House, they will be granted an extra minute. I hope that that is clear and that we can proceed.

Employment and Learning

Employment: Key Skills

1. **Mrs Hale** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline how his Department consults with businesses, employers and their representative bodies to identify and deliver the key skills required to support current and future business needs. (AQO 1957/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I thank the Member for her question. Having a workforce that is equipped with the skills required to support current and future business needs is at the heart of the skills strategy. As key stakeholders, employers and their representative bodies played a vital role throughout its development. My employment and skills adviser, Bill McGinnis, meets businesses regularly to discuss their skill needs. Currently, he is meeting businesses in the engineering sector to determine their specific skills issues and how the Department can address them.

I recently launched the employer engagement plan, which sets out a range of actions through which my Department will engage with businesses to help to deliver the key aspects of the skills strategy. The Department has worked in close collaboration with employer stakeholders to address

the skill needs of a number of identified economic priority sectors through the development of sector-specific action plans.

Employers are also able to avail themselves of a number of services provided by my Department to help them to address their skill needs. They include the skills solutions service, which helps employers to upskill their existing workforce, and the employers' service, which works with employers to advertise and manage their job vacancies through Employers Online or through the network of jobs and benefit offices and jobcentres. An employer engagement team has recently been established to develop and implement an enhanced service to employers. The innovative Assured Skills programme, run in conjunction with Invest Northern Ireland, significantly boosts our offer to potential inward investors and growing indigenous businesses by working with them to develop a workforce with the specific skills that they need.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Brenda Hale, I should indicate to the House that questions 5, 8 and 9 have all been withdrawn.

Mrs Hale: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that, where businesses, employers and representative bodies have identified the need for crucial skills development, appropriate funding should be granted from his Department to fund initiatives that look to maximise current and future opportunities?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for her supplementary. I have always been clear in stressing that skills are a key driver of the Northern Ireland economy. It is critical that we match demand with the appropriate supply. In doing so, we have to tailor our programmes very much to the needs of employers. Often, the employers are most direct in articulating what the current and future skill needs of the economy will be. What the Member has suggested is what we practise in the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

Mrs Overend: Recently, businesses in my locality have told me that education does not always equal skills. Will the Minister tell the House what he has been doing to address that issue and the need for young people to get practical work experience that will enable them to transfer their educational achievement into jobs?

Dr Farry: The Member is right. We have a very good system in Northern Ireland, particularly at the further education (FE) and higher education end of the spectrum. The system provides good education, but we must also ensure that young people have employability skills that are particularly relevant to the needs of businesses.

The Assured Skills programme is a good example of how we try to provide bespoke offerings. The Member will also be aware of the software testers' academy, now on its second cohort, which turns graduates in general subjects into IT specialists over a very short period.

The Member also mentioned work experience and placements, and I am keen to stress their importance. We seek to develop those through the further and higher education systems. Apprenticeships are very much about hands-on work experience, and we are talking about our various employment programmes offering that type of experience as well.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Given the important role that the South West

College plays in my constituency, will the Minister outline the role played by regional colleges in identifying and delivering the key skills needed to support current and future business needs?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for her question. I pay particular tribute to the South West College, which is international in standard, particularly its science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) offerings. On Friday, a reception in the Assembly will recognise the Beacon awards that the South West College recently acquired.

More generally, the further education sector is our default provider of skills across a broad range of sectors and at wide-ranging levels of attainment. It is important, particularly when we look to the future, that we have a joined-up approach, working with employers on skills and integrating that work with what is provided through the further education network.

Mr Dickson: Minister, will you tell the House what the level of interest has been from businesses and employers, particularly in the measures that you have taken to tackle youth unemployment?

Dr Farry: As Members are aware, we have agreed a policy framework through the Executive for a new set of programmes to address youth unemployment. We are in advanced discussions with the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Executive on their financing. A key element will be engaging with employers to offer work experience placements. I am very encouraged by my discussions with employers and their representative bodies over recent weeks. There is a real appreciation of their direct interest in getting good people skilled up in their companies and of the importance to the wider economy of having a skilled workforce.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. Agus ba mhaith liom an méid seo a fhiafraí de. Has the future skills group been consulted on the higher education strategy?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. I think that he is perhaps mixing up a couple of concepts. We run a number of future skills action groups, and the one that we are working with currently is in the food and drink sector, which is an important area for the development of the economy. We are also running an information and communication technology (ICT) working group, and my skills adviser is carrying out a scoping exercise on engineering skills.

The higher education strategy has been developed over a number of years, and the business community has been a key partner in its development. That strategy is very focused on higher education delivering for the future needs of our economy, and the vice chancellors of the two main universities in Northern Ireland are very much aware of their responsibilities to deliver the Programme for Government and the economic strategy.

Further Education: Protestant Working-class Communities

2. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans his Department has to encourage more people from Protestant working-class communities to go into further education. (AQO 1958/11-15)

Dr Farry: As I indicated in a recent response to a similar question from the Member, further education colleges have a number of strategies and a wide variety of provision to encourage people from working-class communities to go into further education. Typically, around 22% of their enrolments are from Northern Ireland's 20% most deprived areas, compared with 14% from the 20% most affluent areas.

Specifically, in the 2011 academic year, 45% of 16- to 21-year-olds in further education enrolments and 38% of higher education enrolments were from Protestants. Also, over the entire period of the essential skills strategy, 42% of essential skills enrolments in further education colleges have been from those with a Protestant background. Those figures compare with a Protestant representation of 41% in the school-leaving population here and of 40% of 16- to 21-year-olds recorded in the Northern Ireland census. Therefore, the Protestant background is represented strongly in further education provision, including essential skills, and is just slightly under-represented in higher education. However, the aim of my Department's widening participation strategy will be to develop and implement initiatives to raise aspiration and attainment among those students to enable them to progress to higher education. The strategy will also seek to improve higher education recruitment and selection processes through, for example, the development of alternative entry routes into higher education for people with non-traditional and vocational qualifications.

As the main providers of adult education, further education colleges are committed to encouraging people from all working-class communities, including those with a Protestant background, to avail themselves of learning opportunities. Their network of campuses and outreach centres across Northern Ireland, in partnership with organisations that have access to hard-to-reach learners and involvement in the European social fund programme, will help colleges to achieve that aim.

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for his answer. Why has his Department failed to work in partnership with the Kilcooley Women's Centre to help improve educational attainment in the Kilcooley area? What plans does he have to address that relationship and to look at funding for the Kilcooley Women's Education Group?

Dr Farry: The Member is well aware of the situation with the Training for Women Network, which bid for money from the European social fund and was unsuccessful. It appealed and, again, was unsuccessful. I very much regret that organisations are unsuccessful in competitive bids, but those are the confines in which we operate. We are very sympathetic towards future bids. They will all be scored objectively by my officials, and decisions will be made accordingly. It is worth stressing that we have an open system of further education in Northern Ireland and a very strong emphasis on outreach. The Department is determined to engage with every community, including Kilcooley in Bangor, across Northern Ireland.

Mr McLaughlin: Thank you very much, a Cheann Comhairle; I hope that you enjoyed me and my comrade doing the Mexican wave.

I am reassured, to some extent, by the Minister's very extensive answer. I ask him to state in the clearest terms that we can address the issues that were named in the

original question by having rigorous and objective criteria for making judgements on where investment should go.

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I am happy to give that reassurance. My Department, like every other Department in Northern Ireland, is very much aware of its equality responsibilities. We treat everyone, irrespective of their background, the same, and we will treat every group that makes an application, irrespective of its community background, the same. Everyone will have an equal chance on a level playing field.

2.15 pm

Mr Kinahan: The Minister touched on the fact that alternative entry routes are one reason why Protestants in working-class areas may not be going into further education. What studies or pieces of research have looked at the other reasons why people do not go into further education?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. It is worth stressing that we have a balance of representation in Northern Ireland. We have an equitable outcome in the further education sector, and the community is properly represented in that cohort. In the higher education sector — it is important that Members understand the distinction, as I make this point — the religious background of that cohort is also broadly representative. There is a specific pocket of under-representation among young Protestant males from a working-class background in higher education, and that is the target that we need to address. There is not the same issue of representation in further education.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the Minister's response, particularly regarding young Protestant males. Has the Minister had any discussions with the Minister of Education about developing a wider participation strategy? That will ensure that there is a more formal approach and that the obstacles and barriers for young Protestants can be lifted.

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. I am pleased to inform him that the Executive are considering a draft widening participation strategy. That cross-cutting strategy will be led by my Department. The Department of Education also has some responsibilities under that strategy, and it has been very much involved in its development. Once the strategy has been approved by the Executive, I intend to come back to the Chamber and make a formal statement on its contents.

Employment Law

3. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the terms of reference for his Department's review of employment law. (AQO 1959/11-15)

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. At this stage, there are no fixed terms of reference for the Department's review of employment law. In the Executive's economic strategy, I committed to a review of employment law, which will seek to stimulate business confidence while maintaining the rights of individual employees. I issued a discussion document to all key stakeholders on 1 May, which I hope will encourage meaningful discussion about the policy and practice issues that need to be considered. I wish to ensure that we review our employment law in a way that meets the specific needs of our regional economy. The responses to

the discussion document will determine the scope of the employment law review.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. I come back to the discussions that he has had with stakeholders. Will he assure the House that, as part of that process, he will have discussions with organisations such as the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the Law Centre?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his supplementary. I assure the Member that those discussions are under way and that we recognise both the stakeholders he referred to as critical to the process. It is worth stressing that this is very much a preliminary process. It is not yet a formal consultation process but a scoping exercise. Given the particular economic and political circumstances in Northern Ireland, it is important that, as we develop policy, we build as much consensus among stakeholders as possible.

Mr B McCrea: Minister, at a recent meeting of the Committee for Employment and Learning, your officials presented your discussion document. They also indicated, because of advice that they had received from across the water, that it might be some time before the United Kingdom introduces this legislation. Given the comments in the Queen's Speech, do you still think that it is important that we deal with this and that Northern Ireland takes the lead?

Dr Farry: I thank the Chair of the Committee for his question. It is important that Members understand that Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK that has had employment law devolved to it. Decisions will be taken in Great Britain for Great Britain. We will, of course, be mindful of those, but, ultimately, we will take decisions in Northern Ireland that suit our particular circumstances. Reforms — if we can call them that — in Great Britain will move at their own pace. We have an independent and separate process in Northern Ireland. We will take note of what happens in Great Britain, but we will not be bound by it.

We also have to be quite practical. We have a range of opinions in the Assembly, and, given the nature of the structures that we have in Northern Ireland, it is important that, as well as having consensus among the stakeholders, we try to build as much political consensus as possible.

Higher Education: MaSN

4. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the timescale for the commencement and completion of the review of the maximum student numbers policy. (AQO 1960/11-15)

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. At present, the higher education system's capacity is managed through the maximum student number or MaSN, as it is known. It is a control mechanism under which the number of full-time undergraduate students at each institution is restricted. MaSN's purpose is to contain expenditure, in particular that associated with student support costs. Although the system provides for some tolerance at its upper limits, it offers little flexibility to institutions in responding to changes in demand. MaSN does not apply to part-time students, and it applies only to Northern Ireland universities and colleges. Changes to the fee regime elsewhere in the UK may impact on demand locally, but that is difficult to gauge at this stage.

In view of those issues, I have undertaken in Graduating to Success, the higher education strategy for Northern Ireland, to review MaSN, beginning in 2014 and concluding by 2016. The rationale for the exercise lies in a number of factors, including the removal of GB students from MaSN, the move towards increased part-time and modular learning, and issues with retention levels.

Distinct from a review of MaSN as a mechanism, I am conscious of the pressures on MaSN numbers. I have been able to increase by 700 the number of full-time undergraduate places at our local higher and further education institutions through to 2015. All those additional places, which have been made possible by funding provided by the Executive, will be in the subject areas of science, technology, engineering and maths. The Department will continue to monitor the position and the impacts on costs, and I am committed to seeking additional resources, should demand warrant it.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his answer. This issue is crucial to the future of our universities. Has the Minister had in-depth discussions with the local universities about it? If such discussions took place, what did they achieve?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. The review's status is that it has been highlighted as a key action point in the higher education strategy, which was, of course, developed in conjunction with the higher education sector. It is fair to say that all institutions are aware of MaSN's limitations and the need to consider a different way forward, particularly as the higher education system and the way that people interact with the institutions change in the next number of years. Back in 2007, a review of MaSN was considered but did not go anywhere. I think that enough has changed in the past number of years to justify this as we move ahead.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. If the Minister is committed to having balanced economic development in the North, will he ensure that MaSN places are distributed with an eye to regionally rebalancing the economy?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. It is important that we appreciate that MaSN is allocated to institutions. We have MaSN for the higher education institutions, and an element of it is included for further education. We announced recently how those additional FE places are to be allocated. I was pleased to see that South West College did well in that exercise, particularly in the light of its strong STEM offering. MaSN control also applies in further education places across the board, and we work with all FE colleges on that. Members will be aware that, as part of the higher education strategy, we are looking to pilot one of the universities having a base in rural Northern Ireland, which I also think fits the spirit of the Member's question.

Mr Nesbitt: I refer to the Minister's original answer to Mr Maginness and to the emphasis that the Minister puts on part-time and modular education. Does he accept that MaSN, which, as he said, applies only to full-time students, is now obsolete and irrelevant and that he should simply get on with introducing a new regime?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question and, perhaps, his endorsement of what we are doing.

Mr Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Higher Education Strategy

6. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he intends to give support to the growing cultural and agrifood sector in terms of the higher education strategy. (AQO 1962/11-15)

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. The higher education strategy reaffirmed my commitment to help the higher education sector become more responsive to the needs of industry. In support of the Northern Ireland economic strategy, I have identified a number of sectors as priorities for my Department. Among others, they include the agrifood sector and the emerging sector of creative industries. My Department, alongside the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and Invest Northern Ireland, has been working with employers in the food processing sector and with education providers to address identified skills issues within the sector. This is being taken forward through the development of a future skills action plan for the food processing sector. This plan details a number of targeted interventions to be taken forward over the next three years. These include a number of initiatives to raise the management and leadership skills of managers at all levels and commitments by third-level education providers to investigate ways to make degree pathways more relevant to employers. It is my intention to launch this action plan within the next few weeks.

In addition, I am fully committed to further education colleges delivering higher education courses. All of the FE colleges in Northern Ireland provide intermediate-level higher education qualifications in a wide range of information technology, media and performing arts subjects. Support for the creative industries will continue to be a key component of the FE colleges' curriculum offer.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he intend to support the legacy of the City of Culture 2013 by granting extra assistance to local cultural educational groups?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. If bids come in under the various programmes that we offer, we will certainly assist in that regard. The Member and others will also be aware of the importance of the tourism aspects of a whole series of events that are being held in Derry over the coming years and that we, as a Department, are supporting the WorldHost programme throughout Northern Ireland with the relevant sector skills council. I am particularly keen to inform the Member that the level of demand from people and businesses in the Derry area has been outstanding. We are very keen to build on that work further.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat a Cheann Comhairle agus buíochas leis an Aire. Is the Minister satisfied that there is sufficient concentration on courses in further and higher education to meet the future needs of the agrifood industry?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. It is important that we stress that the FE colleges set their own curriculum and course content, but, in government, we can work with them very closely to guide the development of their courses. It is fair to say that the FE sector in Northern Ireland is very much in tune with the needs of business. The sector is very sensitive and flexible about shifting its offering

to meet the evolving needs of businesses. The FE sector is very much in tune with reflecting the needs of the agrifood sector.

Mr Storey: I understand that the Northern Regional College, which covers my constituency, is conducting a review of technicians, particularly in regard to certain areas of service provision. Will the Minister undertake to look at the issue of members of staff who are employed to be able to deliver courses in agrifood, given the importance that he placed on the issue in his answer?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. It is important that we are conscious that, as a Minister, I do not micromanage the FE colleges in how they employ their staff. However, we set very broad objectives for them. As I have said to many other Members, the FE colleges in particular are very sensitive to the needs of the economy. They are very aware of the targets that we have set in the Programme for Government and the economic strategy and of the priority skills areas that we have. They will be and should be moving their resources and how they invest in staff to meet those objectives. Right across the board, we have colleges that are very high-performing.

Students: Irish Passports

7. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of students from Northern Ireland with Irish passports qualifying for free university education in Scotland. (AQO 1963/11-15)

15. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the decision made by the Scottish Government to provide free university places for students from Northern Ireland who hold an Irish passport. (AQO 1971/11-15)

2.30 pm

Dr Farry: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 7 and 15 together.

I am aware that, under current student finance arrangements in Scotland, eligible Scottish domiciled students studying full-time undergraduate courses in Scotland qualify for free tuition. I am also aware that, in accordance with European Union law, eligible European Union nationals studying in Scotland must also receive free tuition.

In order to be eligible, the European Union national must have been ordinarily resident in a member state of the European Union or elsewhere in the European Economic Area and Switzerland for the three years immediately before the first day of the first academic year of the course. Similarly, European Union nationals studying in Northern Ireland will qualify for tuition fee support, provided that they have been ordinarily resident in the territory comprising the European Economic Area and Switzerland throughout the three years preceding the first day of the first academic year of the course.

My Department has been advised by colleagues in the Student Awards Agency for Scotland that Northern Ireland students who hold Irish passports can apply to Scottish higher education institutions as European Union nationals and apply to have their tuition fees paid, provided they satisfy the eligibility requirements of the Student Awards Agency for Scotland.

As that is a matter for the relevant Scottish authorities, Northern Ireland domiciled students who hold non-United Kingdom European Union nationality are advised to contact the Scottish higher education institution where they intend to study and the Student Awards Agency for Scotland to clarify their fee status and eligibility for tuition fee support.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he confirm whether the Scottish Executive will cap the number of places for EU students and leave more places for the higher-paying English students?

Dr Farry: Unfortunately, I cannot confirm that. That is very much a matter for the Scottish Executive; it is not a matter for the Northern Ireland Executive. It is fair to say that when we, as devolved regions, take decisions to vary the level of tuition fees, anomalies will arise from that. In Northern Ireland, we took the right decision. We made that decision for the best reasons: to invest in our students and to maximise the number of people going through higher education for the good of our economy. However, in taking that decision, we had to be aware of anomalies on the sidelines, which we have to live with and manage as best we can.

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Credit Unions: Legislation

1. **Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an estimated time frame for legislation to be introduced in the Assembly to enhance the services of credit unions. (AQO 1972/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): My Department is scoping out new legislative provisions in relation to Northern Ireland credit unions, with the aim of aligning Northern Ireland credit union legislation with that of Great Britain. It is intended that the proposed legislative provisions will provide new opportunities and greater clarity for the Northern Ireland credit union sector.

The new Bill is scheduled for passage through the Assembly in the 2013-14 legislative session. The draft policy proposals will be subject to the full statutory consultation process in spring 2013, with the aim of introducing the Bill in the Assembly in November 2013.

I recognise that the recent development of moving from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) regulatory regime to the Financial Services Authority (FSA) regime may represent a challenge to a number of credit unions. For that reason, I have requested that my officials consider options for providing financial support to the Northern Ireland credit union movement to help it to develop the capacity required to comply with the transfer to the Financial Services Authority.

Mr Speaker: Question 10 has been withdrawn and will require a written answer.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Minister for her answer. She will be aware of the economic and social benefits of credit unions being able to invest in social enterprise projects. Therefore, can she give us an assurance that that will be one of the services that she will look at when she is bringing the legislation forward?

Mrs Foster: One of the issues that came to the fore during the credit union debate in the Committee was whether credit union organisations would be able to offer a wider range of services, including investment in the social economy. Obviously, when we bring forward the Bill, that will be one of the subjects that will be there. It is important to say how much we appreciate the fact that the credit union movement across Northern Ireland has been working very closely with the Department. It has worked very well in moving across to the Financial Services Authority. That will give consumers access to the financial services compensation scheme and the Financial Ombudsman's scheme. I think that that will protect a lot of consumers, and it should be very much welcomed.

I hope to make a statement on the progress of credit unions in the House next week. I know that there is great interest in the issue right across the House, so I hope that Members will take the opportunity to come here to listen to the statement.

Mr McQuillan: Will the Minister update the House on any recent meetings that she has had with the FSA regarding the credit unions?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. As I said, this issue has generated interest right across the House. Indeed, Northern Ireland MPs recently met the FSA to discuss credit union concerns that had been raised directly with them. In addition, just last month, I met Andrew Bailey, the FSA director, to discuss a number of credit union-related issues, in particular the limit that the FSA has introduced for the investment period for surplus funds. The meeting was very constructive, and it provided us with an opportunity to address a number of concerns that local credit unions have raised with me either directly or through Members. I intend to maintain a very close and keen interest in Northern Ireland credit union matters, and I am sure that that interest is shared right across the House.

Mr Cree: I know that the Minister is aware that the credit unions have had a very good relationship with her Department. Does she have any plans to maintain that relationship? Could she perhaps explain a little more about the short-term loan issue, which seems to be the single biggest problem facing the credit unions at this time?

Mrs Foster: That is an issue that we raised with the FSA, which has made a number of movements from its initial provisions for credit unions here. It has moved in so far as it originally said that it would put in place a limit on shares of £10,000 or 1.5% of total shares, and it has now raised that to the greater of £15,000 or 1.5% of total shares. So, we were able to show the FSA that the Northern Ireland credit union system was more mature than that which exists in the rest of the United Kingdom and that that should therefore be reflected in the regulation of the Northern Ireland credit unions.

As for the length of time that credit unions are able to invest, the Member will know that the system now allows for tier 2 and tier 1 credit unions. Credit unions can move between those two tiers, and, if they are in the tier 2 system, they will be able to invest for longer.

I must say that I thought that the FSA had a very good understanding of the credit unions in Northern Ireland. I have to say that that is down to the close relationship that my officials have developed with the credit union movement over the years. They have been able to communicate the benefits and strengths of the credit union movement. It is

very much the case that my Department will continue to be there for credit unions, and, if they want us to remain the point of contact, we will do so. I hope to be able to say more next Tuesday about what we are going to do to assist the credit union movement.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the very positive response from the Minister. I particularly welcome the suggestion, although it is perhaps more than a suggestion, that there will be financial help for those credit unions that find it difficult to meet the FSA's requirements. However, there will still be people who are not members of a credit union. Will the Minister tell us whether she will lobby the Westminster Government to reduce the excesses of the loan sharks and the gombeen men who, day and daily, rip off poor people who do not have the resources to pay the high interest rates?

Mrs Foster: The Member's point is very valid, and I know that it was raised with the Finance Minister when he was asked about payday loans at his previous Question Time. Certainly, if people bring complaints forward, Trading Standards will investigate all of them thoroughly. However, I realise that people are at a very low ebb when they resort to borrowing from those sorts of people, so it is a matter of trying to make alternatives available to them before they get into that situation.

I know that the House is aware that, for the majority of credit unions, the requirements of the FSA regulation will be no greater than they were under DETI. However, I am aware that some credit unions might need some assistance to document their policies and procedures. I hope to be able to outline in the House next Tuesday what we intend to do to try to assist those people.

Business: Financial Assistance

2. **Mr Rogers** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on representations her Department has made to the banks, Westminster and the Oireachtas regarding financial assistance to boost local businesses. (AQO 1973/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Although DETI has no statutory control of the banking sector, my officials and I have met representatives of the main banks in Northern Ireland to emphasise the importance of supporting business development and growth. Most recently, on 5 March 2012, I met senior Northern Bank representatives, and I will meet senior representatives from the Bank of Ireland on 16 May. Those meetings provided the opportunity to highlight the importance of access to finance for Northern Ireland businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and to encourage banks to assist indigenous businesses in the current economic climate.

DETI, through Invest Northern Ireland, continues to develop and implement an access to capital strategy that supports the availability of capital in the local SME market. I and the Finance Minister will continue to make representations to the banking sector, Westminster and the Irish Government to highlight the importance of access to finance in supporting local business.

Mr Rogers: Thank you, Minister, for your response. Does the Minister feel that enough is being done by the banks,

especially those that have been assisted by taxpayer bailouts, to help to support our local economy?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. This subject comes up for me during every Question Time and, I think, during every Question Time for the Finance Minister. That tells me that Members do not believe that banks are doing enough to help the local SME community.

I continue to engage with the banks. I know that other Ministers and, indeed, Committees do likewise. On 20 March, for example, I spoke at the launch of the Bank of Ireland's new export initiative. Where banks try to make new inroads and have new initiatives, I will certainly support them. I thought that the export initiative was good because the Bank of Ireland was trying to bring their companies along and encourage them to export to new and diverse markets.

I am sure that a lot of Members will have read in the *agrip* press over the weekend that the banks are keen to lend money, particularly to the agrisector. There were a lot of glossy ads in our local press. I have to say that that has not entirely been my experience at a constituency level. Just last week, when I had a meeting with a bank and a constituent, the attitude was less than helpful, and I await the outcome. However, that is me wearing a constituency hat. Wearing my ministerial hat, I can say that we will very much continue to press, and I hope that Committees will continue to bring the banks before them and forensically ask them what they are doing to help small and medium-sized businesses here in Northern Ireland. It is critical that we have the capital available to grow the economy, and that is why Invest Northern Ireland has put forward various schemes, which I very much hope will help in some way to plug a gap that we have identified.

Lord Morrow: My experience is not dissimilar to the Minister's, nor, I suspect, to that of many Members. We have constituents coming to us to say that the banks are unco-operative, to say the least. Can the Minister give any assurance today that things may be different in future? What steps can she take to ensure that banks are in the business of lending money, particularly to small businesses? As Mr Rogers said, many of those banks got a public bailout, and they have some responsibility. It strikes me that, in many cases, they are ducking their responsibilities.

Mrs Foster: I hear what the Member is saying very clearly. It is one thing for banks to say corporately that they are open for business, but it is quite the opposite when Members go along with their constituents to look for money for perfectly reasonable projects and are given reasons why banks cannot support them. It is hugely frustrating for those businesspeople, whether they are in the agrisector, the manufacturing sector or whatever sector. The Member asked what I can do about it. As I indicated, I can keep lobbying Westminster. I know that the Finance Minister has been in negotiations and met the governor of the Bank of England in November last year. He then took the opportunity to follow that up with the Chancellor of the Exchequer to point out the unique banking system here in Northern Ireland.

He pointed out at that time that we were marginalised from the mainland UK banking system and, indeed, from our Irish counterparts as well. So, there is a big job of work that we continue to have to do to lobby, to use the power of this place to expose, and to shine a light on what is going on

in the banking sector, and I hope that Members across the House will continue to do so.

2.45 pm

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister is aware of the very important role that the SME sector plays in Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Will she give us an update on the roll-out of the Executive loans scheme, when she expects applications to open, and when we can expect businesses to start getting loans from the scheme?

Mrs Foster: The Member is absolutely right. I am, of course, fully aware of the importance of the SME market, and the small loans fund is just one of a number of capital investment programmes that Invest Northern Ireland is rolling out. The growth loan fund is anticipated to be open by the end of this month. It is a £50 million fund. It is unsecured, and because of that, it will have slightly higher interest rates than the banks. However, we intend to try and help companies that want to grow but cannot access the money to do so from their banks. I very much hope that this will fill the gap that we have seen developing over such a period of time. I know that, like me, Members have been to companies that want to grow but simply cannot get the amount of money they need to do so, and that is what this growth loan fund intends to do.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answers, and I echo Lord Morrow's comments. In discussions with the Treasury, will Northern Ireland be given targets for lending? That might be one way through the impasse.

Mrs Foster: I think that the Finance Minister, when he spoke to the Chancellor of the Exchequer — he has copied me into a number of letters that have been going back and forth — said that he wants the Treasury to acknowledge the unique situation that we have here in Northern Ireland. Because of that unique situation, he wants tailored remedies. For example, the enterprise finance guarantee scheme, which was very much heralded as an answer to some of the problems we faced some time ago, still has not really taken hold in Northern Ireland. Although the banks say that they continue to offer the enterprise finance guarantee scheme, there must be a reason why it has not been taken up in Northern Ireland. We are continuing to try to get to the bottom of that issue, and I know that it remains a very live issue for the Finance Minister.

Broadband: Onwave

3. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people from Northern Ireland have signed up to Onwave since it was awarded the contract to deliver broadband via satellite. (AQO 1974/11-15)

Mrs Foster: At 11 April 2012, 44 customers had signed up for Onwave's services under DETI's remote broadband service contract. A further 18 customers had acquired services outside the scope of the contract.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for her reply. Is she happy with the number of customers who have signed up to date, and with the manner in which Onwave is looking for new customers in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I have to say that I am disappointed with the number of customers that Onwave has been able to sign up. From what I can see, the company offers a very good service. I believe that the company could do more. The contract is very heavily supported and is given subvention by government through my Department. I think that there is a role for the regional press, which has huge coverage in rural areas throughout Northern Ireland. It is a good contract, and the company delivers a good service, but it could do more in and around offering the service across Northern Ireland.

Mr McLaughlin: Thank you very much, a Cheann Comhairle. In acknowledging what I think has been a key role of this Minister and her Department in rolling out the telecommunications technology, will she indicate whether she has given consideration to levelling the playing field, given the expense of the set-up costs and the monthly charges for this service, although I know that it is a genuine attempt to provide service to those who fall outside standard communications? I think that we need to deal with an injustice that has emerged.

Mrs Foster: The Member will know the reasons why it costs more to deliver the service in rural areas. Some Members have made the point that they believe that fibre to the cabinet should be made available to everybody in Northern Ireland. Of course, if that were the case, it would cost tens of thousands of pounds for individual houses.

The Onwave contract and, indeed, others before it have been attempts by the Department to deal with that issue. When we met representatives of Onwave a number of months ago, we asked them whether there was a role for doing some loss-leader work, and they explained to me the cost of their equipment and so on. However, I think that that is something that we can talk to Onwave about again. It is delivering the service, and, as I said, I think that it is a good service, but we would like to see more rural dwellers being able to avail themselves of it.

Mr Gardiner: Will the Minister update the House on the delivery of the four proposals that are outlined in the telecommunications action plan for 2011-15?

Mrs Foster: I do not have the four proposals in front of me. I would be obliged if the Member could come back to me in writing with the four proposals, and I will certainly update him on where those stand.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her answer and for her efforts in trying to make sure that there is a better broadband service throughout Northern Ireland. Does the Minister accept that speed and volume are crucial for many businesses, particularly SMEs? Does she intend to introduce a universal service for broadband provision for students and businesses? They are awaiting a service they can afford.

Mrs Foster: The Member mentions a service that they can afford. Again, that goes back to how we subvent and assist those areas where, if we put in the broadband in the ground and through fibre, it would cost tens of thousands of pounds. That is why we often say that people get their Sky reception through their satellite and there is no reason why broadband cannot be delivered in a similar fashion, through satellite or digital mechanisms. That is what we have been

trying to pump-prime through some of our broadband fund applications.

This question is about mobile operation. The Mobile Operators Association attended an event that I hosted here on 2 May. I was somewhat disappointed that very few MLAs took the opportunity to come along on that occasion. I think that six attended part or the whole of the event. It was a good opportunity to engage with the providers and to challenge them about the provision of services right across Northern Ireland. However, I understand that they left their contact details, so Members who have issues around coverage of mobile operation should contact the Department, and we will pass on their information.

Invest NI: Business Start-ups

4. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the tendering process for Invest NI's business start-up programme. (AQO 1975/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest Northern Ireland is currently finalising internal approvals for future start-up provision and is working with the Department of Finance and Personnel's (DFP) Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) to finalise the terms of reference for a new tender process. The tender is expected to be issued in May 2012 — that is, this month. The tender will be required to be published in the Official Journal of the European Union, and potential bidders will have 40 days from the date of publication in which to submit their tenders. Invest NI will then assess the tenders, and it is anticipated that an award decision will be communicated in July 2012. A new contract for delivery is expected to commence as soon as practicable thereafter.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for her answer. In the past, the Go for it programme provided an accessible, intensive and detailed training programme of essential business skills. There has been a gap in the service as a result of a hiccup in the tender. Can the Minister advise us what lessons have been learned in this tender process, so that such a failing will not be repeated in the future?

Mrs Foster: The hiccup that the Member refers to was caused by the fact that Enterprise Northern Ireland did not allow Invest Northern Ireland to continue to deliver a full business-start programme whilst taking its legal challenge. Due to the legal action instigated by Enterprise NI, Invest NI has been prevented from providing a business-start programme. However, we continue to advertise under the wider GO for it brand to stimulate public interest in enterprise, entrepreneurship and business start. From 1 October 2011 to 31 March 2012, we responded to 3,627 enquiries, held 135 business clinics, which were attended by 940 individuals, and met another 499 individuals.

We cannot stop people challenging procurement decisions. The project has brought us problems because we could not deliver the wider Go for it programme, and we are disappointed about that. However, I read out those figures because I want the House to understand that work is continuing. We are still working with small and medium-sized businesses and with people who want to start their own businesses. I hope that we can put all this behind us and start on a new process, which we will have in place in the near future.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. What will she be doing to compensate the local business sector?

Mrs Foster: As I indicated, we will try to work with it and provide an interim service until a further tender process and award of contract for a business-start process is in place. The situation was not edifying, and we wish that we could have avoided it, but we are where we are, and we now need to move on and deliver that programme for small businesses.

Mr Agnew: In referring to the challenge of the procurement procedure, is the Minister saying that no fault at all lay with her Department? If that is the case, how can we be assured that mistakes will not be made again?

Mrs Foster: As the Member will know, procurement is run centrally by the Central Procurement Directorate. Invest Northern Ireland will continue to work with CPD, and if there are any lessons to be learned, those will be learned. It is hoped that the new process will be launched this month, and I hope that that can happen as soon as possible.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Minister for her responses. We all welcome the fact that we are going to get back to a situation fairly soon in which the service can be provided to businesses. Does the Minister think that the new tender document will have a similar outline to the original one or will it be amended in some way to suit one of the original applicants, either the successful or the unsuccessful?

Mrs Foster: As the Member will know, when both parties came together at the end of the case, they agreed a public statement on the outcome, and that was all that was to be said on the matter. They agreed that they would terminate the current procurement procedure and that we would start a new procurement procedure. If Central Procurement Directorate has lessons to learn from the procedure that has happened to date, I am sure that it will take those into consideration. However, that is a matter not for me but for the Finance Minister, as he has control of the Central Procurement Directorate.

Saint Patrick Centre, Downpatrick

5. **Mr Hazzard** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline any plans her Department has to assist with the ongoing difficulties at the Saint Patrick Centre, Downpatrick, which is currently at risk of closure. (AQO 1976/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Downpatrick is one of the key hubs on the St Patrick's Trail driving route. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has offered over £2.1 million of financial support to the Saint Patrick Centre since 1998.

The issue of ongoing Down District Council support for the Saint Patrick Centre is a local one. However, given the importance of the centre in telling the St Patrick story, the Tourist Board and I hope that a positive solution can be reached locally to ensure that the centre continues to offer a high-quality visitor experience.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. Will she detail what talks have taken place between her Department, the Saint Patrick Centre board and Down District Council? If

talks have not taken place, can the Minister ensure that such engagement takes place as a matter of urgency to help save that signature project?

Mrs Foster: The signature project is the entirety of the St Patrick's Trail and not just the Downpatrick heritage centre. That is not to take away from the importance of the Downpatrick centre, because it is one of the key points on the trail, along with others in Armagh and further up the coast.

It is an issue for Down District Council, and I understood from my Tourist Board colleagues that the matter was progressing well. Indeed, I had a meeting with the MP for the area just last week, and she indicated that, as she understood it, things were progressing well with Down District Council. However, if the Member has particular issues that he wants to bring to me, I have no difficulty in meeting him and having a discussion.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her answers to date. I understand that St Patrick travelled beyond Downpatrick.

Will the Minister advise on infrastructure improvements for the rest of the trail, including north Down?

3.00 pm

Mr Speaker: The Member has been very unique with his question.

Mrs Foster: We are now going to take a tour around Northern Ireland with St Patrick, as we normally do. I have been very encouraged by the investment to date in the St Patrick/Christian heritage signature project. As I said to the Member in answer to the substantive question, it is about much more than Downpatrick, although I am quite glad that the Member of Parliament for that area is not here because I think that she would take exception to that. The Tourist Board has issued 23 letters of offer to date and is considering further applications for investment. The offers to date represent a grant commitment of £3 million. Some of the infrastructure that has been put in place has been excellent. As well as the work at the Saint Patrick Centre, work has gone on in the Church of Ireland cathedral and No 5 Vicars Hill in Armagh, as well as the work in Greyabbey, the North Down Museum and the Nendrum monastic site. Capital work has been carried out right across the trail, and I am sure that people will all want to make it their business to holiday along the St Patrick's Christian heritage trail in the coming months.

“The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming”

6. **Mrs McKeivitt** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, following the passing of the motion on “The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming”, what discussions she has had and intends to have with officials and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport about future planning for the event.
(AQO 1977/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have not been asked for nor had any discussions with officials in the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport about future planning for “The Gathering”. I do, however, welcome any scheme that has the potential to bring more tourists to Northern Ireland. With the hosting of the World Police and Fire Games and the first

ever UK City of Culture in Londonderry, 2013 is going to be an exciting year for tourism in Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: I will allow the Member a quick supplementary.

Mrs McKeivitt: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Given the fact that the Irish Government are planning for “The Gathering” to be the biggest tourism event that they have ever staged in Ireland and are aiming to attract 325,000 overseas visitors, does the Minister agree that the Executive and her Department in particular should be making every effort to ensure that the maximum number of those visitors travel north of the border during their stay, to benefit our tourism sector and economy? That, in my eyes, would help complement the Assembly's endorsement of “The Gathering”.

Mrs Foster: Of course, anybody who wants to visit Northern Ireland in 2013 will be made wholly welcome. We look forward to welcoming them to another spectacular year, with the UK City of Culture in Londonderry and all that that has to offer, as well as the World Police and Fire Games. We hope that we will see many of them in Northern Ireland throughout the year.

Committee Business

Tyres: Committee for the Environment Report

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly approves the interim report of the Committee for the Environment on its inquiry into the management of used tyres in Northern Ireland and calls on the Minister of the Environment to bring forward a timetable for implementing the recommendations contained in the report. — [Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment).]

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the report. I thank the Committee staff and the Clerk for compiling the report. I also thank the stakeholders who contributed and the research team. I also take this opportunity to thank my former colleague, Willie Clarke, who sat on the Committee and worked on the report with me and took the lead. I wish him well in his council career. He has definitely left a positive mark in relation to the report, and I thank him for that.

The Chair outlined a lot of points in her remarks, and I do not propose to go over them. The key reason for bringing the report was that, at one time or another, most of us, as public representatives, have been contacted about the illegal dumping of tyres. On many occasions, I have been contacted about tyres being dumped in nature spots or over country ditches in my constituency, and the local council has footed the bill for that. Therefore, we had an investigation into what was happening and who was responsible.

The Chair mentioned the fact that we were disappointed when the Department came back with figures, as it did not have any recent figures. The latest figure it had was 10 years old. However, that did, at least, encourage the Department of the Environment to collect statistics.

I know that a lot of the local authorities came up with stats and figures. The number of tyres has been reduced, and following the implementation of the recommendations, I hope that we no longer see them being brought out at Halloween or at any other time. I think that there is a lot of common sense in the Committee's recommendations, and I do not think that they will have a big cost or resource implication for the Department. I think that some of the suggestions can be carried out very quickly. I encourage the Minister to take the lead on this and to work with all the other bodies concerned to resolve some of the issues.

I want to make two points. First, many people who have contacted me about this believe that the £1, £1.50 or £2 that they paid covered the cost of the disposal of their tyres. Even though they got their tyres changed in good faith, they then found out that they have to pay an extra cost in their rates for the disposal of any tyres that are found. I hope that, as a result of the relevant recommendation on that, there will be a paper trail. I also hope that consumers get value for money and that they are protected.

I am glad that the Minister is attending today's debate. The other issue is about the fact that we should encourage firms to try to recycle and reuse tyres. I just wonder what the market is for doing that. I also wonder whether the Minister

has any plans to work with firms. The Chair mentioned the tsunami incident. There has been a decrease in the need for recycled tyres, be it in the equestrian field or whatever. I know that firms have been stockpiling tyres, and I also know that there have been fires in recent years. I just wonder whether the Minister will look at that to see whether there is a proper market for such tyres. I know that the market has meant that firms have had to stockpile in some instances. I encourage the Minister to take the lead on that and to look at taking a common sense approach to dealing with it.

I welcome the report.

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

Mr Boylan: I hope that the recommendations can be implemented fairly quickly.

Mr Kinahan: The Ulster Unionist Party certainly supports the motion and agrees with the call on the Minister of the Environment to bring forward a timetable for putting the recommendations in place. Our Chair certainly set out the key issues for everyone. I thank everyone in the Committee for all their hard work in pulling the report together. I am sad not to still be on the Committee. I feel that this is a case for which we should not have had to produce a report. However, it will prove very valuable and will help the Department. Nevertheless, I felt that the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and all those concerned really should have been looking at a better way of dealing with the issue of illegal tyres without the Committee having to produce a report.

In one area of my patch a few years ago, we had to place skips around the bottom of bonfires to stop burning tyres from bouncing past and into houses. At the same time, houses close by were losing their windows and doors because of the heat. So, we definitely had to deal with the issue of illegal tyres.

While shooting in Tardree — I share the same pastime as Jim Shannon — we found 200 tyres that had been rolled down a hill and into the forest. We reported the incident to the council, and within a week, it had moved the tyres. Those are just two examples of the illegal use of tyres, which is going on all the time. We really need to find a way of dealing with the issue as quickly as possible.

Whenever tyres appear, the PSNI, NIEA and councils are there to deal with them, but somehow that just does not work. We have to find a way to deal with it. We have to find a way to give NIEA the necessary powers because once those tyres arrive at a bonfire site, it is too late. We have to find a way to stop them getting out of the system. We have got to have a licensing system and a paper trail — something that allows us to deal with the whole mechanism so that the tyres never get to those sites.

I must add that we want the eleventh night bonfires to go ahead. They are very much part of a tradition, and they can go ahead. We have excellent Orange festivals throughout Antrim during those weeks, and I would like to congratulate the councillors, the bonfire groups and all the community groups that have worked incredibly hard to try to minimise the number of tyres while, at the same time, building up good festivals in their areas. I urge all politicians, wherever possible, to lead and show that they are helping to move forward so that we have those good Orange festivals with fewer tyres. We must remember that those tyres are

polluting the environment. Those tyres are bringing the fumes and poisoned air that is all around us.

The highlights of the report show that the duty of care did not work, which goes back to my original point. We knew that things were not working and we had to go ahead with the report. We know that there are financial benefits to many if they can get the tyres out of the system and we have to deal with that, but, most importantly, we have to deal with enforcement. The report highlights that NIEA concentrates on compliance and not on enforcement. We must see that changing. We also must see the fly-tipping protocol agreed, in place and councils working to it.

I gained — as I hope did anyone else who went to Dublin — from listening to DEPOTEC, which showed us that it was doing a three-year study, financed by the Government, Europe and the waste industry, on the very best way of dealing with all waste, particularly tyres, to see what is the most efficient way of producing energy and dealing with the side effects. I look forward to hearing what it comes up with, because that is exactly the sort of thing that we should be doing in Northern Ireland. We should get someone to look at the skills needed to use all our waste and get the very best from it in the most economical way. We may then find that three big waste companies with 25-year contracts are not the right way forward. We have got to keep studying things, and I think that the DEPOTEC presentation was one of the most interesting parts of the whole inquiry.

Mr Speaker: Your time is almost gone.

Mr Kinahan: We support the motion.

Mr Dallat: I also support the report. Indeed, I regard it as one of the most comprehensive and important pieces of work done in the Assembly in recent years. My thanks go to the Clerks who made it possible. Each of the 20 recommendations in the report is worthy of consideration and adoption by the Minister.

Members will know that, in the past, we had horrendous problems with toxic waste that was taken over the border and dumped by unscrupulous people who saw the opportunity to make a lot of money by allegedly dealing in the safe disposal of materials. I am pleased that that issue has been addressed in the report, with the recommendation that Northern Ireland should liaise with the Republic of Ireland when considering a suitable mechanism for dealing with used tyres. The report emphasises that a strict producer responsibility scheme would be counterproductive unless introduced in both jurisdictions, and that is important.

In the longer term, it is recommended that Northern Ireland should consider the introduction of a strict producer responsibility scheme, but the nature of such a scheme and its timing should, again, be developed in close liaison with the Republic of Ireland. We must not allow the used tyre problem to drift on without a solution, and the recommendations are a clear pathway towards a policy that would avoid the opportunities seized upon by criminals in the past who dealt with the toxic waste in a disgraceful way. Already, there have been disturbing reports of used tyres being collected in the North and dumped in Donegal, and that is disgraceful. Crooks are not bothered which way the problem flows as long as they make millions. The public are left to clean up the environmental mess.

The Committee heard a lot of evidence as to how used tyres can be traced, and it is clear that there has to be an audit trail that is reliable and workable. That is not an easy task, given that tyres are imported from hundreds of sources across the world. Nevertheless, it is possible. Here, I refer again to the Republic of Ireland, where a great deal of work has been done to make tyre distributors accountable for their used tyre disposal. We must learn from that and work with those who have the experience and commitment to work with us.

3.15 pm

Mrs McKevitt: I thank the Member for giving way. I acknowledge the points in the report that he raises, which call for the support of local authorities. For too long, the disposal of used tyres has gone unchecked. So, although the necessary legislation, in my eyes, is in place, it is undermined by lack of enforcement. Does the Member agree that it is vital that a stringent system is put in place to police the disposal of used tyres and that responsibility for carrying out checks lies with one body that can be held accountable? I speak on behalf of my constituents from the Mayobridge area outside Newry.

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added to his time.

Mr Dallat: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I know well the problems that exist in my colleague's constituency, because the Committee paid a visit to that area and saw, at first hand, the problem she spoke of.

This interim report addresses the issue of the stockpiling of used tyres. We all know from news reports that large quantities of used tyres have a remarkable capacity to go on fire. One might suggest, cynically, that that is due to spontaneous combustion, but I am afraid that it is much more obvious than that. Again, criminal elements have been involved and have been paid for collecting used tyres, only to set them alight and seek sunnier climates with their ill-gotten gains. That must be avoided, and the report sets out recommendations that, if implemented, would address the problem.

One question is asked again and again: how many tyres are there in Northern Ireland? The straight answer is that we do not know. The issue is put away at the back of our minds and emerges only when large quantities begin appearing on bonfires at traditional times of the year. After they have polluted the atmosphere and endangered the health of our people, particularly children and older people, the problem is forgotten for another year.

The report calls on the Department to re-establish a robust method of quantifying the amount of waste tyres arising on an ongoing basis, with a clear indication of what proportion of them is not recovered and utilised in a proper way. Other agencies, including local councils, which have been referred to, have an important role to play. Here, I would like to say a particular thanks to those councils that took the trouble to engage with the Committee, give evidence to it and make the report the important document that it is. However, I have to say that I am disappointed with other councils that did not respond, or responded to say that there is not a problem, when I and other Members know fine well that there is.

The report claims that compliance is best achieved by a partnership approach — and here, of course, I agree, as I am sure that other Members do. The challenge can be addressed successfully if everyone is pulling in the same direction and the gangsters are given no opportunity to exploit weakness, which exists and should be taken seriously as a warning sign that there is bad news ahead if the recommendations of this report are not acted upon.

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

Mr Dallat: Finally, I urge the Minister to give every encouragement to those recycling companies that have honestly invested in resources to do the recycling. That is equally important. Thank you.

Mr Beggs: As a former member of the Environment Committee, I remember coming across this issue a long time ago. I recognised at that time the potential for profiteering that could easily happen, it struck me, through the mishandling of the storage of tyres being recycled — or not recycled.

I welcome the report that the Committee has made and the conclusions it has come to. The issue of ensuring that all sites are licensed is important. The public needs to be wary where illegal, unlicensed sites are used. There is a need to inspect licensed sites to ensure that they stay within their bounds and do not grow beyond the approved capacity. Continuing to do that will be a big issue, not only in managing the storage on the sites but, ultimately, there needs to be an economic solution that processes them. There is no solution if it is profitable to illegally dispose of the tyres and, on occasion, to have an accidental fire; there must be an economic solution. We all must work towards the development of that so that energy is reused in a constructive fashion. For instance, Lafarge Cement's Cookstown plant utilises some of that energy, but other methods must be found.

Something that I wish to highlight a little bit more in detail is the hazardous nature of tyres when they burn. Some people have mentioned it. The uncontrolled burning of tyres causes huge damage to local communities. I remember attending, a number of years ago, an Arc21 briefing on energy from waste sites. I was very struck by an almost throwaway comment after a slide; the expert said that fewer carcinogenic compounds were produced by a professionally run and monitored energy-from-waste site than would be produced by a small illegal bonfire with a lot of tyres thrown on it. We need to educate everyone about the damage that is happening to the local communities and the environment when tyres are burnt on bonfires. It is not insignificant. The release of those carcinogenic compounds into the local community must be avoided. As others have said, there is also the issue of the intense heat that can result and the damage that it causes to the immediate community. In my area, there has been a vast improvement in how cultural bonfire sites are managed, and all credit to all those involved.

I was shocked to learn about the illegal sites. I think that one million tyres were burned at one of those sites. Let us not focus on all the small bonfires, of which there is a relatively small number; there are some huge sites with hundreds of thousands of tyres being stored, some legally and some illegally. Ultimately, they need to be processed. We must not create a system in which there is a financial

benefit to illegally storing tyres on a site and having them burnt. You have to spend perhaps tens of thousands of pounds to get rid of the waste that is left. Maybe you can get money at the end of it. We must ensure that there are not financial incentives for the illegal storage and burning of tyres.

A system of recycling should be put in place. What happens to the £1.22, on average, that is paid when a tyre is disposed of? We must ensure that that money is used as was intended and that it does not simply appear as profit somewhere. We must ensure that those who benefit from it actually use it towards recycling the tyre rather than abusing the environment and profiteering from that contribution. Ultimately, there has to be an economic solution to ensure that the flow of moneys is virtuous and not corrupting. At one point, cars were being abandoned and burnt, which caused problems for the environment. There is now a virtuous cycle, in which there is economic benefit to those who recycle cars. It is important that that circle is also progressed in the world of tyres and that proper and well-managed businesses benefit.

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

Mr Beggs: I welcome the Committee's report.

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I very much welcome the report. Parallel phases of work are going on in the Department, the agency and the Committee. If we manage those properly, they can converge to get a real grip on the issue. I acknowledge what Mr Dallat and Mr Beggs have just referred to: around the issue of waste and used tyres, there is threat and opportunity. There is the threat of the damage to the environment, but there is enormous opportunity to convert waste into energy or to convert waste products into valuable products. There is no better example than that of plastics on this island. As I said before, only 30% of the plastics generated on the island of Ireland are recycled, and only 30% of that 30% are recycled on the island of Ireland. That confirms that a lot goes to landfill and that anything of value is reused outside the country for other products. Similarly, with tyres, although there are threats that we must mitigate and areas that we must regulate, there are opportunities that we need to exploit and explore.

I confirm that my officials will respond to the interim report before recess. I will encourage those ministerial colleagues to whom some responsibility falls as a result of the interim report to work with me to provide that before the summer. I also welcome the fact that it is an interim report, which not only puts a spotlight on the issue but puts a spotlight on me and the Department. Interim reports from Committees are useful tools in the ongoing challenge to what any Department, including mine, is or is not doing.

However, there is no magic wand. The gathering of recommendations in this report and the work of the Department and similar agencies on the islands, including the island of Ireland, will see that the issue is dealt with. We have to acknowledge that there is not a bottomless pit of money and that the scale of ambition in some of the interim report, which I can support and justify, needs a scale of resources that is somewhat harder to justify in the current economic circumstances.

A number of Members, including Mr Boylan and Mr Kinahan, complimented the Committee Chair on the range of her interim report and were quite right to do so. The Chair put

to me an exhaustive checklist of what a Minister should or should not have been doing. She included some leading comments, such as that she had been “horrified” by the Department’s response to one or two matters. However, I think that, in answering the points that she raised, I may begin to scope out the Department’s responses and obligations in respect of the content of her report.

I will address eight or 10 of the comments made by the Chair and echoed by other Members. It is true that a tyre survey has not been done since 2002. Back then, the assessment was that, each year, there were 1.75 million units in the North. Given the growth of traffic since and despite the downturn in the economy, I suspect that the ongoing all-Ireland survey will reveal that there are more than 1.75 million tyres in the North.

I reassure the House that the assessment is ongoing. There was quite a remarkable response rate from retailers who were consulted on the matter. The very few retailers who did not respond are being visited individually to extract the information from them. I am mindful that we are dealing with the legal part of the business and that the illegal part of the business will not respond — nor should it, because we should not be consulting it. Nonetheless, by July, a new evidence bank will show what the picture on the island of Ireland is, and the Chair’s observation that she was horrified by the situation over the past 10 years might be rectified.

The Chair also raised the issue of better management of used tyres through better communication. She said that the list of those holding licences should be made public on the website.

That is the case already, and since last autumn, the website is updated on a daily basis to confirm who holds waste licences and the status of those licences, namely whether they are in suspension, surrender, revocation or are live. So, I endorse that recommendation because it is one that the Department is already taking forward.

3.30 pm

A number of Members raised the issue that the fly-tipping protocol, which creates obligations on fly-tipping and waste generally, will be reconfigured between the Department and the councils. Six councils have now agreed to participate in a pilot to take forward the new fly-tipping framework, and I hope that three more councils will join that. I wish that all the councils would join in the framework and work through the fly-tipping protocol so that, at the end of the year — it will be a year — we will have the evidence base to say how the fly-tipping arrangements can work best over the next number of years. However, councils need to step forward, and those few Members of the Chamber who are still in councils might encourage them to participate.

The report and the Chair referred to a risk-based approach to waste generally and tyres in particular. That approach has been adopted, but given the scale of the issue and the problems, we are escalating the approach of the Department — in my view, it is the right one — whereby the environmental crime unit (ECU) goes after serious criminal waste activities, organised crime and crime gangs that are involved in waste and, potentially, in the disposal of tyres in an improper way. In my view, that model of high-level enforcement against the worst offenders, be it on the environmental side or, in the fullness of time,

on the planning side, is the right way to go. However, in the meantime, we are in the process of employing 11 new people in the ECU to give it greater capacity. It will have a technical specialist capacity, because these are environmental police people who are trained to police standards and work with the police services, North and South, in real time and in real life operations against waste criminals. That will work itself through in the very serious court cases that are pending or ongoing.

The problem is that the Department has to escalate its response to other waste offences of — if you like — a less serious criminal nature as well. That is why the waste licensing unit, which previously had a regulatory approach, has, over the past two months, begun to put in place an enforcement approach. Therefore, when it comes to — if you like — lesser waste offences, rather than using the high level ECU, there will be a mechanism through the waste licensing unit to deal not just with issues of regulation but with issues of enforcement in order to send the message to those on the wrong side of waste requirements that that will not be tolerated.

I agree that, in so much of this, we have to proceed on an all-Ireland and, indeed, all-islands basis. Mr Dallat and others referred to the fact that if we are to go down the road of a producer responsibility scheme, it will not be feasible, on a lot of levels, for us to have a stand-alone scheme in the North, and it will not have the desired impact. I will look again at the issue of a producer responsibility scheme, and I will write to the Ministers in London, in the devolved Administrations and in the South to see how we might take forward the initiative. The British Government’s previous view was to not go down the road of a producer responsibility scheme. However, given that that is the most favoured approach by most European countries, it clearly needs to be put in place in the longer term, either on the island of Ireland or on these islands.

The report refers to the cost of waste carrier licence fees, and I think the words the Chair used were that people had made their money, dumped the tyres and run before enforcement proceedings could be launched. Indeed, they did so at a very low cost. Going forward, the Department will review the cost of waste carrier licences and employ more technical staff in that part of the business. We will also look further at how to roll out compliance checks, mindful that the resource impact of doing some of what is indicated in the interim report is very substantial and may mean that the Department overreaches.

The Chair also referred to the complexity of exemptions in waste licences. The exemptions, which arise further to the waste framework directive, have been interpreted by the London Government, but have not been reviewed since 2003. Consequently, I think that the recommendation to look at the current exemptions and licensable regime is good, timely and will allow us to see whether those matters should be further assessed.

I agree that there needs to be more certainty with respect to the report’s recommendation to have a better definition of “end of waste”. The Department has set up an end of waste group to work through that definition, as the report suggests, “carefully, clearly and quickly”. My Department is also working up detailed guidance and procedures, and we hope to roll those out over the next year, mindful of and

informed by the fact that the European Union is making recommendations on criteria that will inform waste streams in the future. Therefore, we will be guided by Europe and best advice, but I hope that, during the next year, there will be more certainty on that issue. However, we need to ensure that there is a minimum risk of pollution and to health. Given the character of some who are involved in the business, I know that they will put pressure on the Department to have more flexibility than I think is justified and legitimate: action that would, as a consequence, have greater risks for health and pollution than I think are justified.

I have not been able to respond as exhaustively to the remarks of the Chair as I might have liked. However, as I said, I will ensure that, before the summer recess, if not earlier, there will be a preliminary response from the Department on its behalf and hopefully that of the other Ministers who have responsibilities in respect of the recommendations. That response will ensure that the report and its recommendations converge with the ongoing work of the used tyres subgroup of the waste programme board, which has looked at all these issues. When the narrative of that is fully known by the Committee, I think that you will see a convergence between your recommendations and our ongoing work.

Mr Hamilton (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): Before I forget, I thank the Minister for his very positive response to the Committee's report. I also thank all the stakeholders who gave evidence to the Committee throughout its inquiry. If it had not been for their very detailed evidence over several months, we would not have been able to produce such a comprehensive report, which has now been lifted by my Committee colleague John Dallat to the lofty levels of one of the best pieces of work that the Assembly has ever produced. I also thank the Committee staff for their endeavours in making this happen and tying it all together in the end. I thank all Members who spoke in the debate, particularly Mr Beggs and Mr Kinahan. Mr Kinahan is lately of the parish of the Committee for the Environment, so I half expected him to contribute. However, Mr Beggs's contribution prevented me from feeling, as Jim Wells did, that the Committee was talking to itself. So, I thank Mr Beggs very much for his contribution, which provided a different perspective from those put forward by Committee members.

The report and the Minister's response to it show the value of Committee reports. At a time when there are some who question the value of the work that we do in this Chamber and almost ignore the work that goes on, unreported at times, in the Building's many Committee rooms, this shows that there is value in the work that Committees do, particularly in their inquiries and the reports and recommendations that flow from them. Here is an issue that, although important — and I will come to that — would not be at the top of everybody's agenda. It would not be one of the top 10 issues that Northern Ireland people would think of when asked what problems they face. However, it is a problematic issue. As outlined by Members and by the Chair in her introductory remarks, there is a problem here, and the Committee had the time, the resources and a unique ability to delve into the issue. That is what produced the positive response that we got from the Minister today.

It has led to the work that the Department has already begun, as the Minister said, to get as precise a figure as

possible on the number of tyres and waste arising from tyres in Northern Ireland annually, as well as an action plan to deal with that. So, by starting its work, the Committee brought this to the attention to the Minister and Department and triggered that ongoing parallel piece of work. That shows the value of the report that we produced. Hopefully, that is a positive example of what the Committee can achieve and to which we can refer people out there who argue about the value of some of the things that we do.

Many Members from all parties and all parts of Northern Ireland came forward and identified the problem and how it was manifested in their areas. During our evidence sessions, we heard of sheds being let to an individual and its owner returning, after the tenant had long since disappeared, to find thousands upon thousands of tyres in there, when they thought that the shed was being used to house agricultural equipment or something. Karen McKeivitt talked about problems in her constituency, such as the fire in the Mayobridge area not that long ago. A huge depot fire in Campsie also resulted in catastrophic environmental damage.

Cathal Boylan, Lord Morrow and Roy Beggs spoke of the concerns about bonfires. At the inquiry's outset, I made it clear that I did not want it to be a bonfire-bashing inquiry. Thankfully, it did not develop into that. Mr Beggs was absolutely right to make the point that bonfires may be one of the first things that people think about when they consider problems with tyres. However, a comparison of the volume of tyres now being burnt on bonfires, versus those deposited in these depots that sometimes, as Mr Dallat said, "mysteriously" go on fire, shows that bonfires are a miniscule part of the problem.

I also commend local councils that are doing sterling work in trying to address the problem of tyres making their way onto bonfires. We had great evidence from Ballymena Borough Council on how it has developed its own tyre-marking scheme, which has shown to be of some local success. I know from my time there that Ards Borough Council and other councils are developing schemes and working with local communities to ensure that tyres do not make their way onto bonfires that continue as part of the tradition and culture of some parts of our community. It is only right and proper that we commend those councils for their work.

Many Members identified that our used tyre problem is compounded by the fact that we do not have firm data. The only figures that we have are those from 2002, which the Minister cited, so we are 10 years behind on this. Those figures stated that we had roughly 1.8 million used tyres a year in Northern Ireland. As the Minister rightly said, that number has likely increased in the past 10 years. More worryingly, only 17% of tyres at that time were recovered. Before we start to devise the best way to tackle the problem, we need much firmer data.

I do not think that consumers spend a lot of time thinking about tyres, other than when they have a problem with their car's tyres or when it is due for its MOT or a service and the garage person tells them that they need a new tyre. They pay for the tyre, or go to a tyre company and get a new tyre fitted, and most people do not think about it at all beyond that. Even if people notice that they are being charged an average of £1.22 in Northern Ireland for disposal, they pass over that money, as we have probably all done, in good faith, expecting that tyre to be deposited in an environmentally

sensitive way. The truth is that, as the figures bear out, that does not always happen. The way in which the system is constructed means that the risk of misbehaviour is real. There is no audit trail, and no information is given to consumers about what happens to their tyres. The Committee found evidence that invoices did not always show the disposal fee but that it was included. Customers pay the fee in good faith but do not necessarily get what they expect for that.

3.45 pm

The Committee was encouraged that legislation is in place to deal with the problems with used tyre disposal. However, in equal measure, we were concerned about the lack of enforcement, a point that Karen McKeivitt made in her intervention. A lax approach to enforcement has developed almost by default. We do not know the size of the problem, but we know that it is a big problem that has almost become too big. It is much too difficult to get a grip of, and an impact is being made only around the fringes of the problem. The waste carrier licence is a very good example of how enforcement has not been carried out properly. The process has been too easy and too cheap, and there has been no checking of whether someone who has a waste carrier licence is compliant and behaving properly. Therefore, I welcome the Minister's commitment to increase staff in the environmental crime unit and focus on the problem.

The question is this: what should we do? The Committee favours a strict producer responsibility scheme, and when we look at the evidence presented, that is the only logical conclusion to favour, all things being equal. It is the approach favoured right across the European Union. Some criticism was made of that type of scheme on the basis that it could not work in places such as Northern Ireland where a lot of tyres are available on the market. However, all the evidence from other European countries that have lots of tyres available on the market is that it does work, so there is no valid reason for not pursuing that. Although we operate a free market system in Northern Ireland, there is no responsibility, which produces the problem. As much as I am in favour of a free market, when there is market failure, as there appears to be in these circumstances, it is incumbent on us in government to interject and take action.

We cannot act unilaterally on this issue. Some Members, Mr Dallat and the Minister in particular, talked about the border. We need to consider the border as we devise any plan or scheme for Northern Ireland. If we go for a strict producer responsibility model in Northern Ireland, it will produce a pressure across the border. Companies in the South could register tyres as coming from Northern Ireland to manipulate their figures, or the scheme could have an impact on the price of tyres. It could be very bad for business, particularly around the border. It is the optimum solution, but it is one that we have to consider very carefully. The Minister is absolutely right, and I was going to make the point myself, that we have to look at this in a British Isles-wide context, because some of the problems that happen across the border can happen across the Irish Sea as well. I encourage, as does the interim report, the Department to get involved in the UK-wide Used Tyre Working Group and, in particular, to look at the best practice audit regime that it has developed.

The Committee was very enthused and attracted by the limited producer responsibility scheme that has developed in

the South. All producers bought into creating a system, and all are very positive about it. They are making it work, and it is seen to be working and beneficial. It is not foolproof by any means, and it is not 100% successful, but it is much more successful than what we have. Therefore, it is worth exploring in a Northern Ireland context.

Many Members talked about the alternative uses for tyres. Just as we looked at evidence of very dodgy practice by some individuals in the used tyre business, if you want to call it that, equally we met a lot of people who are far from dodgy and are doing very good and positive things with used tyres. We met people who are doing retreads and we looked at baling, which involves bundling the tyres together and putting them in landfill sites to keep the gases in. We looked at evidence on creating artificial reefs and on using used tyres for safety equipment in playgrounds.

We looked particularly at the use of used tyres in the energy sector. Mr Kinahan mentioned the scheme that University College Cork is taking forward. It seems that there is a possibility that something that we want to get rid of and see as being of no positive benefit can be used to the benefit of society by producing energy. As others said, our ability to do that in Northern Ireland is hampered by the fact that there is no clear definition of the end use of waste here.

I was very encouraged by what the Minister said about developing that in his Department. That is needed so that the market here can respond and develop more of those options. Some of the options for alternative uses of tyres that we saw simply are not available in Northern Ireland. Hence, you get the depots developing because there is no other market for tyres here.

All in all, the Committee has been very encouraged by the response from the Minister. As the Minister identified, the report is an interim one. We have not concluded our thinking on the issue, and we will continue to monitor the situation, particularly the work that the Department is doing on the audit of the volume of tyres and, most importantly, on the action plan that it will produce to deal with all the problems that we have identified in our report and that Members have highlighted today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the interim report of the Committee for the Environment on its inquiry into the management of used tyres in Northern Ireland and calls on the Minister of the Environment to bring forward a timetable for implementing the recommendations contained in the report.

DEL: Transfer of Functions

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two and a half hours for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 15 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have seven minutes.

Mr Buchanan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister, when considering the transfer of the functions currently exercised by the Department for Employment and Learning to other Departments, to take note of the views expressed by key stakeholders consulted by the Committee for Employment and Learning.

It gives me great pleasure to rise as the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning and move this very timely and relevant motion, which addresses the proposed dissolution and transfer of functions of the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

Throughout its existence, the Committee has worked closely with the Department to consider and advise on matters of policy and legislation. Members have become familiar not only with the issues under consideration but with the organisations that have translated those issues into real people with real concerns.

As soon as the announcement was made, the Committee felt that the views of the key stakeholder organisations should be considered in the drafting of any legislation to accomplish the transfer of departmental functions. Accordingly, the Committee wrote to 75 organisations and offered them an opportunity to put forward their views. Members were impressed with the number of stakeholders who not only chose to provide a written response to the consultation but were prepared to come up to Parliament Buildings to explain their views to the Committee. I put on record our thanks to those stakeholders who chose to put their views to the Committee on where the functions of DEL should go.

The majority of stakeholders believe that most, if not all, of DEL's functions would be best aligned with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI). That reflects the belief that the overriding focus should be on the economy and the drive for sustainable prosperity, which was expressed in the Programme for Government.

Some stakeholders went further than that and proposed merging DEL and DETI into a new Department for the economy, as recommended by the independent review of economic policy (IREP) report. That would result in complete integration of skills and training, job creation and employment relations.

The universities and the further education colleges were very much of the opinion that responsibility for third-level education should move to DETI and that, as they have such an intrinsic link in their provision, higher education (HE) and further education (FE) should not be separated. The universities and colleges reiterated that they have a decisive role as drivers of the economy, as well as a role in delivering skills and training. However, the two university colleges, Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University

College, believe that teacher training is an integral part of education and, as such, would benefit from a move to the Department of Education (DE). The vice chancellors of the universities were content that such a split would not have an adverse impact if the remaining HE functions were to transfer to DETI.

Representatives of industry and commerce, as well as those involved with careers guidance, strongly supported transferring to DETI the DEL functions relating to skills and employment. They felt that this would create a closer association between the demands of the labour market and the supply of skills to meet those demands.

Virtually all the voluntary organisations that engage in vocational training with young people and adults agreed that they would prefer to work with a Department that is focused on the economy rather than on education. They felt that such a move would maintain the focus on job opportunities and the social economy — a focus they had worked hard to establish.

Although the First Minister and the deputy First Minister had not identified the possibility of DEL's jobcentre functions transferring to the Department for Social Development (DSD), that was discussed by a number of stakeholders. However, only one stakeholder favoured that option, arguing that it would put DSD in a better position to deal with the implementation of welfare reform. The majority of respondents believed that the association with benefits would be off-putting to jobseekers.

Many stakeholders placed an emphasis on the importance of joined-up government, and that view is shared by members of the Committee. Strategies such as Pathways to Success, which addresses the difficulties faced by young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs), will require dedicated cross-departmental co-operation regardless of which Department is identified as taking the lead.

Another theme common to all stakeholders was a concern that service provision would be disrupted by transferring the relevant functions from DEL to another Department. Effective working relationships have been built up with departmental officials, particularly by representatives from the community and voluntary sector but also by staff within agencies such as Invest NI, and those relationships are greatly valued in achieving a successful outcome.

The Committee also believed that it was appropriate to seek the views of those who are tasked with delivering the DEL services: the departmental staff. Many stakeholders paid tribute to the dedication and expertise of DEL staff, and the Committee has benefited throughout its term from their advice and assistance. Despite a very pressured timescale, almost one third of DEL staff responded to the Committee consultation. That high level of response is indicative of the level of staff concern, and that concern has been heightened by the degree of uncertainty about their future.

Although departmental staff and the senior management team expressed their commitment to the successful implementation of the transfer of functions, whatever the outcome, their views on how that should happen largely reflected the views of key stakeholders. The majority of staff respondents believed that the functions they carry out would sit most comfortably within DETI and that such a move would maintain DEL's existing focus on jobs and the

economy. Many staff already work closely with colleagues in DETI and Invest NI and have found that relationship to be useful and productive.

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

Careers Service staff identified the two different strands of their work — work with adults and work with children — and indicated that work with school-age children would fit best with DE, while careers guidance for adults would align better with DETI.

Jobcentre staff felt that a closer alignment with DSD would not be beneficial as they need to get a wide range of clients, not just benefit claimants, into employment. Staff working with the FE and HE sectors, reiterating the views of the colleges and universities, emphasised the importance of the acquisition of higher-level skills in delivering on the economic targets of the Programme for Government.

4.00 pm

There was a clear and recurring theme running throughout the responses that the Committee received. Stakeholders and staff would welcome the transfer of the majority of DEL's functions to DETI. Such a transfer would continue to build on DEL's growing focus on economic matters and integrate its commitment to delivering skills with the creation of jobs now and in the future.

I commend the motion to the House and seek Members' support in calling on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to ensure that their Executive colleagues take into account the views of all stakeholders when resolving the future of the Department for Employment and Learning as soon as possible.

As we bring this motion to the Floor of the House, I am disappointed that there is no representative of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to respond to the debate. This is an important issue; we are seeing the Committee for Employment and Learning being dissolved. Its functions will go to one Department or will be split between a few Departments. That is all to come on trial. Given the importance of the debate, I would have liked someone to have been here to respond to it. However, we will wait to see the outcome of where this takes us and where the Committee goes. I commend the motion to the House.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate. I see this as an opportunity to look at the future of higher and further education and the future of our skills sector in a way that does not just go back to the status quo with so much divided between DETI and the Department of Education. We should look at it in the round to see how we can improve on some of the services that are delivered by DETI, the Department of Education and even DSD.

It is widely accepted that education must also be an economic driver. The Department of Education has a critical role in producing young people who are suitably qualified for the needs of the economy. This is an ongoing process from the cradle to the career, if you like. Therefore, it stands to reason that it would be better served under a single Department, allowing for more effective strategic planning, continuity, etc.

I know that the whole trajectory of education over recent years has been to drive up attainment across a range of areas, both academic and vocational. That is certainly the logic of the entitlement framework and has been the direction of travel for a period of time. So, to progress seamlessly, it would make sense for further and higher education to be aligned with the Department of Education, as that would enable us to work seamlessly through a young person's learning pathway. That would then ensure that the training and skills sector is equally valued within education and would assist us in enabling young people to add value to their lives and communities, as well as meeting the needs of the economy. We must remember that education is not just about meeting the needs of the economy but about the entire package that a young person goes through. However, it certainly has to do both.

Science, technology engineering and mathematics (STEM) are a major part of the curriculum. It does not make sense to have schools and the Department of Education divorced from the wider STEM agenda. Having been on the Committee for Employment and Learning for a short while, I recognise the great work that is going on. For example, we had a visit to Omagh last week where we heard about the 20 foundation degree courses, in a range of areas, that are being delivered at the South West College. I have been very impressed by the work of the regional colleges. They are no longer seen as the poor relation in further education. It is important to keep that educational package together in one block, if you like. I certainly would have no difficulties with a number of the functions that currently reside within DEL going to DETI. There is certainly a job of work to be done to see where the best match is. I do feel that, to get the maximum benefit out of a young person's education, higher and further education should be aligned with the Department of Education. That said, however, —

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. Will she clarify for the House whether she is speaking as a Member of the House or on her party's policy? When the Education Committee tried to ascertain from the Education Minister his Department's view on the dissolution of DEL, it was told that he had not come to any definitive conclusion and was waiting to see what everybody else was saying. Can the Member clarify the position?

Ms Gildernew: This is a view that I have come to myself, having been at quite a number of the stakeholder meetings and having listened to many of them put their points of view across. Also, I have young children, and I recognise the needs that they will have. Hopefully, they will progress through their education. As a mother, I have no difficulty with them starting their higher and further education journey at a regional college, getting their foundation degree there, and then moving on to a university to continue their education, if that is the path that they choose to take. So, I am speaking very much on the basis of my own experience and on how I see a fit that will benefit the young people of the North.

Going back to the idea of there being an opportunity, there is a need to look further at how the Department of Education could refocus itself. We could look at models in the South or at that in Wales where the education departments include education and skills. One of the stakeholders talked about the absence of a skills strategy and how she felt that the skills agenda had slipped back within DEL as a result. Something that we should think about might be the

expansion of the role of the Department of Education to education and skills. We should also think about ensuring that that fit and progression, and that holistic and very cohesive approach to education, is delivered through a Department of education and skills.

We have the opportunity to take a fresh look at some of the areas of work that are currently being carried out by the Department of Education, and, it has to be said, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. Could things be done better? Both Departments will have to be rejigged to accommodate the new officials and new policies, wherever they end up. So, I think that this is an opportunity — to use the Cathaoirleach's words — to see how we can do things better.

I recognise how important DEL has been in developing the economy and in ensuring that young people, at the minute, are doing their best. However, I have to say that I have been disappointed at times — not just by DEL, but by a whole lot of Departments — about how our most vulnerable young people are treated. As far as DEL is concerned, young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs) are part of that category. There have been times when we have been fairly robust in our challenges to departmental officials about the priority that NEETS get throughout the Department.

At the moment, the training regime of young people with special educational needs is looked after by DEL. I know that there were very strong views at the stakeholder meetings about this, but we have a situation where young people have come through formal education and are now at the training stage. Given that, I would like to see some ring-fencing and a fresh focus and approach. I am sure that many of us have constituents who say that their young people do not get the stimulation or challenge that they need. They are not getting the training that they need to allow them to contribute to, and be a part of, society. Parents do not want their child, or their adult, with special needs to be a burden; they want them to make that contribution and to feel that they are doing so. We talk a lot about good mental health. You need to feel that you are making a difference and that you can impact on society and are not a burden on it.

So, I have been disappointed at times about how our most vulnerable people have been dealt with by DEL, and I would like to make the point that, whichever Department these areas end up in, there should be a fresh focus and ring-fencing to ensure that those people get the treatment and quality that they deserve. Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning for bringing forward this important motion. I also thank the Committee for Employment and Learning for its work in producing this report, looking at the transfer of functions following the proposed abolition of the Department for Employment and Learning and the gathering of the views of the Committee stakeholders.

To begin with, I will speak in my capacity as Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and then I will say a few words as leader of my party.

On 5 March 2012, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) wrote to the Committee seeking the views of the Committee and other Statutory Committees on the redistribution of the current responsibilities exercised by the Department for Employment and Learning. The letter requested that the OFMDFM Committee co-ordinate the views of Committees on the matter. At its meeting on 7 March, the Committee agreed to undertake the co-ordination role and wrote to all Statutory Committees seeking their views on the redistribution of responsibilities. The Committee also wrote to the Committee for Employment and Learning to request the names of stakeholders with which it had consulted and circulated that to the other Committees. The Committee wished to avoid duplication of any work being undertaken by the Committee for Employment and Learning. To that end, the Committee also checked with OFMDFM regarding the organisations it had consulted about the proposals.

Following consideration, the Committee agreed to write to the Equality Commission to seek its views on the redistribution of responsibilities. The Committee also agreed to request a briefing from the Department and to ask it to provide a summary and an analysis of the responses it received to its consultation process. The Committee received responses from the Committee for Social Development and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, advising that they were content for the issue to be dealt with by political parties. The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development responded by providing a copy of a response from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), which advised that it did not anticipate any significant impact on DARD.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel provided a copy of correspondence from the Department of Finance and Personnel in which it advised that there will be a need to bring forward a Supplementary Estimate and associated Budget Bill for the Department or Departments gaining the additional functions.

The Committee received a response from the Equality Commission on 10 May. It has been circulated to Members, but the Committee was unable to discuss it at its most recent meeting on 9 May. The Equality Commission response stated:

"The re-distribution of a number of the functions of the Northern Ireland Civil Service from one Department to others is unlikely of itself to raise equality issues, in circumstances where each public function will continue to be performed and similar resources and staff committed to it. As we understand the position at this time, detailed proposals on the proposed new arrangements have not been published ... In the absence of any concrete proposals at present, it is not possible to reach a conclusion on any potential equality impacts."

At its meeting of 9 May, the Committee considered the responses that I have referred to and agreed to forward them to the Department. The Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Department also agreed that it would be more appropriate for political parties to address the proposals and that it would not, therefore, make any comment on them.

I will now say a few words as leader of the Ulster Unionist Party. I say this to the House and to the Executive: here we have an opportunity to prove to the citizens of Northern Ireland that we are relevant. To give context, let me take you back to 1998 and the Belfast Agreement, when, clearly, the objective was different from what it is today. The objective in those days was to take three groups of people and bring them together. There were those who saw our future going forward politically; those who saw violence as a way forward; and those who wanted to ride the two horses. We created a devolved Administration which was big enough to accommodate everybody. As some people might say, an exceedingly big cake needed to be baked so that everybody got not only a slice, but a large slice.

In 2012, we are in very different circumstances, not least economically. It is time to move forward from those transitional arrangements of 1998. It is time to look at a system of devolved government which is effective and efficient and which delivers value for money. I note that at his party's most recent party conference, the First Minister said that this mandate had a new priority: a priority of delivery, as opposed to the previous mandate, when the priority was survival. I accept that the last mandate was the first in 40 years to go full term and was the first ever cross-community power-sharing mandate to survive in the history of Northern Ireland. However, that was then, and you cannot take that message out twice to the electorate and ask for support.

4.15 pm

It is time to deliver, particularly on the economy. The economy comes first, according to the last Programme for Government and according to this Programme for Government, and the economy comes first according to the report of the independent review of economy policy, which Mr Buchanan referred to. The report's key recommendation was that we should move to create a single department of the economy. Why wait any longer? That report was published in September 2009. In the Northern Ireland Executive report on unemployment in September 2009, the figure stood at 52,700, and a report on unemployment claimants in April 2012 stated that the figure is now 61,500. Therefore, it has gone up by 8,800.

How many more of our citizens need to be unemployed before we act? How many more recessions do we need to endure? How bad must it get before we act and do the sensible thing as recommended by Professor Richard Barnett and his team? The abolition of DEL is the opportunity for us to be relevant, and I call on this House to use it as the opportunity to bring forward a single department of the economy.

Mr P Ramsey: As Members will know, the Committee has been engaging thoroughly with stakeholders throughout all sectors to ascertain the strength of feeling and direction as to the dissolution of the Department for Employment and Learning over the past number of weeks. I want to take the opportunity, as the Deputy Chair has done, to thank our Committee staff for the work leading up to it and also all those who made written or oral submissions. The Committee undertook a very positive and constructive consultation. As a result of that, there are areas where there is clearly consensus.

Let me state categorically that it should not be an issue of carving up a Department for the benefit of a political

settlement. We have tasked DEL with serious issues, and it should not just be a carve-up between the DUP and Sinn Féin. Interestingly, this carve-up has now become much more complicated. One could presume that that is one of the main reasons why we do not have either the First Minister or the deputy First Minister here to respond to this debate.

It should be a matter of providing a leaner, more efficient Government that is capable of delivering for our people — even more so now that times are hard. To do that, the serious work that DEL is undertaking now needs to be placed where the expertise is best placed to integrate those responsibilities.

We were given a wide range of diverse views by 29 organisations, and they addressed a huge number of very important issues within the current competency of DEL. I have said many times before and at the Committee that NEETs and youth unemployment needs to be the highest priority for DEL and among the highest priorities for whatever new Department takes on its responsibility. To that end, the SDLP, after internal discussions and intense discussions with stakeholders, has judged that, based on detailed analysis of responsibilities within the branches of DEL, many of the roles performed by the Department for Employment and Learning should now be exercised by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

We have taken a businesslike approach to this crucial proposal and have deduced branch by branch which Department would be best able to perform the roles soon to be transferred. Obviously, HR, corporate services and finance will be undertaken by a reorganisation of whatever Department undertakes DEL's respective roles.

The higher and further education divisions should be merged and retained together in a new branch within the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to ensure a link-up at source with the economic responsibilities of DETI and to maximise integration of key elements of the higher education strategy, such as knowledge transfer partnerships, as well as the commercialisation of more university-based research.

We believe that the skills and industry division needs to be split. The industry responsibility should be subsumed into DETI's economic policy division, in particular the business development and foresight units. That will add a specific economic focus to the work of that division and will enable DETI to integrate future needs in respect of skills gaps into its internal focus, alongside that of the outputs of our universities. We believe that the skills responsibility is best suited within the Department of Education. It is imperative, as we have seen with NEETs, that a preventative and forward-thinking focus is brought to bear with the skills of our young people. We believe that having that expertise and experience in the Department of Education will enable our young people to focus on their talents and to become more powerful economic drivers post-16 with the skills that the economy needs to recover and grow.

That having been said, the SDLP wants to be clear when it states that youth unemployment and young people not in education, employment or training pose huge problems for our economy going forward. As such, we must give it a primary focus. It is for that reason that we believe that a dedicated youth unemployment and NEETs division should

be created, headed by both DE and DETI to give it the cross-departmental basis that it always needed and with its work being held to account by the ministerial subgroup on children and young people.

The final relevant branch in DEL — strategy, European and employment relations — should be merged into the European support unit in DETI, as well as the business regulation division and the economic policy division. While it is clear that there are major opportunities for us in Europe, it is imperative that those opportunities, including the European social fund, are used for the benefit of us all, as well as the economy at large.

It should be stated that some respondents were concerned about the expertise in relation to the employment relations aspects of DEL being lost and, perhaps, DETI being too concerned with employers. Therefore, any decision on those responsibilities should be taken in the context that workers are the drivers of the economy and their needs should be dealt with with the greatest care and efficiency, whichever Department they find themselves in.

A massive body of work has been carried out by the Employment and Learning Committee and by the respondents to our consultation over recent weeks, who have reflected on the future needs of DEL customers as well as the wider economic responsibility that DEL carries out. It is imperative that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister takes those into account if we are to have any confidence in the outcome of any moves to dissolve the Department. It is worth saying that delay without a final decision being made and the mutterings about political deals being done behind closed doors have caused great stress and anxiety to the community that relies on DEL for a range of services. That includes departmental staff who are demotivated and whose morale is not good. We have a duty to ensure that government reflects the priorities of the people we all serve. This is an opportunity to show that we are listening and have listened —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr P Ramsey: I look forward to the contributions of other Members.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the efforts of Basil McCrea, the Chair of the Employment and Learning Committee, for taking a lead on what was an inclusive and innovative consultation process. He showed a lot of leadership on the issue and had an innovative speed evidence session as part of the Committee, which is something that other Committees could learn from and utilise. Indeed, it is a significantly more robust consultation than that of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister at this time.

We managed to gain quite constructive ideas on this important issue as a result of the consultation on the future of one of the most important economic Departments in Northern Ireland. I will take away five key areas from the process.

First, one of the key points from the feedback was that Dr Stephen Farry is — to be frank — doing a particularly good job in his role as the Minister for Employment and Learning. There was a genuine sense of disappointment at the possibility of losing him as Minister. Secondly, there was an acknowledgement that the Department for Employment and Learning had developed particular expertise, and there

was concern about how the delivery of those services will be protected.

Thirdly, they said that if DEL were abolished, a wider review of good governance and departmental structures should be conducted, with a more full and public consultation. Fourthly, they said that that wider review should seriously consider giving the majority of DEL responsibilities to a Department of the economy; that has been the Alliance Party's position for quite some time. Otherwise, the good work that has been done on skills — a skills strategy has been in place since May 2011 — is in jeopardy of being dissected.

Fifthly, they said not to neglect key areas for which the Department for Employment and Learning has been responsible, such as community-based education and adult learning. The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning launched adult learners' week in the Assembly today. A lot of the feedback from community groups doing vital work in community education on the ground was that they are concerned about where their field will fall as a result of this process.

I am not sure whether the current process is about good or rational governance. From our perspective — if we are frank — this is more about reducing the number of Departments held by the Alliance Party. Let us be clear: the Alliance Party has put forward sensible and workable proposals that could deliver coherent reform and good governance. If proper reform and more efficient government for people in Northern Ireland were on the agenda, my colleagues and I would wholeheartedly endorse that. However, I do not think that that is what is on the table at the moment.

So what feedback are we getting? The Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA), the union representing staff working in the Department, claims that it only found out about the process via the press. I am not really sure whether that is the way we want to conduct good governance via the Assembly. This creates the quite absurd situation where a Minister could become, as far as I recall, the first Minister on these islands to be removed from office because he and his party are doing a good job. Many organisations have also acknowledged how competent Stephen Farry has been as Minister in delivering change in a key economic Department and in improving Executive co-operation across other Departments. That was noted in particular by the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO), which acknowledged the good cross-cutting work being done by DEL and the Department of Justice. The action being taken on 'A Shared Future' was noted in particular.

Most notably, the Department has developed a shared future policy-proofing tool, meaning that all new policies introduced by DEL will be tested to determine whether they contribute positively to a shared society or inadvertently reinforce divisions by providing services on a segregated basis. DEL is the first Department to introduce that innovative policy-making process, which, I believe, demonstrates real delivery by an Alliance Minister to tackle the cost of division in Northern Ireland. Although all other Ministers talk about a shared future, Stephen Farry has initiated a meaningful review and taken action on the segregated nature of teacher training in Northern Ireland, with all its associated costs — an issue that has been ignored for too long by other Ministers.

Some of the other key concerns raised in the consultation feedback were about where skills will sit in any new departmental structure, where the key issue of getting young people into education, employment or training will sit, and the continuation of our higher and further education strategies. The Minister and his Department have not been found wanting on those issues so far. So, the question being asked is this: will that important work be affected by the dissolution of the Department that brings those key roles together? With that in mind, I say to those seeking to remove DEL for political ends that perhaps they should have a thought for that and should be careful what exactly they wish for.

I would also like to pay tribute to the Committee staff who oversaw this informative process and to the various stakeholders and numerous organisations that responded. The Committee has collected a wealth of information, and a full report is available via the Committee for Employment and Learning. I hope that the First Minister and deputy First Minister will take some time to read that, given that they are not here today.

4.30 pm

It is the view of the Alliance Party that it is the duty of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to provide a full, formal consultation and a wider review on an issue as important as departmental rationalisation for Northern Ireland. Alliance is well up for a reduction in the number of Departments and MLAs. We have made that clear, and we have specifically stated that we think that eight Departments and 80 MLAs is a good target to aim for, but the way this is being addressed by the First Minister and deputy First Minister is concerning. There is explicit concern that it amounts to political vandalism for political ends.

Mr D McIlveen: As has already been said, the amount of work that has gone into bringing the report forward is worthy of thanks. First, I want to thank the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee. I know that they have both been heavily involved in bringing this piece of work into existence. I also want to thank the stakeholders who responded in writing and particularly those who took time out of their busy schedules to come to address the Committee. We really did appreciate that. It was very useful in setting the context for where the stakeholders see the functions of DEL being transferred to.

I think that the biggest thanks have to go to the Committee staff, who did a sterling service in co-ordinating everything. It was a mammoth task to get all those people into two rooms in one go. The whole process was efficient, and a big thank you and congratulations have to be passed to the staff, both the Clerk and the assistants, of the Committee.

Before we go too far down the road of the ins and outs of this debate, we have to remember that, from a public point of view, this is, ultimately, a good-news story. We have to accept that the Assembly is too big, it is over-governed, and there are too many Departments. If we are putting a message out to the public that you have to be more careful, watch your spending and be more efficient, surely it only makes sense that, in the Assembly, we are seen to be doing the same thing. I know that there were some issues —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr D McIlveen: Yes, I will.

Mr Lyttle: On that note of the public and efficiency, what would the Member say about the view that the Institute of Directors, which obviously represents a significant amount of the public, submitted to the consultation, namely that the process appeared to be motivated by political expediency rather than good governance, and that the impact on efficiency would be greater if the departmental structure were reviewed as a whole?

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Member for his intervention. What do I think of it? I absolutely agree. I think that there have been some issues around communication. I know that the Alliance Party will have a party political problem with this because, ultimately, it will be that party that loses a Minister, but the fact is that we need to constrain what we have here. We need to be seen to be bringing our budgets under control as well. We concur with the Institute of Directors — there are no issues with that — but it was one of many organisations that brought their views forward on this particular issue.

Bearing in mind that it is, by and large, a good-news story, we have to be very careful that when it comes to the distribution of the functions of DEL, we do not very quickly lose that ground and turn it into bad news: something that is embarrassing, on which the wrong decisions have been made, and on which we get to the end of the process and have ignored the stakeholders and public opinion. It is very important, now that we have taken that piece of work on board and we have the opinions of the stakeholders, that we listen very clearly to what they had to say.

I also concur with the Deputy Chair and others who have mentioned the ministerial response. I think it would have been worthwhile to have a ministerial response at the end of the debate. However, I am an optimist, and we can perhaps take their absence as a positive, in that the Committee has statutory functions and is there to advise the Executive, particularly — in this Committee's case — the Department for Employment and Learning. We can possibly take some heart that, despite the cynical view of the Alliance Party, decisions have not already been made and, perhaps, as the motion requests, they will take note of what has been requested by the Committee.

Mr Allister: Even you do not believe that.

Mr D McIlveen: I do, Mr Allister; I believe it with all my heart.

I return to the stakeholder responses. I agree with Mr Ramsey, who mentioned that the responses were very innovative. I was surprised by just how emphatic they were. It would be erroneous to say that everybody, 100% of the respondents, said that the functions of DEL should go to one particular place, but we were not expecting that. I do not think that anyone expected that. However, the vast majority, by a long, long way, wanted to see the functions of the Department for Employment and Learning either go into DETI or to a new Department of the economy.

I have some concerns about the comments made by Ms Gildernew on the seamless approach to education, how someone should start from the cradle and get into a career. The fact is that when someone in our education system gets to the age of 16, there is a natural seam: they have a choice to leave. We are not going to remove that just by having it

all under one Department. If our drivers are towards the economy, surely it makes sense, when we are preparing for the next stage of a young person's career, that we ensure that they have the right grounding and the right support in place as far as support from the Department is concerned.

During the consultation process, we had a very interesting engagement with Bill McGinnis, who gave us what I believe to be a fairly comprehensive definition of DEL's main aims, which are to promote learning and skills; prepare people for work; and support the economy. I believe that those three fundamental aims are central to the whole ethos of DEL, and it is vital that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister keeps those aims in mind throughout the process of dissolving the Department for Employment and Learning. There is no doubt where those functions lie. It is common sense that those functions, on the whole, should be transferred to a Department of the economy or into the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

I really do hope that this does not become a political carve-up and that we take a long-term view on this and come up with the best results for the people we are here to represent.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Again, like the other members of the Committee, I am appreciative that the Committee, under the chairmanship of Basil McCrea, undertook a very important exercise when we provided an opportunity for the key stakeholders to express their views on the dissolution of the Department and the transfer of functions. I, too, want to thank the Chair, the Deputy Chair and the Committee staff, led by Cathie White in this exercise. I particularly refer to the day when 10 stakeholders met in one room, with a section of the Committee led by the Chair, and other stakeholders met another section of the Committee, led by the Deputy Chair. Tom managed to keep to time on that day; Basil, I think, ran over time, but there was always that danger. I was happy to be located in the room governed by the West Tyrone member on that occasion.

One of the key considerations, if we are to go to the heart of the matter, is the question of where higher education and further education should go. I argue for the provision of a continuum of lifelong learning under the auspices of a Department of Education or a Department of education and skills. I believe that those functions should be transferred to the Department of Education. Higher education and further education are part of a bigger administration of all education in Dublin, where there is the Department of Education and Skills; in Scotland, where there is the Department of Education and Training; and in Wales, where there is the Department for Education and Skills. I think that that best practice needs to be mirrored in this region.

I am drawn to evidence that some groups provided on the matter, including, for example, the Ulster Teachers' Union. It stated clearly that the proper place for the higher and further education functions of DEL was the Department of Education. Similarly, the University and College Union made a very strong case and reminded us that its primary function was to be educators, not businesspeople. It expressed concern about shifting emphasis away from education and the area of learning on to the business and private sector. Of course, it is not irrelevant at all, but there is a shift away

from an emphasis on learning and the unique educational needs of the individual.

The Alternative Education Providers' Forum argued strongly about that area as well. It is responsible for 14- to 16-year-olds and a small 16-plus group of young people who are very alienated from the education system. It stated:

"We have found that, once we transfer those young people into further education or training organisations, the support services that we bring have not found a continuation."

The Open College Network expressed the idea of a continuum of lifelong learning and emphasised that there was an opportunity for young people to establish themselves on a clear path of learning for life, including from the cradle to the grave. So, again, I am drawn to the evidence that those groups provided on the matter.

I note that even some of those that opposed the realignment of further education and higher education with the Department of Education found some justification for locating the teacher training function in DE, not least because the major policy drivers emanate from and are initiated by the Department of Education. I suggest that the Department of Education is the more natural home for higher education, because the primary and core function of higher education is learning, teaching and the student experience. It is not solely about economic development, although that is an important element. I remind people that the University and College Union wanted emphasis on the fact that its mission means that they are educators who are conscious of the needs of the individual.

A point that other Members made, including Michelle Gildernew, was that a number of contributors to the consultation said that the most important thing for them was that working among Departments and joined-up government needed to be central to all this. Those contributors were not prescriptive about the direction of the functions. Among the organisations that made that point was Include Youth, which works with young people who are not in education, training or employment. It said that it should be noted:

"responsibility for addressing the needs of that group lies with a number of Departments and, crucially, with the Executive as a whole."

Include Youth's message was that the ministerial subcommittee needs to work effectively on that.

There needs to be a review of the Careers Service as well. I am concerned that careers teachers in the North tend not to make students aware of options in the rest of the island, where, in very many cases, there are no student fees. I am told that there might be as few as 20 students from the Armagh area who study IT in Dundalk, where you might be able to complete a degree without paying fees for that type of higher education.

I will conclude —

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

Mr McElduff: I will conclude by saying that it is not all rosy for the Department of Education, because the FE sector says that it does not want to be Cinderella in any new

arrangement. The Department of Education needs to ensure that that does not happen.

I welcome the fact that junior Minister Bell has joined the debate.

4.45 pm

Mr Douglas: I support the motion, and I welcome the opportunity to speak in today's debate. Like many other people, I wish to pay tribute to all those who have been involved in this process, including the Chair and Deputy Chair, or Basil and Tom, as we call them. I think they have done an excellent job.

In one sense, it is a bit sad being here today, because we are talking about the dissolution of the Committee as well, and I have enjoyed being part of it. I also want to pay tribute to the Committee members and all the departmental and Committee staff, particularly Cathie White and her team for the excellent job that they have done. They have helped us and have been invaluable in our research over the consultation period. I think that this is a good example of a Committee that has, by and large, worked very well together.

The motion asks OFMDFM to take into account the opinion of key stakeholders when transferring the powers of the Department. The Committee's consultation found clear and uniform answers. The majority of stakeholders who responded, including businesses, community and voluntary groups, DEL staff and trade unions — although I think trade unions were split down the middle on a couple of issues — wanted to see most or all of the Department's remit transferred to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I do not believe that any of the respondents wanted to see all of DEL's functions transferred to the Department of Education or any other Department.

Like me, the stakeholders agreed that the economic benefits of linking DEL and DETI are not only clear to see but would deliver real and tangible benefits for the Northern Ireland economy. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI), an organisation that represents around 60% of Northern Ireland's biggest employers, stated that the:

"key functions of DEL are, therefore, unambiguously linked with economic development. We believe that their effectiveness will be enhanced through closer integration with DETI."

To link the Department that is a vehicle for economic development, DEL, and the Department that delivers it, DETI, not only makes economic sense but provides an opportunity to further create economic drivers and, more importantly, keep Northern Ireland moving forward.

The Institute of Directors, which I think someone mentioned earlier, commented on another advantage of linking DETI and DEL, which is that it would allow access to information, skills and services to make economic development more simplistic and streamlined. I believe that all of us in this Chamber agree that confusion often arises when the services and roles of both Departments overlap. DEL is being dissolved: that is a fact. Let us make the most of it, as I think one of my colleagues said earlier.

It is clear from the consultation that the majority view is that the natural home of DEL's remit is the Department of

Enterprise, Trade and Investment. That is a fact. Enhancing the development of the economy can only be seen as advantageous and a welcome asset to Northern Ireland. In order to facilitate further enterprise, innovation and development, the only logical move, for me, is to ensure that DETI plays a major role in the transfer of powers from DEL.

I pay tribute to our excellent universities and further education colleges that have made exceptional efforts over past years to align themselves with business and the skills sector, thereby ensuring that they equip the Northern Ireland labour market with a vast array of skills and a competitive advantage on the economic landscape.

Under the inspirational leadership of Minister Arlene Foster — I am sorry; I cannot read her writing here — the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has been a fundamental driver to economic development. I am confident that, under her watch, the utilisation of DEL and DETI will be maximised.

Mr McElduff: Will the Member give way?

Mr Douglas: Go ahead, Mr McElduff.

Mr McElduff: Is the handwriting Arlene Foster's or your own?

Mr Douglas: It is hard to work out because it is in Irish. That gives me an extra minute. I thank the Member for that timely intervention.

I will address some concerns that were highlighted by DEL staff. If I was in their position, I, too, would be concerned. There certainly was a feeling among staff that the delay in the decision-making process on the future of DEL has been damaging to morale. That must be addressed urgently, because it is simply not acceptable that staff tell us that they are demotivated because there was little or no consultation. Concerns were also raised about potential job losses, and people are worried about an uncertain future as a result of DEL's dissolution. There were also fears that further reductions in the number of Departments would mean more changes down the line. Staff are asking whether they have to go through all these changes now only for it to happen again in the future.

Many staff also felt that there was little or no consultation with them until we, the Committee for Employment and Learning, asked for their views and, I think, did a good job in trying to elicit those. Several branches stated that they felt that there was a clear alignment between at least some of their functions and DSD, yet DSD was not mentioned at all during the discussions. One recurring concern was the potential loss of momentum between current DEL staff and providers. Many stakeholders and staff voiced concerns about the loss of relationships built up over the years between various projects and staff. They also worried about a loss of momentum, particularly on initiatives aimed at tackling youth unemployment. Pat Ramsey mentioned NEETs, and the people involved in that area worry that it will be lost in the transition.

Finally, there was criticism from some Members, who claimed that the dissolution of DEL was a manoeuvre of political expediency. When I stood for the DUP last May on a manifesto of making Stormont work better and streamlining it to deliver more for the people of Northern Ireland, the electorate endorsed those policies.

I call on OFMDFM to take note of staff concerns and stakeholders' views. It is my view that DETI must play a major role in the reshaping of DEL, either through the transfer of power or, as someone mentioned earlier, the amalgamation of the two into a Department of the economy. I support the motion.

Mr Kinahan: I am very pleased to have a chance to speak today on the transfer of functions from the Department for Employment and Learning. I speak as a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and as a member of the Education Committee. However, I feel that I must start by declaring an interest, as I have two children just entering the university world. I wonder whether one or two other Members ought also to have declared an interest.

I noted, when reading the call for evidence, that the test was maintaining effectiveness, and we must all keep that in mind regardless of whether the functions are kept together or moved. However, we should also keep in mind that there were six Departments under direct rule, and we now have 12. For a considerable time, the Ulster Unionist Party's policy has been that there should be eight. However, today's motion is on the future of DEL and whether to split it or move it as one. If further and higher education were to go to the Department of Education and all skills moved to DETI, it would seem sensible that all of education remained under one Department — if only that were the case. The lecturers want it that way, and it would keep together all elements of education from the cradle to the point of getting a degree or starting a career. However, it does not seem healthy for one party to have total control of education from beginning to end, and I emphasise the word "control". I aim that comment at Sinn Féin, should its Minister remain there.

There is too much emphasis on control, and it is not just a problem of dogma. It seems that it is more important that Sinn Féin controls every decision and makes those decisions itself. There also seems to be a total lack of consensus and discussion. In my few weeks in the Education Committee, going around parents, teachers and boards, that is what I am hearing from all of them. No one is discussing anything with them or communicating well with them. Taking that on board, we can then look at the mess we have with transfer tests. We got rid of transfer tests, brought in two or three tests and then we had last Friday's bickering. We cannot afford to have that happening with our children's education. We need consensus and discussion, and we need to find an agreed way forward. It comes down to politics, particularly when politics is damaging. We also saw it last week with the debate on nursery places. We called for a review of the July and August birthday criteria and the need to help the working poor, and we were basically told no. We need discussion and a consensus to come forward.

The alternative is to put it all into DETI, and as you heard from my party leader, that is the way that we think it should go forward. The Assembly must concentrate on creating jobs and skills and on ensuring that all our students and apprentices find jobs. That is the most important priority, and it should be our top priority. The Ulster Unionist Party feels that we should have a Department of the economy. Let us take up that point and make it an opportunity.

Something else that I think is very important is that when you look at education and government, where are the links with trade, business and commerce? Councils, which are responsible for so many of the people in Northern Ireland, have little links with trade and business, and there is little help for training. The councils are there to look after everybody and yet, somehow, we are missing out on commerce. As another Member said, in our schools, you do not really meet it until you get to the careers evenings. The governors do not necessarily have a business link, nor do the teachers. We have to look at what we are doing and find a way forward to ensure that we are looking for the skills that will get everyone jobs in the future. At the other end of the spectrum, what research is going on to ensure that the jobs and skills that we prepare people for in the future are the right ones and the ones we are educating people for? Therefore, a Department of the economy seems to be the right way forward.

We support STEM subjects, and it seems right that we should be training everyone more in technologies and engineering. However, look at world markets and world skills and try to find Northern Ireland's place there. A study by R E Smalley, a Nobel Prize-winning scientist at Rice University, found that, in the future, 90% of all physical scientists and engineers in the world will be in Asia. In 2001, 5% of American 24-year-olds had engineering degrees, compared to 39% of the Chinese and 19% of South Koreans. We have to find our niche in world markets. Therefore, I ask again: who is looking at the research as to where we go in the future?

Look at the top businesses and top industrialists. How many of them are actually run by people who have the skills of those bodies? Often you will find a linguist or a lawyer at the top. We really must prepare people for the future and equip them with a wide range of skills. At the same time, we must move away from the tick-box world that has come in with interviews, where the threat of legal action against somebody stops them actually assessing the best leadership qualities that we need to take our businesses forward.

The Ulster Unionist Party believes that there should be a Department of employment, but it also believes that there should be parental choice and a light touch. Apologies for the clichés, but we should let teachers teach, learners learn and parents parent. When it comes to the Department, we should depart and not have too many hands on.

5.00 pm

Mr Ross: Other Members started by thanking the Committee staff. I had better do the same; otherwise, I may get into trouble. A lot of work has been done by the Committee staff and, as Mr Douglas said, by our Chair and Deputy Chair. He referred to them as Basil and Tom. I have heard then referred to by other names in the past, but it is important that we put on record our appreciation for what was quite a volume of work to get through.

It is also useful to thank the Business Committee for allowing a little extra time for the debate. That has allowed Members who are on other Committees or who have not been part of the process until now to give their views. Members of the OFMDFM Committee and the Education Committee have been able to comment, and that is useful, because Committee motions that are brought to the House

often result in the Committee involved talking to itself. I am glad that that has not been the case today.

As Members said, how DEL's functions are split up will ultimately be a political decision. It is important to note that the Committee's approach was not one of all its members starting with a political point of view towards which we made sure the report was biased. Rather, our approach was to ask the experts — stakeholders in industry and the economy, in the colleges and universities and in our businesses — what they thought and how they thought the functions of DEL should be distributed. We collected their views in written and oral evidence, and that was important, because the experts are the drivers of the economy. They are the very people of whom we were thinking when we put the economy at the centre of our Programme for Government, and it is important that they be able to argue from their position of expertise.

The argument comes down to whether you believe that we should have a Department for lifelong learning, as Mr McElduff talked about, or that we should move towards having a Department for the economy. In that regard, a casual reading of the evidence that we have collected over the past months will show a clear consensus. The majority of stakeholders believe that we should move towards having a Department for the economy, with the majority of DEL's functions moving to DETI, whether it is rebranded or not. I have also heard it argued that having a single Department to drive forward the economy would be a strong indication from the Executive and the Assembly that we are taking the economy seriously.

During the exercise, others have argued that perhaps a new Department for the economy would be better considered in an overall restructuring of the Executive. In line with my colleague Mr McIlveen, I would have no difficulty with that. Indeed, our party has consistently argued against the structures that were set up in 1998. They were not set up for efficiency or effectiveness but for overtly political reasons. We have always maintained that we want to have a smaller Executive and Assembly. Hopefully, that will happen in the future. That debate is probably for another time and place, but it is worth putting those points on record.

As other Members said, a look at the list of consultees who argued that the majority of DEL's functions should move to DETI shows it to include the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors, Invest Northern Ireland, a number of charities, Colleges NI, Queen's University and the University of Ulster. It is significant that they all argued the same point. As has been said, the unions were not of a single view — some argued one way and some the other. Predictably enough, I suppose, the teaching unions agreed with the view of Stranmillis and St Mary's that they would be better suited in the Department of Education. Most Committee members thought that that would be the case when the exercise was begun.

However, it is interesting that other unions, including NIPSA, argued that they should move towards DETI. When we looked at the evidence from jobcentre staff, it was interesting to learn that they unanimously believe that their role of getting people into work is more closely aligned with the work of DETI than with that of the Department for Social Development. Many members began the process thinking that some of the functions would go to DETI, some to the

Department of Education and perhaps even some to DSD. Therefore, it is interesting that that was raised in evidence.

Nevertheless, the thrust of the evidence that we have taken is that the function of the Department of Education should be to concentrate on the building blocks of education. It should be about ensuring that school leavers, whether at 16 or 18, have the numeracy and literacy skills required to move on in life. Many said that they believe that the Department of Education is already too big to be taking on more functions of higher or further education or skills training. Other Members said that they are fearful that further education in particular will become the Cinderella service. They remember that that was the case previously, and, indeed, a number of charities said that they did not wish to go to the Department of Education because it is too big already and they would be forgotten about.

The further education and higher education views that came out in the report said that those sectors are there to equip people for the world of work. It is about joining up with industry for the skills that it needs and the graduate courses that are provided at university. I should declare an interest as an Assembly Private Secretary in DETI, but I think that that gives me an insight into the needs of business. I disagree with Mr McElduff, who talked about the need to have lifelong learning in the Department of Education. I have listened to employers and business voice concerns about people not leaving school and college with the needs that industry requires, and that leads me to the conclusion that we need a joined-up approach in a Department of the economy. Indeed, only this morning, the Ulster Unionist Member Mrs Overend and I met one of Northern Ireland's leading companies. That company talked about how concerned it is that young people do not have the skills that it needs. That highlights that our focus should be on that area. If we can deliver that by having a single Department for the economy, that is important.

Other Members spoke on the comments of Bill McGinnis, who is the adviser on employment and skills. He spoke about the importance of supporting the economy and said that his preferred option is for DEL, DETI and the work of Invest to operate together. Nigel Smyth of the CBI echoed that belief. He talked about the links between the functions of DEL and economic development. Again, that highlights the direction in which we should be travelling. The universities very much see their role as one that supports economic development and that can deliver the Programme for Government. The voluntary sector also wishes to go in that direction.

In conclusion, of course people will automatically look for bits of the report that back their views.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mr Ross: However, if you do not come to the report with a predisposed position but read it and look at the stakeholders' views, you will see that it is going in the one direction that they want, which is towards a Department for the economy with the majority of functions moving towards DETI.

Mr Lunn: I rise not as a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning but as an interested observer to all this. I welcome the opportunity to speak to the Committee for Employment and Learning's motion. It is not a normal thing for me to do, but I congratulate Basil McCrea,

along with his Committee and the Committee staff, for their speed and efficiency and for the attention that they have given to the matter. That is very important.

In making any decision about the future of the Department or its functions, it is essential that the First Minister and deputy First Minister do what is best for Northern Ireland and our economy rather than make any short-term political move. So far, it is being viewed in that way, and I see no reason to change my view on that. As some Members said, including some from the DUP, it is a pity that OFMDFM is not represented here today. I was going to welcome Mr Bell, but he has disappeared again. He managed about 15 minutes.

Mr Allister: He must be at the golf course.

Mr Lunn: Mr Allister wants to steal my joke about golf courses, so I will not pursue that.

The Alliance Party is supportive of the streamlining of government. In our most recent manifesto, we advocated a system that went down to eight Departments and to about probably 80 MLAs. This really needs to be part of a full review of how all Departments operate and how government in Northern Ireland can be made more effective and efficient. Decisions that are made regarding a rationalisation of Departments should not be taken in isolation of a wider review. I heard Mr McIlveen and Mr Ross say that there was no reason not to go ahead with this at the present time. If it is the right thing to do, why wait? I will watch and listen with interest to see what the next Department to be targeted will be, because there is no reason to wait for that either. Perhaps that will be a Department that is not held by an Alliance Party Minister, but it is nearly bound to be. Perhaps it will be a Department that is held by a DUP Minister or a Sinn Féin Minister, but I doubt it very much. As I say, we will wait and see.

As a small region, we need to have a flexible and responsive workforce, but we need to lay the foundations now for the skills that we will need in the future, particularly given the possibility of corporation tax reduction on the horizon. DEL, as demonstrated by its recently published skills strategy, has set out the vision for the skills that our economy is likely to need to maximise our growth possibilities. A labour market that is strong in the STEM subjects — science, technology, engineering and mathematics — will form the basis of a successful and advanced economy. DEL has been actively working to achieve strength in those skills alongside other Northern Ireland specific priority skills and the essential skills of literacy, numeracy and IT.

DEL is a coherent Department based around the skill needs of our population. In fact, compared to a number of other Departments, its functions have a much more natural fit. So, I agree principally with the DUP that the functions should not be split. There is no coherent reason that I can see for the functions being split. However, I will watch what happens with interest, because there is a clear difference of opinion across the House about whether some of its major functions should go to the Department of Education and some to DETI or a new Department of the economy. We will wait and see how the big parties sort that out.

The focus of DEL at the moment is on training those who require the skills to enter the labour market for the first time, be that through further or higher education; those who are already in the workplace but require new skills

to progress or change their careers; and those who are unemployed and need help to enter or re-enter the world of work.

Both the Programme for Government and the economic strategy recognise the importance of investing in skills and have set ambitious targets to ensure that the skills of our population meet the needs of business, both now and in the future. Skills are critical to growing our local business base as well as to meeting the requirements of potential foreign investors. Given the focus that the Executive are placing on the economy, we can ill afford to play political football with one of the key Departments to ensuring economic growth. In fact, it is one of the largest Departments in the Northern Ireland Executive.

As I said, we will watch with interest, as the losers in this debate, to see the outcome. The most important thing is that the functions of DEL, the morale and spirit of DEL staff and DEL's ability to do the job it was set up to do are not too badly damaged by all this. There must be a morale problem at the moment. That is plain to see. That is really all I have to say about it.

Mr Allister: We are gathered here today to mark the impending passing of the Department for Employment and Learning. I admit that I have attended better wakes, and I am sure that you, Mr Deputy Speaker, have too.

Here we are, dutifully debating a serious issue. A serious issue in particular for the staff of a government Department, who, through political machinations, have been left in a position of total limbo. Their morale probably knows neither whether it is coming nor going, for they do not know whether they are coming or going. This whole process has treated the staff particularly badly.

Here we are debating this, but to what end? Who is listening to what we have to say in this House? Maybe we should be grateful, because we had the great honour of one of the junior Ministers from OFMDFM gracing us with his presence for all of 15 minutes. The truth is that they are not listening, because what we say will not in the least affect what they do. That is the harsh political reality. The reality is that the outcome of this will be dictated by political expediency, just as its origin is political expediency. The decision to abolish DEL was not taken on the basis that it was the Department that most deserved to go or that there was some rationale or determination that identified it as the obvious candidate to be put out of its misery. If you were doing that, you might have thought that the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), the Ministry of fun, would have been the most obvious Department to choose. If the decision were dictated by reality, you certainly would not be disbanding DEL, but then who needs a Department for Employment when the number of people unemployed is as low as 60,000? Who needs a Department of skilling when 25% of young people are without skills and are unemployed?

5.15 pm

Oh yes, we need DCAL and DSD, but it seems that we certainly do not need DEL. Anyone who believes that will believe anything and will believe the propaganda that will come out when the functions of DEL are distributed — as if it will be done on any rational or sensible basis. If rationality — that which is sensible and that which is necessary — were the touchstone, DEL would certainly not be the Department being dispatched.

However, we all know that it was political expediency that decided that DEL had to go, because even the unembarrassable OFMDFM had no answer when asked about the scandal that a party with 16 seats had one Ministry and a party with eight seats had two Ministries. So, as part of the patch-up in relation to justice, it was decided that the Alliance Party's Department, whatever it might be, had to go. That is what has brought us here today, and it is that same spirit of political expediency that will determine where DEL's functions will ultimately go.

Indeed, OFMDFM is not even putting a face on it, hence the absence of any Minister. Its Ministers are showing their unbridled contempt for this House and this Committee and for the future of DEL's functions. Not even a junior Minister is here for the debate — apart from the 15 minutes when Mr Bell was here. One might have thought that it would be more beneficial for them to have a listening role in this House rather than a speaking role, if yesterday is anything to go by. Maybe Mr Bell would have been better spending his time in this House yesterday than doing what he was doing. Maybe even today he has other requirements. I do not know what section of our community he is off insulting today; yesterday it was the golf clubs, maybe today the garden centres —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr Allister, I have given you a lot of flexibility. You are well away from the motion, and I ask you to return to it.

Mr Allister: I am seeking to express my exasperation that OFMDFM Ministers are not here. I am giving them some advice. If they were here to hear it, it might keep them from putting their foot in it in other places, but we will see.

Even if OFMDFM Ministers are not here for me to cast my pearls of wisdom before them, I will give the House the benefit of my opinion as to where I think the functions of DEL should go. To me, it really is very straightforward. If you have an employment and skilling Department — when you distil it down, that is, in essence, what DEL is all about — it seems self-evident that you attach it to either a new Department of the economy or the present DETI. That pretty much seems to be a no-brainer. However, that is not how it will be. It will be a political carve-up between the DUP and Sinn Féin. “Them and us” politics will still be very much alive when it comes to the distribution of DEL functions. This bit for them, this bit for us — that will be the determination of how the functions will be distributed. So, I am sorry, we are largely wasting our time, but, then, what is new about that in this House?

Mr Deputy Speaker: After all those pearls of wisdom, I ask Mr Basil McCrea to conclude and make a winding-up speech on the debate on the motion.

Mr B McCrea (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I am not sure whether I can add any pearls of wisdom to those offered by my esteemed colleagues. There is much to appreciate in tonight's debate. I want to take the opportunity to speak a little bit on behalf of the Committee and make some observations. If time permits, I will offer a few observations of my own.

I do not want in any way to embarrass any of my colleagues by what I am about to say. Some of them have been quite outspoken on the matter, and I am grateful for that. I think that it is a mistake that no Minister from the Office of the

First Minister and deputy First Minister is present to hear what had to be said. I do not want to cause embarrassment, but I think that a lot of really important information has come across. We had a really interesting debate this evening. The media sometimes castigate this place for not staying late, not talking about important issues and not dealing with issues that really affect the people of Northern Ireland. However, this is not one of those occasions. This was a measured, constructive debate that was conducted by people who have different opinions and points of view, but which were put across quite properly and appropriately. I do not think that it would have been too much to ask for some people who are in the Executive, whoever in the Executive, to listen to what we have to say. When I was waiting for the debate to start, I heard Minister Alex Attwood responding to an interim report from his Committee. He said that he would respond and take things further forward.

Having made that point, I want to thank the Business Committee. We asked several times for a little bit more time for the debate, as others might have wanted to speak. As it turns out, we probably will not need all the time. However, as the Chair, I was keen for every Committee member and others who chose to speak — I thank them for their time — to be able to give their opinion on this matter.

One issue, amongst others, that was raised was about the views of the staff in the Department. Sammy Douglas appropriately raised it. Something that was really quite novel in the exercise that we took forward was the inclusion of a very detailed response, almost line by line, from many people in the Department. That is the correct way to have a consultation — people should be asked what they think. The staff have been quite outspoken, and I do not think that they should be castigated for saying what is on their mind. They are worried about their jobs, morale, budgets and a lot of things. We should take note of those worries and deal with them. If a private company was acting in this way, we would all be at the steps of its head office saying that that is not the right way to go forward and that the staff should be involved. Many of us were quite alarmed by the debates around Stranmillis and St Mary's. We asked at that time why the views of the staff at Stranmillis were not being taken on board. The same argument applies here.

There were positive issues that came across, and I want to offer a sincere and genuine note of thanks to my vice Chairman, Tom Buchanan, who more than ably led the debate. He absolutely put out the points of view that need to be discussed. I hope that Tom will agree with me when I say that we have shared the responsibility of trying to manage the Committee on a number of issues. Tom shared the workload and has been most diligent and helpful, and he put his point of view across in his own inimitable style.

I am also happy to report to the Deputy Speaker that chairing the Committee has been an interesting experience. Some personalities have been involved. I am grateful that the smiling Jim Allister is here to make his contribution. He certainly made a very valuable contribution in Committee. I notice that Mr McElduff was worried about my timekeeping in some of the Committee meetings that I chaired. That was mostly because I had to try to keep Mr McElduff in some form of order, which was not an easy task, as you can imagine.

Other Members have spoken, including Mr Ross, Mr McIlveen, and Mr Douglas, who I have referred to already. All of them

made contributions that made the Committee as a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Mr Ramsey was forever drawing to our attention our obligation to NEETs, and I thank him for that. We addressed other issues, such as the North West Regional College. Ms Gildernew brought quite an interesting perspective on things, including getting me on a zip wire near Omagh — I thought my last days had come.

When you take all of that together, I think that we actually worked very diligently and very well as a Committee. There were times when we had differences of opinion, sometimes hotly expressed, but they were always in the interests of making Northern Ireland a better place. For people, particularly in the media, who criticise politics or politicians, let me tell you that there is no greater amount of work and no proper diligence that has not been carried out by this Committee. If they have any decency in them, they will take note of the way in which this debate has been carried out and the points that have been made. I challenge them, here and now, if they are listening to this — because we are now past 3.30 pm, which is the point at which they stop watching — to see that this is real politics; this is real debate, and these are issues of import. They are not simple sound bites. These issues need proper, considered debate and deliberation, and it would serve us well if we were able to get that message across to the electorate in this part of the world.

I want to move on and mention some of the issues. What is in front of us is more than just a sterile debate about whether DEL should go into DE or DETI, or whether universities should go to one place or another. There is much more that the Department for Employment and Learning and its Committee have looked to than just that. Earlier, Mr Lytle mentioned the opening of adult learners' week. That was a most inspirational event. The Belfast Trust, among others, talked about care workers who said that 80% of the people in their care left school with no qualifications. A significant number of them have numeracy and literacy issues. They point out that these are governance issues for them, because if there is a problem with reading and writing, there may well be problems later on with health. They talked about inspiration and the way that people come forward, with a bit of training, and how they go on to other things. This is what DEL is about.

We also talked about education maintenance allowance (EMA). Include Youth told us how they feel so annoyed that EMA is not paid to them but it is to others. Who will forget the person from Opportunity Youth with the great Mohican haircut — I hope he will not mind, but I thought he made a marvellous contribution — who told us how he turned his life around. That is also DEL. That is education.

Of course, the issue of youth unemployment was raised. We have to look at Steps to Work and ask whether it is a good programme. Maybe it is good that 25% of people on Steps to Work got a job. Perhaps that is a tick. However, maybe we might think that there should be more. There are issues that the Committee will, rightly, look at: tuition fees and whether the maximum student number (MaSN) cap is still relevant. Mr Ramsey repeatedly raised the issue about what Derry would like to see as far as a third campus is concerned.

Mr Wells: Londonderry.

Mr B McCrea: I am quite happy to see that Mr Wells has come to join the debate, because I am happy to deal with this in a calm and equal manner, whether it is Derry or Londonderry. I have made the point, and the issue in front of us is about our people — all of our people.

I talk also about autonomy. What comes out in many issues in the report is that Queen's, the University of Ulster and the further education colleges value their autonomy. They all like having the freedom to go and do what they think is right. We have seen some great examples of them operating on their own, which, as politicians, we sometimes try to muscle in on. The Confucius Institute initiative was the University of Ulster's, which we happened to attend.

The investment in the Belfast campus was put together by them. The head teachers' initiative by Queen's University and the leverage are issues in which they had some independence.

5.30 pm

I come now to the skills gap. Mr Ross raised the point about most of our fastest growing companies being absolutely beside themselves because we do not have the skills necessary to fill the job opportunities. That point was repeated by other Members, including Mrs Overend. We have to ask ourselves about careers. When our young people are at school, or later on, are we giving them the right advice as to where the jobs are going to be? Are they doing the right degrees? We talk about teacher training, and we had a debate about St Mary's and Stranmillis. People said that it does not matter whether you make too many teachers, because all of them will get jobs anyway. Think of the waste. That is not the right way for a small, niche economy to be carrying out its business.

We must find some way to deal with adult apprenticeships. Most of our companies are telling us that they want highly skilled technical people of graduate calibre, which, for those who are listening, is different from graduates. It is about having people with technical skills to look after such areas as aerospace, coding and software. We need somebody to look at that.

I have to mention other issues. Ms Gildernew brought up the work that the Committee has done with the disabled and those who need a little bit of support when they look for education. I do not think I would be alone in saying that one of the greatest triumphs for the Committee was when it had dinner presented to it by NOW, which is a project for people in north and west Belfast. You can look at the other contributions. I do not know what other members thought about Orchardville and how its representatives explained where they want to go with sheltered education.

I want to read one final bit of contribution from our report. It is really worth listening to, if the First Minister or the deputy Minister are listening. Mr Tom Mervyn of the Employment Services Board said:

"Before we get into the issue of the potential dissolution of the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), I will give you a brief overview of the Employment Services Board and the area that we represent. West Belfast and the greater Shankill area has around 50% of Belfast's unemployed, its worklessness and its income support and incapacity benefits claimants."

He also said that it has worklessness rates of as much as 65% in some individual wards. He makes the point that because of the size of Belfast, and you can talk about other cities in our area, it is not something confined to them. This is something that affects us all. It affects the productivity of this area. We need to make sure that we concentrate resources into those areas. I am interested to see what form of structure comes forward to make sure that we deal with all those issues. It is not about only universities —

Mr Douglas: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: Certainly, Sammy.

Mr Douglas: This is not to give you an extra minute or anything. Does the Member agree that a lot of the good work that has been carried out by the Committee should be part of a legacy that will be handed on or transferred to whatever Department takes on the functions of DEL?

Mr B McCrea: As ever, I am very grateful for Mr Douglas's intervention. On a personal note, I must say that I have been very impressed by the contribution that he has made throughout the Committee's work. His perspective is about trying to get things done. I hope that we will be able to deal with these issues.

Let me finish by saying a few things in my capacity as a Member, because I have been speaking on the Committee's behalf. I want to put out some truisms that I do not think are true. I know that some people will disagree with this, but this is real debate. Some people think that we should be engaging in blue-sky thinking and that we should simply let our teachers get on with it or let our researchers sit in a lab somewhere and think up something. We do not have the resources to do that. We are not the United States of America. We cannot research everything. We cannot do everything. We need to be focused in what we do. It is not for me to say what we do. However, I know that we need focus and that most learning takes place when it is in context and when people say, "I want to learn that skill for a particular reason." It is about getting relevant, and we need to focus our activity on ways that maintain our employment, our standard of living and our competitiveness down the road.

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

Mr B McCrea: Sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker. I do not have my glasses on, so I did not see that we were getting so close. I will finish with this point. This is not about politics; this is about the future of Northern Ireland. I hope that we will have another debate in which all are engaged, including our Ministers. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister, when considering the transfer of the functions currently exercised by the Department for Employment and Learning to other Departments, to take note of the views expressed by key stakeholders consulted by the Committee for Employment and Learning.

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Knockmore Primary School, Lisburn: Special Needs Units

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic for debate will have 15 minutes in which to speak. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond. All other Members wishing to speak will have approximately five minutes.

Mr Craig: It is with some regret that I come back to this House only a matter of months since the issue of Knockmore Primary School was debated. Last October, the debate was around the proposed closure of Knockmore Primary School. At that time, there was a huge debate around the issue, and, on that occasion, the school was saved from closure. I take this opportunity to thank the Minister and his Department for whatever role they played with regard to that. However, today, it is regrettable that despite winning that previous battle to save the school, we are now in a similar position in relation to the proposal to relocate the special units from Knockmore to other areas outside Lisburn.

In this academic year, the school enrolment is 143. Some 62 of those children enrolled in Knockmore are specifically designated to a special unit in the school. I believe that there will be good news with regard to this year's enrolment, which I am led to believe is well up from last year.

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

The school has a total of seven units, which cover each year group from year one up to year seven. The units cater for children who require specialist speech and language teaching and social communication tuition. Of the 62 pupils who attend the school for its specialist provision, 44 children use the speech and language units, and 18 are enrolled in the social communications unit. If you have not already guessed, a lot of those children suffer from autism. That is where the social communication skills come into it.

The proposed removal of each of those key special units will have a detrimental impact on the children, especially those with autism, because one of the key issues with autism is keeping a set routine. The removal of the units will most definitely lead to a change in that routine, which will have a horrendous impact not only on the children, but on the families of those involved.

The relocation of the special units to the other locations will pose a significant problem relating to transport of the children to other locations in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area. It is disappointing that in the same academic year as we secured the retention of Knockmore Primary School, we are faced with further bad news from the board, and the commissioners know the many reasons for the widespread opposition to closure in October. What has changed since that debate around the school closure? This is a school with an outstanding inspection report — that was the comment that was placed there by the inspection

regime. The same staff are there, although many remain on temporary contracts despite the fact that a decision has been made to keep the school. I would like the Minister to look into that because I find it alarming. We have a Sinn Féin Minister and his party saying that they are all for protecting the rights of workers, so why, when the decision has been made to keep Knockmore Primary School open, are its acting principal, acting vice principal and three mainstream teaching staff on temporary contracts? There is an issue there, and I would like the Minister to look into it. That should not be the case but, unfortunately, it has been for many years.

What has changed? What brought about the idea to relocate the speech and language units? We are told that it is all about the children affected having a choice of where to go. According to the South Eastern Education and Library Board, it will relocate one of Knockmore's speech and language units to St Luke's, Dunmurry and one to Ballynahinch Primary School. The good news in all of that, apparently, will be the creation of a new learning support unit at Carryduff and also, for some reason that I do not know, the renaming of mild learning disability units in St Malachy's, Castlewellsan.

The distance between Knockmore and Ballynahinch is 12 miles. The journey takes 30 minutes to an hour, depending on the time of day that you hit traffic. The distance from Knockmore to Carryduff is almost another 10 miles, which is another half-hour journey. Dunmurry is, indeed, closer. However, the real question is this: why are units being moved away from a school when one of the strong arguments put together by those who, ultimately, brought about its saving was that it was a single unit? It was not just a primary school; the additional special needs unit made it unique. Time and time again, parents testified that many pupils passed from the special needs unit back into the primary school and, at times, back into the special needs unit. The continual joined-up approach at the school led to a far better educational environment for those children, so why remove the units from Knockmore?

Were the South Eastern Education and Library Board giving additional units to the areas mentioned, I would be the first to congratulate it and would have no issue. Indeed, with today's announcement of a further £6 million for special educational needs, the Minister indicated that there was increasing need in that area. I welcomed that statement from the Minister this morning, but why can we not have additional units instead of the removal and break-up of what is, quite clearly, a very good, functional unit at Knockmore Primary School?

I strongly urge the Minister and his Department to reconsider the proposal that has been placed on the table. We have spoken many a time in the Chamber about underachievement. I have seen a report that clearly indicates the levels of underachievement in the Knockmore area. Here we have a primary school that, as clearly indicated in its latest educational report, is overachieving. A combined special needs unit and school are working well together in an area of huge underachievement, and the results from Knockmore Primary School are excellent, not only for mainstream children but for those with special educational needs. That is an example of what works. It is not an example of a failing education system. What I am really saying to you, Minister, is this: the special needs units

at Knockmore ain't broke and do not need fixed. So, why are we tampering with them?

5.45 pm

Mr B McCrea: Having just finished a long debate about how we need to deliver for our people rather than play politics, I feel that it is incumbent on me to support and congratulate Mr Craig for bringing this matter to the House's attention. I know the school and the set-up there. What I took from the proposer's speech was this: if it ain't broke, why fix it? We have an excellent school that is really well supported by very diligent parents and is integrated fully in the community, with people of all abilities working together. It just seems a real shame that we have to go and disrupt that.

When it was announced that we were successful the last time and the matter had been put to bed, we were relieved, because it seemed as though the argument had been won and that certain people had been won over. However, the spectre of apparently doing something by the back door has been raised again.

I am hoping to hear the Minister — I am grateful that he is here — say that he will take on board the fact that there is genuine concern and angst. Given his earlier statement, I know that he is very concerned about the issue. I would really like to engage with him to find out what the thinking is. Why do we have to go down this route? Is there not some way of keeping everybody happy rather than constantly reinventing the wheel? I conclude on that note, because I am sure that others wish to add to the debate.

Mr Lunn: It seems no time since we were involved in the previous debate about the fate of the school, not just the special needs units. It is hard to comprehend from what we know now that on 2 December last year, which was only four days after the commissioners decided not to pursue a development proposal to close Knockmore, the commissioners were asked to review the location of speech and language units in the primary sector, obviously with Knockmore in their sights. That just seems a bit disingenuous now. It was pretty bad timing and, as it turns out, pretty bad PR.

The last time we debated the fate of the school, the Minister was fairly critical of the fact that the debate had been brought to the House at all. I must confess that I had some sympathy with that view, because we were asking him to comment on something that had not yet come before him and that he would perhaps have to adjudicate on. So, that was fair enough; I could understand that. We may get a similar reaction this time. However, at least it gives us, largely local representatives, the opportunity to vent our views about what is happening. I do not want to repeat everything that Jonathan said, because I agree with every word.

The special needs units at Knockmore are widely acknowledged as a centre of excellence in that field. Some of the reasons that I think will probably be put forward for distributing some of the units to other parts of the board area are travel time, convenience and that sort of stuff. However, I have heard no complaints from any parent with a child at the special needs units about having to travel from Carryduff or Ballynahinch to Knockmore. In fact, in the previous debate, Margaret Ritchie commented on the fact that it was not a problem and that the special needs units

at Knockmore were valued by those in the northern end of her constituency just as much as by those in Lisburn. So, I really hope that good sense will prevail.

The consultation that has started will have to run its course. I hope that the right conclusion is arrived at. Some 50% of pupils who attend those units go into mainstream education, which is a terrific achievement. The pupils come from some distance away.

Jonathan referred to children with autism and the effect of upheaval and disruption to their daily lives and lifestyle, particularly to their education. That point has been reinforced. The Education Committee recently went to Middletown, where we heard the same story — that what those children need, and what is highly desirable for them, is stability. Stability will not be the outcome if some of the units are shifted. There is a demand, and the Minister recognised that in his statement today when he referred to the extra £6 million, which is totally to be welcomed. That is a sign of the increased demand that there is for those types of units. That demand is no less in the Lisburn and Lagan Valley area than it is anywhere else.

Mr Craig also said that if we need extra units, let us provide extra units, but somebody would need to make the case, so that I might understand it, for the redistribution of three out of seven of those particular units in a highly successful school, which has just recovered from the shock of almost being proposed for closure. It was thought that it was safe. Enrolments are going up now that the threat of closure has passed. What will happen if those three units are taken away? Down will go enrolment numbers again, and the next thing that we will have is another development proposal as part of the area planning process.

I do not make the case for Lisburn not having enough primary schools. There are probably too many primary schools on that side of Lisburn, but Knockmore is a special case. The synergy between the special needs units and the school itself is far too important to lose. I will conclude with that. I really hope that good sense will prevail in the long term.

Mr Givan: I thank my colleague Mr Craig for bringing this Adjournment topic to the House. I do not intend to repeat everything that Mr Craig, Mr McCrea and Mr Lunn have said. I would like to be able to add to it. Obviously, the issue has been debated in the Chamber before, so the Minister is very much aware of the campaign that has existed around Knockmore, a campaign that successfully retained the school.

It is important that we put out a message that Knockmore Primary School has been saved and, in the immediate future, will continue to operate as a local primary school, delivering education for young people. It is important that we emphasise that. What we are talking about here is a specific number of units. The school has been saved. It will go into the area planning process, along with every other urban school in Lisburn. It is important that we make it very clear that Knockmore Primary School was saved and will continue to operate in the immediate future, pending the outcome of the area planning process.

When the statement was released, the sting in the tail for a lot of people was the reference to the special units. Many people felt that the way in which the South Eastern Education and Library Board handled the initial talk about the mainstream school closing and then added in the

special units was an underhand tactic. It annoyed a lot of people. It divided a school that had been united, and I emphasise again that the way in which the education board has conducted itself has left a lot to be desired.

Issues have been raised. We had a meeting that the parents were able to attend, at which quite a number of questions were asked. It is fair to say that some of the questions were answered, but a lot of them were not. The way in which one of the officials from the board conducted themselves left a lot to be desired. Many felt that contempt was being displayed for what were very genuine questions being raised by the parents present.

One of the concerns is that we have specialist provision at Knockmore that caters for a lot of children, and the fear is that if we start to split that up by relocating those units, specialist provision elsewhere will be diminished by spreading it too thinly. A discussion needs to take place with the health trust on how it will be able to provide the service if relocation of the units takes place.

Another issue that was raised concerned transport. Parents from Downpatrick and parts of Belfast have said that they want to continue to send their children to Knockmore. The official gave an assurance that if that was the parents' choice, it would be facilitated. The fear is that, having been told that there is alternative provision near your home, which you decide to go past to continue at Knockmore, you may then have to meet your own travel costs. People raised that fear, and I would be keen for the Minister to touch on that and to provide some reassurance to parents that that will not be the case.

In response to a letter that I wrote to the Minister, he indicated that the preferred travel time for children who are in this type of situation is 30 minutes. At the meeting, parents said that they were not happy with the type of transport that they get. They were happy for most of the children to travel for longer than 30 minutes, but the type of transport that is used is inappropriate. If there were a better way to provide the transport in a more suitable vehicle and with better timings, parents would prefer that to the relocation of units.

I agree with everything else that my colleagues from Lagan Valley said on this; I just added to their remarks. I commend the school. In the face of all the difficulty and uncertainty that has been created, the teaching staff have continued to provide an excellent service and quality education in very difficult circumstances. Testimony to the school is the fact that its enrolment has gone up. Usually, when the threat of closure comes, people abandon a school. In this case, enrolment at Knockmore Primary School has increased, and I think that that is testimony to the good work that has been done there. I particularly thank the principal for her leadership of the staff and those parents who have been involved actively in raising these issues and campaigning.

I look forward to the Minister's response.

Mr Rogers: I thank Mr Craig for bringing this issue to the House, and I also welcome the Minister here.

As a representative of South Down, I must say that the people there value Knockmore Primary School. Although we have a responsibility to provide quality education to

all children, we must make a special effort for those with special educational needs. The Minister acknowledged that in his statement this morning.

Whether children are in preschool, the traditional school setting, a learning support unit, a special unit or a special school, we have major responsibilities. Knockmore attracts pupils from far and wide to its specialist speech and language and autism units. The school ticks all the boxes of the sustainable schools criteria. This has already been mentioned, but you might ask why there has been an increase in its enrolment since 2008. I suggest that the reason for that is that it is simply a good school and that it is very good at meeting its pupils' needs. It is commendable that the majority of its children transfer into mainstream education and need no additional or specialist support.

We do not need a High Court ruling to tell us about the advantages of early intervention. The Department's own figures for numeracy and literacy tell us that early intervention has an 80% success rate for children aged six or seven but only a 20% success rate when they are 10. By the time that they reach secondary school, the odds are stacked against them if they do not get that specialist help.

So, having previously attempted to close the school in the autumn, plans to relocate the speech and language and social communication units were brought forward just before Christmas. The most important people in this debate are the children and their parents. Has anyone stopped to think of how the disruption of moving to another unit would impact on the children? Those children need stability and will achieve their potential only if they are in a friendly, caring, supportive and familiar environment. Such children find it difficult to adapt to new surroundings, and the increasing stress that is created can have a negative effect on their learning. How can the parent of a six-year-old autistic boy tell him that he will not be going back to Knockmore in September but somewhere else, perhaps somewhere much further away? We have a moral and ethical duty to protect the most vulnerable in our society and give them a first-class education in a school that has a proven record.

6.00 pm

I fully support Mr Craig in bringing this to the House. There is a need for greater consultation with the school, its governors and, most importantly, the families who would be adversely affected if the closure became a reality.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to respond to today's Adjournment debate on the consultation on the removal of special educational needs services from Knockmore Primary School. You will recall that the Adjournment debate on 25 October last year focused on the possible closure of Knockmore Primary School and Dunmurry Primary School. In respect of Mr Lunn's comments, it is the right of Members to bring forward such topics for debate. My concerns around the last debate were that we had linked Knockmore and Dunmurry together, which I thought was not the best way forward. Certainly, however, Members are perfectly entitled to bring forward debates on such subjects and raise their concerns about them.

There are seven special classes or units at Knockmore; four speech and language classes and three learning support classes, which cater for 62 pupils. Children attend

those types of classes for an intensive period to address their difficulties. The classes are attached to mainstream schools. The South Eastern Board has indicated that some of the pupils who attend Knockmore travel considerable distances to get to the school. Last October, the board carried out a pre-publication consultation on whether a development proposal for the closure of Knockmore Primary School should be published. The board subsequently decided not to publish the development proposal for the closure of Knockmore, but instead indicated at the time that it wished to consider relocating some of the special services at Knockmore to other schools that were closer to the pupils' homes. I believe that the rationale was that some of the children were considered to be travelling excessive distances every day.

I understand that the South Eastern Board is now considering publishing four development proposals for the relocation and redesignation of its special services, which would affect Knockmore Primary School. Those are: relocating speech and language services from Knockmore to St Luke's Primary School, Twinbrook; relocating a speech and languages class from Knockmore to Ballynahinch Primary School; changing the status of the moderate learning services that are currently at St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewellan to learning support services; and establishing a learning support class at Carryduff Primary School. However, I emphasise that my Department has not received any definitive proposal for any change at Knockmore Primary School or the special units that are located there. If the board chooses to publish such a proposal, it will have to follow a statutory process that will involve extensive consultation with elected representatives and the community. If it is published, I will ensure that I meet representatives from the House and representative bodies from around the constituency. I know that Members will bring those to my attention.

As you are aware, the first stage of the process will be the pre-publication, which is under way. Following that, the board will decide whether the development proposal will be published. If the decision is to publish the development proposal, there will be a statutory two-month period during which interested parties can make their views known to my Department. At the end of that period, I will decide on the proposal, taking into account all relevant information, including, undoubtedly, comments that will be received from elected representatives at that time.

As I have a responsibility to make the decision on development proposals, I cannot comment on specific proposals in advance of that process. However, I assure the House that I will give full consideration to the proposals that are brought forward. Mr Givan said that he had concerns around how the board is conducting the process. The Member should bring those to the attention of the board. If he remains dissatisfied and wishes to bring them to my attention, I am more than happy to look at them. It is incumbent on us all to assure members of the public and parents of children with special educational needs who may be facing change that their concerns will be addressed in an open, frank and compassionate way, and that parents will receive all the information that is available to them. Any concerns around travel or the process should be explained carefully to parents. If you need to explain it again, explain it again to ensure that parents and pupils know exactly what the process may involve.

I assure Members that if a development proposal is published, I will meet Members and representative bodies and will discuss all the concerns that they have. I emphasise that, at this stage, I have no development proposal in my Department for Knockmore Primary School. When I have one, I will be in the rather difficult position of not being able to make detailed comments on my views on that proposal. It is a statutory process. I have to make a legal decision at the end of it, and I am bound by process. Once again, I reassure Members, members of the public, parents and representatives of the school that I will take on board their views during that process.

Adjourned at 6.05 pm.

Written Ministerial Statement

The content of this written ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

Written Ministerial Statement

The content of this written ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

Regional Development

A8 Belfast to Larne Dualling: Publication of Notice of Intention to Proceed and Making of Statutory Orders

*Published at 12:00 noon
on Tuesday 1 May 2012*

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): On 14 February 2012, I announced a programme of improvements to our strategic road network over the next four years. The A8 Belfast to Larne Dualling Scheme is one of the projects I identified to take forward, subject to the outcome of public inquiries. Public Inquiries have been held and the Inspector submitted his report in September 2011.

The Inspector recommended that the proposed dual carriageway should be constructed in accordance with the preferred route which is largely online widening, with an eastern bypass of Bruslee and a western bypass of Ballynure.

The Inspector made over 130 recommendations, which include, keeping Church Road open, the removal of the Rushvale Road – Calhame Road link and the provision of agricultural crossing facilities. The remaining recommendations made by the Inspector are relatively minor and typically relate to accommodation works, provision of additional information, or recommendations for the detailed design or construction phase.

Having discussed the Inspector's report with my Department's officials and having given the matter due consideration, I concur with the main recommendations made by the Inspector.

Construction of the scheme, which will provide 14.4 km of new dual carriageway from Coleman's Corner to Ballyrickard Road is expected to commence in June this year. The scheme helps reduce journey times, improves road safety along the A8, and helps the development of the Port of Larne, which is the second largest Port in Northern Ireland.

The scheme should also lead to an increase in demand for local suppliers of construction material as well as give a boost to commercial trade in the surrounding area.

I have asked my Department to publish Notice of its intention to proceed with the scheme and to make the necessary statutory orders.

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 20 April 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Strategic Investment Board

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the Strategic Investment Board has not appointed advisers to projects in Derry, particularly the Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 and the One Plan.

(AQW 7587/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) has committed significant resources to projects associated with both the Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 and the One Plan.

SIB provides support through a number of channels, including the Interim Chief Executive of SIB advising the Board of the Culture Company. Advisers also provide recruitment and communications advice to the Culture Company, and a range of advice services to Ilex in relation to the One Plan and support to Derry City Council.

In addition, SIB has recently appointed a project manager who is working on the Apprentice Boys of Derry Heritage Project.

By using specialist resources flexibly, SIB can provide a greater range of support to the UK City of Culture 2013 and The One Plan than could be possible through the appointment of specific advisers.

Older People's Strategy

Mr Brady asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the development of the Older People's Strategy.

(AQO 1531/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Older People's Strategy has been developed following consultation with the then Older Peoples' Advocate, the Older Peoples' Advisory Panel and the Commissioner for Older People. Its further development will be taken forward within our Delivering Social Change framework.

The Department has been developing the Strategy following comments from the key stakeholders mentioned above and will be consulting further with the Advisory Panel before submitting the Strategy to Ministers and the OFMDFM Committee.

Subject to the agreement of our Executive colleagues, we intend to launch the Strategy for three months' public consultation in May. This will include consultation events in June for older people, older people's representatives, people who care for older people and anyone who wishes to take part.

The final Strategy will be published by the end of the year.

Suicide Among Young People

Mr Moutray asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action their Department is taking to tackle the issue of suicide among young people.

(AQW 9951/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: One of the aims of our 10 Year Children and Young People's Strategy is to improve children's health, and reduction in the suicide rate is a key performance indicator.

Junior Ministers also attend the Ministerial Sub Group on Suicide Prevention which is chaired by the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. We understand that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety intends to hold the next meeting of this Sub-Group shortly.

Last year we welcomed the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's decision to extend the Protect Life Suicide Prevention Strategy until the end of 2013.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Waterways: Designation

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the process and the criteria used to determine the designation of waterways.

(AQW 9102/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Designation is required to enable my department to undertake maintenance and schemes for drainage and flood defence purposes at public expense. Applications to designate a watercourse should be submitted to the Drainage Council for NI which operates as an independent advisory Non Departmental Public Body. Criteria for the designation of watercourses are used objectively by the Drainage Council to ensure uniform treatment throughout the north. There are two key overriding conditions. Firstly, that the proposed works offer value for money with benefits outweighing costs. Secondly, that the works have sufficient priority to be included in my Rivers Agency's programme. Viable works are programmed and this second condition has not resulted in designation being refused due to availability of funding. There are five additional criteria beneath the two overriding conditions, with an application for designation needing to satisfy one or more of these. Firstly that there is sufficient area of disadvantaged agricultural land which is subject to poor drainage or flooding. Secondly, that works to reduce existing or potential flooding are outside the capability of the riparians to organise and carry out at their own expense. Thirdly, where works are required but it is not possible to identify the occupier/riparian. Fourthly, where the watercourse requires works but it does not perform any function connected with the drainage of riparian land. Lastly, that works are required to provide an outfall for increased run-off from new housing and commercial development. The Drainage Council has recently been reconstituted and at its first meeting on 15 March members were asked to assess the current criteria to satisfy themselves that they remain fit for purpose. It is proposed to review the criteria after receiving comments from the Drainage Council members at the next meeting in June. My officials will recommend to the Drainage Council that the criteria for designation ensure that designation is determined on need and is not dependent on the availability of funding. A broader review, including full consultation, of the whole designation process will be undertaken in the future as part of planned review of the current legislation and potential drafting of replacement legislation to be led by my Rivers Agency.

Irish Language and Cultural Projects: Funding

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the funding from her Equality Budget that has been spent on Irish language and cultural projects since May 2011, broken down by project; and what is the estimated spend in this area over the next twelve months.

(AQW 9641/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Equality Unit within DARD has incurred the following costs since May 2011. These costs have solely involved the translation of documents into Irish. No funding has been spent by the Equality Unit on any other Irish language or cultural projects since that date.

Date	Cost	Translation
July 2011	361.20	Equality Scheme Summary
September 2011	48.00	Equality Scheme Forward
Total	409.20	

The Council of Europe Charter on Regional or Minority Languages is designed to protect and promote regional or minority languages.

As part of the commitment given by the Executive to the European Charter, all public bodies here are required to encourage and promote the use of Irish and Ulster-Scots.

The DARD Language Policy for Irish and Ulster Scots commits the Department to accepting and responding to correspondence received in Irish. The policy also commits us to providing pro-active translations of documents into Irish and Ulster Scots when they are likely to be of particular relevance to Irish and Ulster-Scots speakers; are likely to be read and used generally; and will contribute to promoting, maintaining and safeguarding either language.

Taking the above factors into account it is not possible to estimate the spend in this area over the next twelve months.

Rural Development Programme: Axis 3

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what criteria are used under Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme to assess if a legal charge is applicable to a project.

(AQW 10190/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A legal charge is applicable where:-

- grant aid of more than £50,000 is awarded for the building, development or refurbishment of any land or property; or

- b) where grant aid of more than £50,000 is awarded for the purchase of a building or the purchase of land. In such cases, except where the project is Council lead, the applicant is required, prior to any payment of grant aid, to register a charge in favour of the Department (DARD), over the land or property with Land Registry under the Land Registration Act (NI) 1970.

Rural Development Programme: Axis 3

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development which section of the Operating Rules permits her Department to levy a legal charge on a project which has been offered funding under Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme; and when this section was introduced.

(AQW 10191/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The relevant sections of the current Axis 3 Operating Rules are Chapter 2 paragraph 2.74, Chapter 6 paragraph 6.13 and also letter of offer 'Terms and Conditions Booklet' paragraph 30.1.

Sections relating to the need for a legal charge have been contained within the Operating Rules since version 1 was issued in July 2009.

Evidence and Innovation Stakeholders Forum

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the priorities her Department accepted at the Evidence and Innovation Stakeholders Forum in (i) 2010; and (ii) 2011.

(AQW 10260/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD's evidence and innovation (E&I) priorities are identified on an ongoing basis, informed by both informal and formal stakeholder engagement. Our annual Evidence and Innovation Stakeholder Forum is central to this process.

Before a Forum, stakeholders receive a proposed list of DARD's E&I priorities for that year. At both the 2010/2011 events stakeholders were invited to comment; seek clarification; propose changes; and put forward additional suggestions. The results were published on the DARD website and were used to inform the priorities published in our annual DARD Directed Agri-food Biosciences Institute Research Work Programme.

Evidence and Innovation Stakeholders Forum

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what projects her Department has submitted to the Evidence and Innovation Stakeholders Forum for 2012.

(AQW 10261/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The process for determining the DARD directed Agri Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Research Work Programme for 2012/13, which started with the 2011 Evidence and Innovation Stakeholders Forum, is now coming to a close. We therefore have not yet started planning for the 2012 Forum, but hope to consider the timing and format of the event shortly.

Rural Development Programme

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 8570/11-15, what is the breakdown of the expenditure of each cluster on administration.

(AQW 10279/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The breakdown of expenditure for each cluster is as follows:

	ARC	DRAP	GROW	LRP	NER	SOAR	SWARD
Staff costs	1,016,046	572,130	478,524	480,539	643,195	802,148	1,270,668
Construction/ refurbishment							111
Evaluation Costs	265	735					
Marketing & Publicity	70,164	67,849	49,651	83,233	44,996	71,488	39,780
Professional Consultancy	27,462	27,912	64,734	31,080	67,314	38,794	50,802
Purchase of Equipment/ Land	43,316	25,689	4,818	7,740	4,289		29,490
Running costs	189,788	165,411	65,010	67,375	85,722	120,123	194,580
Training		360	1,185		75	2,337	1,348

	ARC	DRAP	GROW	LRP	NER	SOAR	SWARD
Travel & subsistence	65,698	29,140	25,743	23,374	57,138	23,981	59,152
Total	1,412,739	889,226	689,665	693,341	902,729	1,058,871	1,645,931

The Department operates an accrual accounting system which does not analyse accruals at a micro level, therefore detailed expenditure analysis can only be provided for expenditure excluding accruals. Consequently the above breakdown of expenditure is slightly behind the position set out in accrued accounts.

Rural Crime: Categorisation

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether and how she is working with the Minister of Justice to review the categorisation of rural crimes.

(AQW 10325/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I met with the Minister of Justice last year, to discuss several issues, including the recent rise in rural crime. I also raised the matter of how rural crime statistics are recorded and was advised that the PSNI record crimes on a District Command Unit (DCU) basis.

While any review of the categorisation of rural crimes is primarily an issue for the PSNI, I will continue to work with both the Minister of Justice and the Chief Constable to explore ways in which we can work together to help tackle rural crime.

Single Farm Payments

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the number of Single Farm Payment (SFP) applications that are (a) still to be finalised; and (b) undergoing adjustments following inspection; (ii) the target time for the payment of a SFP (a) without inspection; and (b) with inspection; (iii) the actual payment time for a SFP (a) without inspection; and (b) with inspection; and (iv) the target date for the completion of Single Farm Payments.

(AQW 10329/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- i) To date, my Department has finalised 35,570 (94%) of the 37,854 claims submitted under the 2011 Single Farm Payment. On-farm checks were carried out on a total of 1,894 of the claims submitted to verify the eligibility of the land declared to support the claims involved. Of the 2,284 claims not yet finalised, 1,307 require the findings of on-farm inspections to be applied to the claim.
- ii) My Department's SFP payment performance targets for the 2011 Scheme were published in November 2011. These targets were to complete 83% of all claims by the end of December 2011 and 90% by the end of January 2012. Our objective is to pay inspection cases, which can require very complex assessments and therefore take longer to process, at the earliest possible time.
- iii) The EU legislation permitted my Department to start making payments for the 2011 scheme year in December 2011. I am pleased to say that 85.3% of claims were processed for payment in the first month of the opening of the payment window. A further 5% were paid in January, the second month of the permitted period, and a further 2.5% were completed in February and March. The claims paid in December 2011, January, February and March 2012, included around 100, 120, 130 and 180 inspection cases respectively.
- iv) EU Commission regulations require that my Department pays out at least 95.24% of the value of its 2011 SFP budget by 30 June 2012. At this time, around 93% of the budget has been paid out and it is anticipated that that the 30 June requirement will be met. It is also anticipated that 2011 inspection cases will be significantly completed by the end of July 2012. It may take some further time to finalise all the remaining 2011 claims where information or action outside of the control of my Department is required, for example, the completion of probate. Not all of the remaining case will be due a payment because of ineligibility or the application of penalties under scheme rules.

Ministerial Cars and Drivers

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the number of departmental staff who have availed of ministerial cars and drivers in each of the last three years; (ii) the cost of providing the service; and (iii) whether the benefit derived is subject to income tax.

(AQW 10332/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: No staff have availed of the departmental car. On occasion, the Special Adviser and Private Secretary have travelled with me to official events. The cost of the Ministerial driving service in the 2011/12 financial year, including running costs, was £34,151.56. There has not been any benefit derived which has been subject to income tax.

Royal Ulster Agricultural Society: Relocation

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the benefits to communities in Lagan Valley as a result of the proposed relocation of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society.

(AQO 1720/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I would like to offer my best wishes to the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS) on their proposed relocation to the Long Kesh site. It will be an exciting opportunity for the agriculture industry if they commit to building an agriculture centre of excellence. The RUAS presence in the Lagan Valley area has the potential to benefit the area and its communities significantly when it stages key agricultural events such as the Balmoral Show and Winter Fair. The new location will allow RUAS to fully realise and capitalise on the scope of the show and other events as visitor attractions.

I believe that development of the strategically located Long Kesh site provides potential not just for the community in the Lagan Valley but also for those across the North of Ireland. The proposed relocation by RUAS and development of an agriculture centre of excellence could lever investment in infrastructure such as broadband services and attract jobs to the area through the creation and expansion of rural businesses associated with the organisation and its events. I hope that the RUAS master plan will be built upon by the development corporation and that, in time, we will see all of the 347 acre site developed for the good of the community.

Dogs: Microchipping

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she plans to conduct any testing on the possible adverse reactions to microchipping in greyhounds before the implementation of the Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012.

(AQO 1725/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have no plans to conduct testing on possible adverse reactions to microchipping in greyhounds. The Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations 2012 came into operation on 9 April 2012 and includes a short-term exemption from microchipping for thoroughbred greyhounds registered with the Irish Coursing Club until 1 January 2013. This will allow time for the Irish Coursing Club to enhance their systems to facilitate the recording of microchip numbers.

During consultation on the proposals for the new dog control legislation in 2009, a small number of consultees raised concern that there may be a casual link between microchipping and cancer in dogs. The consultation responses, including all the material relating to the health aspects of microchipping, was considered as part of the Assembly legislative process before the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 was enacted in February 2011.

Regarding the health risks associated with implantation of microchips, there are a small number of studies which suggest the possibility of a link between implantation of microchips and the development of tumours. However, it is clear from the British Small Animal Veterinary Association's research (which has been recognised internationally) that any such risk from microchipping is very low. Between 1996 and 2011, more than 5 million animals were microchipped. Of these, only 429 cases of chip failure, or adverse reactions, to a microchip were reported. Of the 429 cases, and I think that this is something that I must stress, only 3 cases involved a tumour in the area of the implantation site, but there was no conclusive evidence of a direct link to the microchip.

The Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 provides for an exemption from the microchipping requirement where a veterinary surgeon confirms that microchipping would have an adverse effect on the health of the dog. If, in a veterinary surgeon's professional opinion, microchipping would have a detrimental impact on a dog's health the veterinarian should provide the dog owner with a signed certificate to that effect. On production of that certificate the local Council will license the dog without the need for a microchip.

To assist dog owners, Dogs Trust has recently announced that they are extending their free microchipping campaign in the north until the end of 2012.

Common Agricultural Policy: Less-favoured Areas

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the potential changes to the Less Favoured Areas scheme under the current EU Common Agricultural Policy proposals.

(AQO 1729/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowances Scheme currently forms an important part of our Rural Development Programme and operates under Pillar II of the CAP. My Department undertook a review of the support arrangements for less favoured areas in 2009. In policy terms, the evidence from this review clearly points to an underpinning rationale and need for continuing LFA support with a clear focus on contributing, through continued use of agricultural land, to delivering positive environmental outcomes and, in particular, avoiding land abandonment and environmental degradation. The European Commission published legislative proposals for CAP post 2013 last October and these include a provision, within Pillar II of the CAP, to continue support for Less Favoured Areas (or Areas of Natural constraint) post 2013. However, there are some potential changes to the architecture of the Pillar II support in that payments may require to be linked more closely to compensating farmers for the additional costs incurred and income foregone of those farming in the LFAs and to be degressive above a threshold level of area per holding. The CAP Reform post 2013 proposals also provide for an optional payment for areas with natural constraints within Pillar I, but Pillar II payments would need to take account of any Pillar I payment.

The future of LFA support beyond 2013 will also depend on the outcome of the EU-led project on the re-designation of these areas. The EU Commission has proposed that the future designation of areas of natural constraint should be based on a set of objective biophysical criteria. The proposals also suggest that these new designations be in place from 1 January 2014.

Overall, I am working hard to ensure we have sufficient flexibility within the overall CAP framework post 2013 to allow me to address the needs of these areas.

Agrifood Strategy

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions have been held with Bord Bia on her plans for a new Agri-food Strategy.

(AQO 1730/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: On 22 March this year, I had a very useful meeting with Aidan Cotter, the Chief Executive of Bord Bia to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Specifically, we discussed how Bord Bia's Pathways to Growth Report and the south's Food Harvest 2020 document are formally guiding the strategic focus and priorities of the agri-food sector. We also discussed similarities that might arise with the work of our Agri-Food Strategy Board, the potential for cross-border collaboration on these and other related work, such as food labelling, and the value of working together to overcome difficulties.

At the meeting, Aidan also emphasised the essential role of partnership with industry in driving the success of Food Harvest 2020. This is a view, I very much share and that is why our Agri-Food Strategy Board, here in the north, will be industry-led. I believe everyone involved in the food chain, from farmers through to processors and suppliers, need to play their part in taking forward work on the Strategy.

Aidan and I agreed to keep in touch as our work on the Strategy develops.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's internal work and external engagement in preparing systems, staff and processes for a possible transitional period between the existing and a reformed Common Agricultural Policy if its implementation is delayed beyond January 2014.

(AQO 1731/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The current CAP legislation covers the period up to the end of 2012 for the Single Farm Payment (SFP) Scheme and to the end of 2013 for Rural Development Schemes (including Less Favoured Areas and Agri-Environment Schemes). The CAP Reform proposals are intended to apply from 1 January 2014 onwards. Hence the Commission has published a transitional regulation for SFP in 2013 scheme year which is scheduled to be agreed later this year. It is in the most part a rollover of existing arrangements and therefore I would anticipate that our current systems and process will suffice in relation to 2013.

I am aware that it is possible that the implementation of the CAP Reform proposals will be delayed beyond 2014 and we are currently pressing the EU Commission to come forward with proposals to deal with this scenario. At this stage the EU Commission is reluctant to concede that there will be a delay. It is anticipated that any interim arrangements in 2014 for SFP will be a rollover of the current scheme which should mean minimal changes to existing systems and processes. The position in relation to Rural Development schemes in 2014 is more complicated and hence we are pressing the EU Commission to come forward with proposals at the earliest opportunity so that the necessary systems, staff and processes can be put in place.

Rural Primary Schools

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether any assessment has been made of the impact on a rural community of a primary school closure.

(AQO 1732/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Quality education and good schools play a vital role in sustaining our rural communities; indeed I have recently raised concerns about school closures directly with the Minister of Education.

Policy responsibility for the schools estate rests with the Department of Education. It is my understanding that a published statutory Development Proposal is required before there can be any significant change in the school estate, such as a school closure. I am assured that the Department of Education's Sustainable Schools Policy which addresses the issue of rural schools and was rural proofed prior to publication, rigorously assesses any published Development Proposal.

The Department of Education has made a number of commitments in relation to sustaining rural communities under their Sustainable Schools Policy. This proposes six criteria for use in assessing a schools educational viability, these are: quality educational experience, stable enrolment trends, sound financial position, strong leadership and management, accessibility and strong links within the community. Schools are therefore assessed not just on numbers attending, but also on a range of criteria including their position within the community.

While the Department of Education is taking the lead on this issue I am fully supportive of their approach. I will continue to work with my Ministerial colleagues and departmental officials through various means including the Rural White Paper Action Plan, to ensure that the provision of high quality education supports the sustainability of our rural communities.

Woodland

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the Department's performance in meeting its target to increase woodland coverage.

(AQO 1733/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Forest Service business plan target in 2011/12 was to create 250ha of new woodland under the Woodland Grant Scheme and by 1 March 2012 this target had been exceeded and 284ha was planted. However I acknowledge that this rate of planting is insufficient to meet our aim to increase woodland cover to 12% of land area by the middle of this century.

To help achieve our long term aim, last November I announced in the Assembly that Forest Service will review support arrangements for private planting to increase the rate of woodland creation. I also indicated that the review will take account of the Commission's proposals under the draft Rural Development Regulation.

While I acknowledge our requirement of agricultural land for food production, I am aware of a limited amount of such land, that since 2008 has or may become ineligible under the Single Farm Payment (SFP) scheme, or which is not in good agricultural and environmental condition. This land may be

suitable for forestry planting in a way to help farmers comply with their SFP responsibilities. Forest Service will explore the potential of this land with stakeholders in advance of the 2013 planting season.

Rural Development Programme

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many measures in Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme are currently open or will be opened in the next six weeks.

(AQO 1734/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The grant application process is open under the Rural Development Programme, and 5 measures are currently open for applications. There is however a backlog of applications across the 7 clusters and officials are working proactively with each cluster to assist in clearing these backlogs before opening calls so that there is a clear indication of the value of uncommitted funds. Presently the current backlog of applications stands at 471 worth £33m. This work will also inform the clusters review and completion of Implementation Spending Plans for the 2012/13 financial year and indeed subsequent years, it is through these implementation plans that the clusters set their financial spend targets. This work will also assist them re-focus their delivery of Axis 3 funding to ensure that it is invested effectively in rural communities.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure: Special Adviser

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she will ensure that the appointment process for her Special Adviser results in the most qualified and suitable candidate being appointed.

(AQO 1743/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The DCAL Special Adviser was appointed in accordance with the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers and the Civil Service Commissioners (NI) Order 1999 as amended.

Review of Public Administration

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what powers or responsibilities her Department will pass to local government as part of the Review of Public Administration.

(AQO 1746/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department is not transferring any powers to local government as part of the Review of Public Administration. The functions which the Department plan to transfer are;

- Armagh County Museum will transfer to the Armagh / Banbridge / Craigavon Council.
- Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC) will transfer to local government provided that a suitable delivery arrangement can be agreed with local government.
- Twenty one water recreation sites are to transfer to local councils.
- My Department is committed to transferring funding for local arts to local government in line with the guiding principles set out for RPA. The budget for local Arts in 2009 / 2010 was calculated at £1.1 million.

Ministerial Cars and Drivers

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the number of departmental staff who have availed of ministerial cars and drivers in each of the last three years; (ii) the cost of providing the service; and (iii) whether the benefit derived is subject to income tax.

(AQW 10333/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for Ministerial transport was transferred from Department of Finance and Personnel to departments with effect from 1 April 2011. Since that date no staff from my Department has availed of the Ministerial car or driver.

Fishing: Legal Catches in Lough Neagh

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what procedures are in place to ensure an accurate count of the fish caught in Lough Neagh by legal netmen from 2012 onwards.

(AQW 10404/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The only requirement on DCAL licensed netmen to ensure an accurate count of fish caught in Lough Neagh is through the salmon carcass tagging scheme as stipulated in the Fisheries (Tagging and Logbook) Byelaws (Northern Ireland) 2001 as amended. The Department enforces this through inspections on boats and at quaysides where salmon are detected in the catch.

DCAL Fisheries Protection Officers also carry out inspections of fish dealers to ensure fish registers are aligned with fish present on the premises.

There is no legal basis for the Department to ensure an accurate count of all fish caught on Lough Neagh by licensed netmen. Lough Neagh is a private fishery and the scale fishing rights are claimed by the Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative Society Ltd (LNFSC).

River Bann: Leisure

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given the cultural history of the Mountsandel area of Coleraine, what plans she has to promote the Lower River Bann System as a leisure destination.

(AQO 1736/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: With regard to the Lower Bann, Waterways Ireland plan to carry out a Product Development Study for this region in 2012.

This study will involve the relevant tourism and local authorities being consulted to define the aims and future needs of the region. Waterways Ireland has also published a Lower Bann Chart which details key facilities in this area.

Waterways Ireland sponsors a diverse range of events across the navigations. To date approximately 65,000 people have attended the Riverfest events at Coleraine on the Lower Bann. Other events sponsored by Waterways Ireland include the Head of the River rowing competition and the Ulster Schools Coarse Angling competitions.

In recent years Sport NI has also provided funding towards the development of sporting and leisure activities on the Lower Bann. If there is a demand from local users, activity providers and land managers to develop a forum for the Lower Bann then Sport NI and Waterways Ireland will be happy to support it.

Fish Monitoring: Lough Neagh

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what measures are being taken to collect accurate data on the fish life in Lough Neagh, particularly eels, salmon, dollyghead, roach and perch; and when accurate reports will become available.

(AQW 10508/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The responsibility for fish monitoring programmes as required by European Commission law rests with Department of Environment.

Stadium Development Project for Casement Park

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the social clauses that will be part of the Stadium Development Project for Casement Park.

(AQO 1741/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Social clauses, and strategies for maximum social returns, will be firmly embedded throughout the procurement and delivery process for all three sports stadia. Relevant clauses and measures will be included on both contracts for professional services and construction works and will contain provision for delivering sustainable economic, social, environmental and equality improvements. For example, I would wish to see the projects providing skills development opportunities and employment opportunities.

The Sports Governing Bodies' Project teams working on the stadiums are currently liaising with my officials, the Strategic Investment Board, Central Procurement Directorate and the Department for Employment and Learning to ensure that the use of social clauses is both applied and optimised through the development of these major construction projects.

I am pleased that all of the sporting bodies intend to implement my Department's requirements on social clauses and maximum social returns. I am currently considering the detail of how community participation can be maximised, equality impacts measured and monitored, and significant social returns delivered to the most deprived parts of this society.

The Executive is firmly committed to the use of public money for maximum improvements to the lives of those areas and communities suffering greatest socio-economic inequalities. My Department also has stand-alone statutory and public policy requirements as a public authority in its own right which impose specific obligations, such as the general duty and specific procedural duties attached to Section 75 of the NI Act 1998. It is worth noting the words of the now First Minister, when he launched the Executive's guidance on integrating social and equality requirements into public procurement as Finance and Personnel Minister in May 2008. Mr Robinson said: "...opportunities exist within the procurement process for policy makers and procurement professionals to work together with suppliers to promote equality of opportunity and sustainable development in the delivery of our public services". The Executive's May 2008 guidance is the minimum bottom-line guidance to assist Departments on how those opportunities can be maximised. I am requiring that each of the three sporting bodies fully integrates the need for social clauses and socio-economic returns as a "golden thread" within the entire lifetime of each of the stadiums.

Football: Brandywell Stadium

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what implications the Windsor Park lease agreement may have for the redevelopment of the Brandywell Stadium.

(AQO 1745/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The process of developing the policy on regional stadium development has required the Irish Football Association and Linfield Football Club to have the existing financial agreement between them renegotiated before public funding is made available for the redevelopment of Windsor Park. The agreement refers solely to the use of Windsor Park for International football events and therefore does not impact on any other football stadium in the north of Ireland.

Irish Language: Funding

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how core funding for Irish language groups will be developed following the recent consultation on funding arrangements.

(AQO 1748/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The consultation about the proposed changes to the core funding arrangements for Irish language groups ended on 2 April 2012; therefore no decisions have yet been taken on how core funding for Irish language groups will be developed.

At the NSMC Language Meeting held on 14 February 2012, Ministers were given an assurance by Foras na Gaeilge that all submissions received as part of the consultation process would be considered.

The responses are currently being analysed and a report of the findings will be presented to the Board of Foras na Gaeilge in May 2012 for consideration.

While it is important to ensure the best use of the resources available, I will need to be convinced that the proposed changes to the funding arrangements will mean the current and future development needs of the language are fully met.

Following the completion of the consultation process, Foras na Gaeilge will finalise a detailed business case in support of the portfolio of draft schemes.

NSMC approved an extension of interim funding for the existing core funded bodies to the end of June 2013.

Department of Education

Ministerial Cars and Drivers

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of departmental staff who have availed of ministerial cars and drivers in each of the last three years; (ii) the cost of providing the service; and (iii) whether the benefit derived is subject to income tax.

(AQW 10292/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): On rare occasions, departmental staff have travelled with me to official events. Other than these occasions, departmental staff have not used the Ministerial car. The cost of the Ministerial Driving Service for the Department of Education for the 2011/12 financial year, including running costs, was £36,333. There has not been any benefit derived which has been subject to income tax.

GCSEs: School Leavers with Hearing Loss/Deafness

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education, for each of the last three years, to detail the percentage of school leavers with hearing loss/deafness who achieved at least five GCSEs at grades A* - C, broken down by Education and Library Board area. **(AQW 10511/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Percentage of school leavers with hearing loss/deafness who achieved at least 5 GCSEs A*-C inc. equivalents by Education and Library Board 2007/08 to 2009/10

	2007/08		2008/09		2009/10	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
BELB	5	38.5	6	66.7	8	53.3
WELB	*	#	7	53.8	*	#
NEELB	5	50.0	*	#	8	66.7
SEELB	7	35.0	7	38.9	5	35.7
SELB	6	46.2	*	#	*	#

Source: School Leavers Survey

Figures include those pupils with mild/moderate hearing loss and severe/profound hearing loss.

Data excludes special and independent schools

* Denotes fewer than five pupils

figure not provided under rules of statistical disclosure

Department for Employment and Learning

Divided Society: Additional Cost of Service Provision

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an estimate of the annual additional cost to his Department of providing its services in our divided society, broken down by (i) capital; and (ii) revenue costs. **(AQW 10093/11-15)**

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): In line with my public commitment to address this aspect of public spending in Northern Ireland, I have undertaken an assessment across the Department for Employment and Learning of the impact of societal division. The services my Department delivers and secures on behalf of the population have been and continue to be affected by the legacy of conflict and the consequences of division in Northern Ireland society.

Arguably this impact is felt most keenly in the demand for services and is indirectly related to previous and continuing lost economic opportunities. The study undertaken indicates that there is less evidence of duplication costs, given the physical location of services. In three business areas the initial analysis suggested elements of duplication:

Employment Service: With the exception of Derry and Belfast, there is little evidence of duplication of services resulting from divisions and segregation. Employment services are generally available on a cross-community basis

Fair Employment Tribunal: Duplication of activity and management has been largely eradicated in recent years. In the longer term, the question remains as to whether it is appropriate to maintain Industrial Tribunal and Fair Employment Tribunal structures which are technically separate. Initial findings suggest that any savings arising from a merger are likely to be small, however, given that duplication has been eliminated to a large extent.

Higher Education: In the higher education sector, particularly with regard to initial teacher training, additional costs are incurred in maintaining existing arrangements. These would be avoided by a more integrated approach to teacher training. I am currently engaged with the first element of a two-stage study examining the future of the teacher training infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what was the final underspend for the first round of the European Social Fund Programme; and what happened to the unspent monies. **(AQW 10174/11-15)**

Dr Farry: Following the first round of the NIESF a total of £1,113m of the Department's contribution to the NIESF Programme was surrendered back to the executive and a further £329k of an easement in 10/11 was utilised internally by the Department.

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much of the unspent monies from the first round of the European Social Fund Programme was brought forward to the second round; and how much was transferred between Priority 1 and Priority 2. (AQW 10175/11-15)

Dr Farry: Funding from within the Northern Ireland European Social Fund was available for allocation under two calls launched during the life-time of the programme from 2007-2013. Any unspent funding identified following the first call activity was not carried forward to the second call as the Department did not have the additional 25% annual funding contribution required to match the ESF funding. However this does not impact on the Department's ability to drawdown the full ESF allocation over the life time of the programme

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether there is provision within the European Social Fund Programme to carry any underspend from the first round to the second round of the Programme. (AQW 10176/11-15)

Dr Farry: Funding from within the Northern Ireland European Social Fund was available for allocation under two calls launched during the life-time of the programme from 2007-2013. Any unspent funding identified following the first call activity was not carried forward to the second call as the Department did not have the additional 25% annual funding contribution required to match the ESF funding. However this does not impact on the Department's ability to drawdown the full ESF allocation over the life time of the programme

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether there is a mechanism for moving funding between Priority 1 and 2 of the European Social Fund Programme. (AQW 10177/11-15)

Dr Farry: Complicated mechanisms do exist to move funding between the Priority 1 and 2 of the Northern Ireland European Social Fund (NIESF) Operational Programme as set out in the Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, Article 65 (g).

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) whether any of the projects which accepted the offer made in April 2011 of financial assistance from the European Social Fund have yet to be added to the EU database; and (ii) the reason for the delay in adding the projects to the database. (AQW 10248/11-15)

Dr Farry: All successful projects have been issued with a Letter of Offer and this information has been recorded on the Systems 2007 database. Any delay in adding the projects on the database was due to delay in receiving match funding commitment certificates from the projects. This completes the full cycle for project eligibility and accountability. All projects have been recorded on the database.

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in relation the European Social Fund Programme, to detail the three projects that did not accept an offer of funding in the second round; and the total level of funding unallocated as a result. (AQW 10249/11-15)

Dr Farry: Two projects withdrew from the second round of the ESF Programme. The total value of ESF and DEL funding was £1,270,337

University of Ulster: Educational Provision

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he intends to maintain the standard of educational provision at the University of Ulster given the reduction in funding which has occurred. (AQW 10253/11-15)

Dr Farry: As a result of the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review all Higher Education Institutions have had to identify savings equivalent to 6% of their block grants over two successive years. My intention is that funding will be held constant for the final two years of the spending review period.

However, each university and college of higher education is responsible for managing its own resources within the funding available, for the standards of the awards it makes and for the quality of the education it provides to its students. Each has its own annual internal quality assurance procedures and longer term periodic reviews.

Despite the additional funding shortfall, which arose as a result of the decision on tuition fees and is being addressed through a collective Executive agreement, my Department continues to fully discharge its statutory duty to ensure that the teaching

provision it funds at the four Northern Ireland HEIs is of high quality and meets agreed standards within the HE Sector, thus ensuring that NI students and/or Institutions are not at a disadvantage to their other UK counterparts.

The Department exercises this duty by working with and contracting the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) to devise and implement quality assurance methods.

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what savings were identified by his Department's value for money exercise on the European Social Fund Programme.

(AQW 10291/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department carried out an affordability exercise on the second call for funding under the Northern Ireland European Social Fund. The second call was significantly over-subscribed in terms of both the number of applications received and the funding sought. A total of 112 applications were received under the second call compared with 86 for the first call, an increase of over 30%.

The total value of ESF funding sought amounted to almost £50 million, against a budget of £30 million over a three-year period. The Department applied a cut – off point of 134 marks in order to ensure that available funds were distributed to as many projects as possible i.e. fund the greatest number of projects, but at a reduced level that would still be feasible for the projects.

83 projects scoring 134 marks or more were selected for funding subject to a satisfactory economic appraisal as determined by DFP

This arrangement resulted in a much greater number of projects funded than would have been the case. Had all top scoring projects been allocated the full amount bid for, only 49 projects would have been supported in the second call.

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether his Department will maximise the funding available through the European Social Fund Programme and issue letters of offer to projects that were successful in their bids but which are currently unfunded, given that there are a further 2 years of the programme remaining.

(AQW 10294/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department is satisfied that the 82 Priority 1 projects currently in receipt of ESF funding over the next two years of the second call will be able to maximise and spend the available funding from the European Social Fund.

On this basis it is not the Managing Authority's intention to issue any additional letters of offer at this stage but the situation will be kept under review as part of the programme's ongoing financial management.

European Social Fund Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether, as of March 2012, there are identified savings or underspend for the end of year 1 of the second round of projects under the European Social Fund Programme; and if so, what plans are in place to redistribute this funding to ensure that there is maximum expenditure with no decommitment to the EU.

(AQW 10299/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department is satisfied that the 82 Priority 1 projects currently in receipt of ESF funding over the next two years of the second call will be able to maximise and spend the available funding from the European Social Fund without any decommitment to the EU. Whilst the second call experienced a modest under spend in the first year of operation it is anticipated that this will be corrected in the incoming years as the 82 projects settle down and spend as forecasted.

On this basis it is not the Managing Authority's intention to issue any additional letters of offer at this stage but the situation will be kept under review as part of the programme's ongoing financial management.

Health Professions Admission Test

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether an Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the decision to use the Health Professions Admission Test as a screening tool for students applying to health profession courses at the University of Ulster.

(AQW 10310/11-15)

Dr Farry: The University of Ulster has stated that the proposal to introduce the Health Professions Admissions Test was screened according to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, with no indication of an adverse impact on any Section 75 group.

Health Professions Admission Test

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the impact on students with reading difficulties of the University of Ulster's use of the Health Professions Admission Test, as a screening tool for students applying to health profession courses.

(AQW 10312/11-15)

Dr Farry: The University of Ulster is responsible for its own policies and procedures, including admissions. The University has stated that all applicants undertaking the Health Professions Admissions Test are advised that they may declare a disability prior to the test and request a reasonable adjustment to be made. This includes applicants with dyslexia or other specific learning difficulties.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Trade and Innovation Programmes

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, further to her statement on 27 March 2012, how much of the £119.8 million 'business value' from companies participating on Trade and Innovation Programmes relates to Northern Ireland business; and what percentage change does this represents from previous years.

(AQW 10187/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): In 2011 the business value achieved by Northern Ireland companies was 64% of the total, in 2009 and 2010 the Northern Ireland percentage was 29% and 27% respectively. Annual comparisons are influenced by the schedules for evaluations and monitoring visits.

InterTradeIreland: Trade and Innovation Programmes

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, further to her statement on 27 March 2012, of the 2576 companies that have participated on Intertrade Ireland Trade and Innovation Programmes, how many are based in Northern Ireland; and how does this number compare with previous years.

(AQW 10188/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Out of the number of companies engaged in North South business through InterTradeIreland activities and services, in 2011 Northern Ireland companies represented 33% of the total, compared with 26% in 2009 and 17% in 2010.

Tourism: Marketing

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what analysis her Department has carried out on any detriment that is being caused to the tourist industry by not marketing this region as part of Ireland.

(AQW 10223/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the Member to the reply I gave to AQW 10224/11-15.

Tourism: Border

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she is aware that tourists in many key markets are not aware of the existence of a border and regard Ireland as a single entity.

(AQW 10224/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Responsibility for marketing Northern Ireland overseas lies with Tourism Ireland which was established under the framework of the Belfast Agreement of Good Friday 1998.

Its main objective is to market both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland overseas and to help Northern Ireland realise its tourism potential.

Tourism Ireland works with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, which is responsible for product and enterprise development and marketing to tourism consumers within both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

There is a range of information available to tourists on Tourism Ireland's website www.discoverireland.com

Tourism: Stakeholders

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what research her Department has carried out with tourism stakeholders on the issue of this region being marketed as a destination in Ireland.

(AQW 10225/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the Member to the reply I gave to AQW 10224/11-15.

Invest NI: Land

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 7967/11-15, to detail (i) whether any of the measures, such as assignment, sub-lease or buy-back have been implemented at Invest NI sites at Station Road and Creagh, including how much land in each case; (ii) the cost to Invest NI of re-purchasing lands previously sold; and (iii) the intentions of InvestNI in relation to the re-purchased land and whether any of it is to be offered to the private sector for development.

(AQW 10246/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The tables attached at Annex A provide the information you have requested at points (i) and (ii) above in respect of both Creagh and Station Road Business Parks.

Companies seeking further information on these property interventions should, in the first instance, contact their Invest NI Client Executive.

In relation to point (iii) I can confirm that land which has been re-purchased by Invest NI, as with all Invest NI owned property, is held in support of economic development and is actively marketed to both foreign and indigenous investors through the agency's NIBusinessInfo.co.uk website.

Invest NI property is available to those companies that meet criteria including turnover and quantity of business outside Northern Ireland. The company must also have a robust, approved business case and a demonstrable immediate property need.

Annex A

Creagh Business Park

Measure	Number of Instances	Acreage	Paid by Invest NI (£)
Sub-Lease	0	0	0
Lease Assignment	0	0	0
Land Buy Back*	2	11.05	1.75m

Station Road Business Park

Measure	Number of Instances	Acreage	Paid by Invest NI (£)
Sub-Lease	0	0	0
Lease Assignment	1	2.415	0
Land Buy Back*	0	0	0

* In order for Invest NI to consider the re-purchase of undeveloped land, a company must first demonstrate, to the agency's satisfaction, that it is in acute hardship as a result of the economic downturn. Each case is appraised and is subject to a rigorous approvals process to ensure good corporate governance. The market value of all property, either purchased or sold by Invest NI, is set by DFP Land and Property Services.

Tourism: Marketing

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of local tourism operators being isolated from a larger tourism market if this region is not marketed as Ireland.

(AQW 10290/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the Member to the reply I gave to AQW 10224/11-15.

Department of the Environment

Moyle District Council

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment when he intends to extend to Moyle Council, the same support given to Coleraine Borough Council to tackle dereliction in the area, given its tourist attractions, such as the Giants Causeway and Bushmills Distillery.

(AQW 9826/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The support to Coleraine Council was provided against the backdrop of the greatly increased media and tourist interest which the hosting of the Irish Open golf championship will bring to the Portrush/Portstewart area, the cross-departmental work that had been carried out in partnership with the Council in identifying the area's worst examples of dereliction and dilapidation and the need to improve amenity experience for general tourist business and those who live locally.

I recognise the potential to extend the principle of the Portrush/Portstewart intervention to other districts suffering similar problems. However, clearly, such projects can only be tackled if the necessary funding is available. If monies become available, it would be through in-year monitoring and / or end of year unspent monies.

Tree Preservation Orders

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he is taking to improve his Department's performance in enforcing Tree Preservation Orders.

(AQW 10287/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I believe robust measures should be taken in relation to planning offences and that enforcement – particularly for serious environmental and planning issues - needs to be escalated.

I have been assessing how to achieve this and I have made it crystal clear to my staff that more robust enforcement is an essential element of a balanced planning system.

In particular reference to enforcement of Tree Preservation Orders, I have asked my officials to review existing procedures for alerting the Department outside office hours of active tree felling. In addition, commencing in this new business year, I have requested that my officials provide me with monthly reports in relation to enforcement activities associated with High Priority cases – this includes trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order. I have done this because it is rare for a Tree Preservation Order to end up in court proceedings and I wish to ensure that action is and is seen to be taken against those who breach Tree Preservation Orders.

Derelict Property

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment, given his announcement of funding to deal with derelict sites on the North Coast, whether funding will be extended to other areas for similar projects.

(AQO 1697/11-15)

Mr Attwood: This Assembly will be aware of the particular significance of this year for the Portrush/Portstewart area and of the greatly increased media and tourist interest which will be focused there, with the hosting of the Irish Open golf championship. It was against that background that I decided to provide some funding to help reduce the potentially negative impact of the area's worst eyesores.

The Assembly will also be aware of the dereliction that is reducing the enjoyment of the area for yearlong tourist visitor and residents.

I would very much like to extend the principle of my Portrush/Portstewart intervention to other districts suffering similar problems. Such projects can only be tackled if supporting funding is available. The principle of such intervention remains one in which I believe and a goal towards which I continue to work. Given the financial pressures in the department and across the public sector, funding opportunities through in year monitoring rounds offer one potential mechanism to take this initiative forward.

On the question of the recovery of monies from the owners' properties improved by this action, Coleraine Borough Council has stipulated, within the Deed of Consent it agreed with affected land and property owners, that the owners accept that a payback clause for monies above £10,000 would be part of the arrangement for works carried out to their property. Any such monies would be returned to the department.

Developers: Incomplete Developments

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of the Environment what meetings he has attended in the last month with developers on the issue of incomplete developments.

(AQO 1698/11-15)

Mr Attwood: During the last month I spoke with a senior official in NAMA in relation to this issue. As part of the Portrush/Portstewart intervention, I shall shortly call in developers to make it clear what I consider their responsibility for sites. I am looking to meet with the banks and have also tasked officials to work up how central and local government can intervene more fully and robustly in relation to dangerous dilapidated and derelict sites or properties.

Wildlife: Endangered Species

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what he is doing to protect endangered wildlife species.

(AQO 1699/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Northern Ireland Environment Agency undertakes a variety of actions to protect endangered wildlife species. These include gathering information to help identify species which require legal protection or listing as Northern Ireland priority species. A wide range of measures are used to protect these species including the declaration and management of designated sites such as Areas of Special Scientific Interest, addressing the needs of species in the regulation of activities such as planning, and engagement with the public to inform people about the conservation requirements for species and the law as it relates to wildlife.

Road Safety: Cyclists

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with the Minister for Regional Development about improving road safety for cyclists.

(AQO 1701/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have met with Minister Kennedy on two occasions. In our meeting on 17 August 2011 we discussed speed limits and the road safety strategy. On 15 December 2011 we met during the Ministerial Road Safety Group. I will meet with Minister Kennedy again when the Ministerial Road Safety Group reconvenes on 9 May 2012.

The focus of the meetings held last August and December was not specifically about cyclists, but concerned the protection of all vulnerable road users including pedestrians, children, the elderly and cyclists.

One of the results of the meetings is that my officials are co-operating with DRD officials in preparing a publication to provide advice on safe cycling.

Local Government: Power Sharing

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will ensure that a structure of governance is put in place when powers are transferred to local government under the Review of Public Administration to promote power-sharing, fairness and the protection of minorities.

(AQO 1702/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am committed to ensuring that equality of opportunity and fairness will be key features in the new councils. The Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill, that I will, subject to Executive agreement, be introducing to the Assembly in the autumn will make provision for the new governance arrangements.

These arrangements will allow councils to select, from a limited number of specified models, the method it wishes to use to allocate positions within the council, and on external bodies. It is intended that the application of each of the models will be specified in legislation.

The arrangements will also include the use of a call-in procedure where a number of councillors, who have an issue with a specific decision, would be able to join together to request that a decision is reviewed. The criteria for "call-in" will cover both issues of a procedural matter and also any issue in relation to the protection of political minorities. A further check and balance will be the introduction of qualified majority voting for specified strategic decisions.

All these arrangements are mindful of the need to ensure effective and inclusive local democracy, to protect the rights of minorities, to prevent any direct or indirect discrimination, and to promote equality of opportunity. If there is any weakness in what is being proposed, I would welcome hearing further. The opportunity to build the highest level of protection into reformed local government structures needs to be fully embraced.

Derelict Property: Portrush and Portstewart

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment whether he plans to recover the money spent on derelict properties in Portrush and Portstewart from the owners of the properties.

(AQO 1703/11-15)

Mr Attwood: This Assembly will be aware of the particular significance of this year for the Portrush/Portstewart area and of the greatly increased media and tourist interest which will be focused there, with the hosting of the Irish Open golf championship. It was against that background that I decided to provide some funding to help reduce the potentially negative impact of the area's worst eyesores.

The Assembly will also be aware of the dereliction that is reducing the enjoyment of the area for yearlong tourist visitor and residents.

I would very much like to extend the principle of my Portrush/Portstewart intervention to other districts suffering similar problems. Such projects can only be tackled if supporting funding is available. The principle of such intervention remains one in which I believe and a goal towards which I continue to work. Given the financial pressures in the department and across the public sector, funding opportunities through in year monitoring rounds offer one potential mechanism to take this initiative forward.

On the question of the recovery of monies from the owners' properties improved by this action, Coleraine Borough Council has stipulated, within the Deed of Consent it agreed with affected land and property owners, that the owners accept that a payback clause for monies above £10,000 would be part of the arrangement for works carried out to their property. Any such monies would be returned to the department.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Departmental Staff

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of staff in post at (i) grades (a) 7; (b) 6; (c) 5; (d) 3; and (e) 1; and (ii) analogous grades, in each Department, at 1 January, in each year between 2000 and 2012.

(AQW 8226/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The number of civil servants at (i) grades (a) 7; (b) 6; (c) 5; (d) 3; and (e) 1; and (ii) analogous grades, in each Department, at 1 January, in each year between 2000 and 2011 is set out in the attached tables. Validated data at 1 January 2012 is not yet available. Data in relation to the Senior Civil Service (Grades 1-5) is held as Grade 5 and above and is not further disaggregated.

NICS Staff at Grade Levels 7, 6, and 5+ by Department @ 1st Jan 2000-2011

2000

	General Service				Analogous Grades				All			
	G5+	G6	G7	Total	G5+	G6	G7	Total	G5+	G6	G7	Total
DARD	14	1	28	43	9	21	221	251	23	22	249	294
DCAL	4	0	6	10	2	1	6	9	6	1	12	19
DE	9	0	20	29	6	51	1	58	15	51	21	87
DETI	26	3	63	92	1	6	38	45	27	9	101	137
DFP	16	3	52	71	18	40	67	125	34	43	119	196
DHFETE	8	1	27	36	0	0	1	1	8	1	28	37
DHSSPS	12	2	42	56	19	28	33	80	31	30	75	136
DOE	10	1	24	35	6	13	34	53	16	14	58	88
DRD	11	2	26	39	10	17	68	95	21	19	94	134
DSD	16	2	46	64	2	7	2	11	18	9	48	75
OFMDFM	7	2	22	31	4	2	0	6	11	4	22	37
Total	133	17	356	506	77	186	471	734	210	203	827	1240

2001

	General Service				Analogous Grades				All			
	G5+	G6	G7	Total	G5+	G6	G7	Total	G5+	G6	G7	Total
DARD	15	1	30	46	8	23	220	251	23	24	250	297
DCAL	4	0	10	14	2	1	6	9	6	1	16	23
DE	9	0	21	30	5	54	1	60	14	54	22	90
DETI	25	3	63	91	2	4	39	45	27	7	102	136
DFP	18	3	51	72	20	53	73	146	38	56	124	218
DHFETE	8	1	28	37	0	1	1	2	8	2	29	39
DHSSPS	13	3	45	61	17	25	34	76	30	28	79	137
DOE	9	1	28	38	6	14	34	54	15	15	62	92
DRD	12	2	30	44	9	18	70	97	21	20	100	141
DSD	15	2	57	74	2	6	1	9	17	8	58	83
OFMDFM	15	1	35	51	4	5	2	11	19	6	37	62
Total	143	17	398	558	75	204	481	760	218	221	879	1318

2002

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DARD	15	1	30	46	8	27	226	261	23	28	256	307
DCAL	4	1	10	15	2	1	7	10	6	2	17	25
DE	10	0	22	32	5	52	1	58	15	52	23	90
DETI	25	3	69	97	2	4	37	43	27	7	106	140
DFP	19	3	52	74	15	52	72	139	34	55	124	213
DEL	10	1	27	38	0	0	2	2	10	1	29	40
DHSSPS	15	1	45	61	20	30	31	81	35	31	76	142
DOE	11	1	27	39	5	14	36	55	16	15	63	94
DRD	14	2	37	53	9	18	76	103	23	20	113	156
DSD	14	3	61	78	1	1	1	3	15	4	62	81
OFMDFM	18	0	38	56	6	3	3	12	24	3	41	68
Total	155	16	418	589	73	202	492	767	228	218	910	1356

2003

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DARD	16	1	33	50	4	25	227	256	20	26	260	306
DCAL	4	2	15	21	2	0	6	8	6	2	21	29
DE	9	0	23	32	5	53	2	60	14	53	25	92
DETI	12	2	28	42	1	4	21	26	13	6	49	68
DFP	22	3	63	88	15	51	77	143	37	54	140	231
DEL	10	1	29	40	0	0	3	3	10	1	32	43
DHSSPS	13	2	51	66	20	34	34	88	33	36	85	154
DOE	10	2	34	46	6	13	47	66	16	15	81	112
DRD	15	2	39	56	8	18	78	104	23	20	117	160
DSD	16	4	66	86	1	1	1	3	17	5	67	89
OFMDFM	24	1	41	66	6	3	3	12	30	4	44	78
Total	151	20	422	593	68	202	499	769	219	222	921	1362

2004

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DARD	19	3	40	62	4	23	227	254	23	26	267	316
DCAL	5	1	19	25	2	1	7	10	7	2	26	35
DE	9	0	27	36	5	57	2	64	14	57	29	100
DETI	10	2	28	40	1	4	20	25	11	6	48	65
DFP	25	3	67	95	13	49	77	139	38	52	144	234

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DEL	10	1	32	43	0	1	2	3	10	2	34	46
DHSSPS	18	2	52	72	17	32	38	87	35	34	90	159
DOE	12	3	35	50	5	15	50	70	17	18	85	120
DRD	19	2	37	58	4	20	77	101	23	22	114	159
DSD	18	5	65	88	0	0	3	3	18	5	68	91
OFMDFM	24	2	40	66	6	2	3	11	30	4	43	77
Total	169	24	442	635	57	204	506	767	226	228	948	1402

2005

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DARD	19	3	42	64	4	21	257	282	23	24	299	346
DCAL	5	1	21	27	2	1	7	10	7	2	28	37
DE	10	0	27	37	5	63	2	70	15	63	29	107
DETI	11	1	28	40	1	3	22	26	12	4	50	66
DFP	31	12	76	119	11	48	76	135	42	60	152	254
DEL	9	1	33	43	0	0	4	4	9	1	37	47
DHSSPS	18	3	52	73	19	29	37	85	37	32	89	158
DOE	14	4	49	67	4	17	62	83	18	21	111	150
DRD	20	2	40	62	4	19	78	101	24	21	118	163
DSD	20	7	74	101	0	0	3	3	20	7	77	104
OFMDFM	24	1	49	74	5	3	2	10	29	4	51	84
Total	181	35	491	707	55	204	550	809	236	239	1041	1516

2006

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DARD	18	2	42	62	3	21	264	288	21	23	306	350
DCAL	5	1	18	24	1	1	7	9	6	2	25	33
DE	10	0	28	38	5	62	2	69	15	62	30	107
DETI	9	1	30	40	1	4	24	29	10	5	54	69
DFP	33	18	90	141	12	44	116	172	45	62	206	313
DEL	8	3	35	46	0	1	2	3	8	4	37	49
DHSSPS	17	3	57	77	18	27	39	84	35	30	96	161
DOE	13	4	49	66	3	15	71	89	16	19	120	155
DRD	20	11	52	83	4	18	51	73	24	29	103	156
DSD	20	8	76	104	0	0	3	3	20	8	79	107
OFMDFM	22	0	34	56	5	2	4	11	27	2	38	67

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
Total	175	51	511	737	52	195	583	830	227	246	1094	1567

2007

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DARD	17	2	40	59	2	8	206	216	19	10	246	275
DCAL	5	1	18	24	2	0	8	10	7	1	26	34
DE	12	1	30	43	5	58	3	66	17	59	33	109
DETI	9	1	28	38	1	6	24	31	10	7	52	69
DFP	36	19	92	147	11	44	122	177	47	63	214	324
DEL	10	4	35	49	0	2	3	5	10	6	38	54
DHSSPS	19	2	55	76	15	26	39	80	34	28	94	156
DOE	14	5	46	65	3	15	75	93	17	20	121	158
DRD	20	17	49	86	5	16	39	60	25	33	88	146
DSD	17	8	74	99	0	0	3	3	17	8	77	102
OFMDFM	20	2	35	57	5	1	8	14	25	3	43	71
Total	179	62	502	743	49	176	530	755	228	238	1032	1498

2008

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DARD	17	3	42	62	3	7	201	211	20	10	243	273
DCAL	4	2	17	23	2	0	11	13	6	2	28	36
DE	13	1	32	46	5	59	4	68	18	60	36	114
DETI	8	1	29	38	1	5	20	26	9	6	49	64
DFP	34	17	96	147	12	46	121	179	46	63	217	326
DEL	11	4	37	52	0	1	3	4	11	5	40	56
DHSSPS	17	2	56	75	13	25	34	72	30	27	90	147
DOE	12	6	50	68	4	15	79	98	16	21	129	166
DRD	10	6	33	49	3	9	44	56	13	15	77	105
DSD	16	9	86	111	1	0	3	4	17	9	89	115
OFMDFM	21	2	37	60	5	1	9	15	26	3	46	75
Total	163	53	515	731	49	168	529	746	212	221	1044	1477

2009

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DARD	17	3	47	67	2	14	188	204	19	17	235	271

	General Service				Analogous Grades				All			
	G5+	G6	G7	Total	G5+	G6	G7	Total	G5+	G6	G7	Total
DCAL	6	1	17	24	1	0	7	8	7	1	24	32
DE	12	3	36	51	4	64	3	71	16	67	39	122
DETI	9	1	33	43	2	4	21	27	11	5	54	70
DFP	37	25	101	163	11	53	151	215	48	78	252	378
DEL	11	3	46	60	0	2	4	6	11	5	50	66
DHSSPS	17	6	57	80	13	16	41	70	30	22	98	150
DOE	11	10	57	78	4	18	74	96	15	28	131	174
DRD	13	5	39	57	4	9	47	60	17	14	86	117
DSD	19	11	93	123	0	1	4	5	19	12	97	128
OFMDFM	25	2	37	64	4	1	9	14	29	3	46	78
Total	177	70	563	810	45	182	549	776	222	252	1112	1586

2010

	General Service				Analogous Grades				All			
	G5+	G6	G7	Total	G5+	G6	G7	Total	G5+	G6	G7	Total
DARD	18	3	48	69	3	14	182	199	21	17	230	268
DCAL	5	0	16	21	1	0	6	7	6	0	22	28
DE	14	3	38	55	5	64	2	71	19	67	40	126
DETI	8	2	32	42	1	3	16	20	9	5	48	62
DFP	34	17	93	144	10	53	140	203	44	70	233	347
DEL	11	3	45	59	0	1	3	4	11	4	48	63
DHSSPS	12	2	47	61	14	20	52	86	26	22	99	147
DOE	10	10	50	70	2	16	80	98	12	26	130	168
DRD	14	4	30	48	3	8	46	57	17	12	76	105
DSD	18	11	91	120	0	0	4	4	18	11	95	124
OFMDFM	25	3	39	67	4	1	9	14	29	4	48	81
Total	169	58	529	756	43	180	540	763	212	238	1069	1519

2011

	General Service				Analogous Grades				All			
	G5+	G6	G7	Total	G5+	G6	G7	Total	G5+	G6	G7	Total
DARD	18	4	46	68	3	12	192	207	21	16	238	275
DCAL	5	0	14	19	1	0	8	9	6	0	22	28
DE	13	3	35	51	5	59	2	66	18	62	37	117
DETI	10	3	29	42	1	3	15	19	11	6	44	61
DFP	28	15	92	135	13	76	143	232	41	91	235	367
DEL	12	4	45	61	0	2	5	7	12	6	50	68
DHSSPS	12	1	46	59	12	14	47	73	24	15	93	132

	General Service			Total	Analogous Grades			Total	All			Total
	G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7		G5+	G6	G7	
DOE	14	7	49	70	3	14	70	87	17	21	119	157
DRD	14	4	29	47	2	9	42	53	16	13	71	100
DSD	16	13	80	109	0	0	5	5	16	13	85	114
OFMDFM	20	3	36	59	7	2	11	20	27	5	47	79
DOJ	23	8	69	100	9	5	57	71	32	13	126	171
PPS	0	0	3	3	11	0	56	67	11	0	59	70
Total	185	65	573	823	67	196	653	916	252	261	1226	1739

Figures for 2011 include Department of Justice (DOJ) and Public Prosecution Service (PPS)

Notes

Data sourced from HRMS, HRConnect & additional DOJ databases.

Staff numbers are provided on a Headcount basis.

Excludes Casual Staff.

Data based on Staff in Post at 1st Jan each year.

The table found in Annex 1 (page 31) of the publication 'Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service' (link below) details status changes resulting in movement of staff into or out of the NICS as well as the years in which these changes occurred, and the approximate number of staff involved.

http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/NICS_Equality_Stats_2011.html

Ministerial Cars and Drivers

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of departmental staff who have availed of ministerial cars and drivers in each of the last three years; (ii) the cost of providing the service; and (iii) whether the benefit derived is subject to income tax.

(AQW 10295/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Responsibility for Ministerial transport was transferred to departments with effect from 1 April 2011. It was agreed that when not needed for Ministerial purposes, cars would be available for other Departmental use including the transport of officials. Driver log sheets are maintained but not in a format which would enable use by departmental officials to be identified or any costs incurred.

Domestic Rates: Payments by Credit or Debit Card

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the costs of processing payments for domestic rates by credit or debit card; (ii) how much a customer is charged per transaction; and (iii) for what purposes any profit is used.

(AQW 10413/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The LPS staff costs for processing a card payment is £1.30. This is an approximate figure based on the average time taken to process a card payment.

Customers are charged 2% of the transaction amount for credit card transactions. There are no customer charges for other types of card payments.

There is no profit made by Land & Property Services from the charge.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Accident and Emergency Departments: Antrim Area Hospital and Mater Hospital

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) why the Accident and Emergency Departments at the Antrim Area Hospital and the Mater Hospital, Belfast, have the highest proportion of patients who are not treated, discharged or admitted within four hours; (ii) whether this has changed in the last 12 months; and (iii) what action is being taken to improve the service.

(AQW 10199/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I am aware that the Antrim Area and Mater hospitals had the highest proportion of patients who were not treated, discharged or admitted within 4 hours in February 2012. However this position has varied month by month in the past 12 months.

Information on emergency care waiting times is collected on a monthly basis, and is available to view or download from the link below:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/emergency_care-3/emergency_care-monthly_waiting_times.htm

Provisional information for February 2012 indicates that 58.3% of attendances at Antrim Area and 57.5% of attendances at the Mater were treated and discharged or admitted within 4 hours of their arrival, compared with 54.2% and 58.5% in February 2011 respectively.

I find it unacceptable that patients have to wait longer than is necessary and recently asked the HSC Board to provide a robust plan of immediate actions to secure improvement in Emergency Departments. The HSC Board, working with the Public Health Agency, has established an Improvement Action Group, as part of a 3 month programme to secure a step-change improvement in 12-hour and 4-hour performance and to the patient experience. In addition, in relation to Antrim Area hospital Mary Hinds, a Director in the Public Health Agency, has been providing support and assistance to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust over a six week period which ended recently. Mrs Hinds is due to present her report in the near future.

Eating Disorders: Patients Transferred to England for Treatment

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been transferred to England for treatment associated with eating disorders in each of the last three years.

(AQW 10200/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below shows the number of patients transferred to England for treatment associated with eating disorders in each of the last three years.

Year	Number of patients transferred
2009/10	19
2010/11	16
2011/12	4

Source: HSC Board

Patients Association Care Campaign

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the South and South Eastern Health and Social Care Trusts have not signed up to the Patients Association Care Campaign.

(AQW 10211/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern HSC Trust has, recently signed up to this campaign and the Southern HSC Trust advises that they will be signing up in the near future.

The key principles within this campaign are already being implemented throughout the Health and Social Care system in Northern Ireland through existing Departmental policies.

Abuse of Adults in Nursing Homes

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the on-going review of operational policies and procedures in relation to tackling adult abuse in nursing homes; and for an estimate of the timescale for the introduction of relevant legislation.

(AQW 10212/11-15)

Mr Poots: The prevention of adult abuse and ensuring an effective response whenever abuse occurs, is a key priority for my department. Regional Adult Protection Policies and Procedures are currently being reviewed under the auspices of the Northern Ireland Adult Safeguarding Partnership. The updated policies and procedures are intended to further improve the response of all agencies and establishments to concerns about adult abuse wherever it arises, including in nursing homes.

In parallel, my officials are considering the recommendations of the recent Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission report, In Defence of Dignity – The Human Rights of Older People in Nursing Homes, with a view to identifying what changes, if any, are needed in relation to the current regulatory and inspection framework for nursing homes. Also, my department, jointly with the Department of Justice, is leading on the development of an overarching adult safeguarding policy framework. It is intended to consult publicly on the framework by the end of this year. The policy framework will seek to ensure that effective preventative and protective mechanisms are established in relation to adult abuse. In the course of consulting, we will seek views on a range of legislative proposals to underpin the policy framework. Subject to the outcome of consultation on the proposals, it is likely to be 2014 at the earliest before a Bill could be introduced in the NI Assembly.

Departmental Funding

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what has been the increase in the total level of funding for his Department between 2007 and 2012.

(AQW 10254/11-15)

Mr Poots: The total funding (current and capital) for my Department increased from £4,068.2m in 2007/08 to £4,614.1m in 2011/12.

Quality 2020 Strategy

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the publication of the Quality 2020 Strategy, what consideration he has given to including pain management in the proposed national outcome measures for health services.

(AQW 10323/11-15)

Mr Poots: An implementation plan is nearing completion for the Quality 2020 Strategy launched by me last November. I would expect this to be published before June of this year.

One of the 5 work-streams in this plan will concentrate on improving quality outcome measurement and the reporting on safety, effectiveness and the patient/ client experience in health and social care services. While some detailed elements of individual initiatives in the plan have yet to be finalised, I will ensure that the honourable Member's suggestion will be passed to the relevant project team in due course.

Accident and Emergency Admissions as a Result of the Effects of Alcohol

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 9836/11-15, for his assessment of the need for his Department to have access to the information to allow it to measure the extent of substance abuse among young people.

(AQW 10385/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department uses a range of information and data sources to help assess the extent of substance misuse among those aged under 18. This includes:

- the number of under 18s receiving treatment for substance misuse (as reported by the Drug Misuse Database: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/dmd_bulletin_2010-11.pdf and the Census of Drug and Alcohol Treatment Services in Northern Ireland: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/census_bulletin_-_1_march_2010.pdf);
- prevalence rate for drug misuse among 15-24 year olds (as reported by the Drug Use in Ireland and Northern Ireland Prevalence Survey: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/bulletin_1_-_ni_prevalence_rates.pdf);
- information on alcohol and drug use from the Young Persons Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (<http://www.csu.nisra.gov.uk/YPBAS%202010%20Headline%20bulletin.pdf>);
- the number of alcohol and drug related admissions to HSC Hospitals in Northern Ireland (which can be broken down by age and gender); and
- the number of alcohol and drug related deaths (which can be broken down by age and gender).

Unfortunately information on the number of people under the age of 18 who have attended Accident and Emergency Departments as a result of the effects of alcohol or drug is not currently available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. While this information would be useful, it would only be one part of the overall picture used to assess the extent of substance misuse among young people.

Pharmacies: Annual Rural Payment

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 10268/11-15, to detail the criteria the 73 community pharmacies had to meet to qualify for funding.

(AQW 10388/11-15)

Mr Poots: As I stated in my answer to AQW 10268/11-15, 73 pharmacies have now received the rural support payment in 2011/12. To be eligible for payment a pharmacy had to be open six days a week for a minimum of thirty hours, dispense less than the average dispensing volume of 5666 items per month and be further than 1km from the next nearest pharmacy.

Department of Justice

Prison Reform

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Justice, in light of his statement on Prison Reform on 26 March 2012 and his comments relating to full-body searches, when he expects licensing to be agreed on the application for Holme House Prison, Yorkshire. **(AQW 10180/11-15)**

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Initial advice was that the outcome of the Holme House application may take some months. I am however exploring options as to whether an application process can be expedited.

Marian Price: Costs Associated with Prison Accommodation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to provide (i) the total; and (ii) a breakdown of the costs associated with accommodating Marian Price in Maghaberry Prison and Hydebank Wood Prison. **(AQW 10231/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The total cost of accommodating Marian Price in Maghaberry Prison between 13 May 2011 and 16 February 2012 was £192,546.00. A breakdown of the costs is shown in Table A below:

Table A

Staffing costs	£189,247.00
Refurbishment costs	£ 3,299.00
Total	£192,546.00

The total cost of accommodating Ms Price in Hydebank Wood from 17 February 2012 to date, is £10,275.83. A breakdown of the costs is shown in Table B below:

Table B

Staffing costs	£5,462.18
Refurbishment costs	£4,813.65
Total	£10,275.83

Legal Aid: Top 10 Earning Counsel

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the figures on the top ten legal aid earning counsel, how many (i) defendants; and (ii) cases these figures represent for each company over the relevant payment period. **(AQW 10282/11-15)**

Mr Ford: It is not possible to answer the question in the format requested. The Legal Services Commission (the Commission) does not hold records at case or defendant level and cannot readily provide details of the number of cases or defendants receiving legal aid. Providing information on the number of cases or defendants represented by counsel during this period would require a manual trawl of the Commission's records and information held by the Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The table below provides details of the number of legal aid certificates issued in respect of both criminal and civil proceedings, which were paid directly to counsel in 2010/11.

	Number of certificates paid
Miss E M McDermott	49
Mr J A Gallagher	30
Mr D Hopley	14
Mr P Magee	34
Mr A D Harvey	22
Mr J Orr	14
Mr C MacCreanor	81

	Number of certificates paid
Mr D P Fee	9
Mr W G Berry	58
Mr K A Mallon	74

Legal Aid: Top Four Earning Companies

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the figures of the top four legal aid earning companies, how many (i) defendants; and (ii) cases do these figures represent for each company over the relevant payment period.

(AQW 10283/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is not possible to answer the question in the format requested. The Legal Services Commission (the Commission) does not hold records at case or defendant level and cannot readily provide details of the number of cases or defendants receiving legal aid. Providing information on the number of cases or defendants represented by the top four legal aid earning companies during this period would require a manual trawl of the Commission's records and information held by the Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The table below provides details of the number of legal aid certificates issued in respect of both criminal and civil proceedings, which were paid in 2010/11.

	Number of certificates paid
Kevin Winters & Co	4,998
McKenna Sweeney McKeown	3,190
Madden & Finucane	2,443
Trevor Smyth & Co	2,831

Marian Price: Defence Costs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how much has been paid in legal aid for defence costs for Marian Price in relation to her (i) cases currently in the justice system; and (ii) court applications relating to her custody, broken down by (a) solicitor; and (b) counsel.

(AQW 10284/11-15)

Mr Ford: Civil Legal Aid Scheme

Marian Price received civil legal aid totalling £1,636.52 paid to her in the name of Mrs Marion McGlinchey in respect of Judicial Review proceedings to challenge the decision of the Secretary of State to revoke her release from prison on licence. Funding was limited to the necessary steps to prepare and lodge an application for leave with Counsel to make the application before the court.

Legal Aid Advice and Assistance Scheme

Under the 'Green Form Scheme' legal aid has been paid to Ms Price's legal representatives on nine claims to date. Those claims are detailed in the table below.

Advice Category	Solicitor Profit Costs	Disbursement	VAT	Total
PACE	£771.26	£25.70	£134.97	£931.93
PACE	£136.17	£3.57	£23.83	£163.57
PACE	£897.90	£47.13	£179.58	£1,124.61
Complaint/PSNI	£64.11	-	£12.82	£76.93
Criminal charge	£660.70	£12.50	£132.14	£805.34
Bail	£72.08	-	£14.42	£86.50
Judicial Review	£88.00	-	£17.60	£105.60
Judicial Review	£159.55	£25.00	£31.91	£216.46
Life Sentence Review	£375.79	£34.20	£75.16	£485.15

Advice Category	Solicitor Profit Costs	Disbursement	VAT	Total
			Total	£3,996.09

Criminal Legal Aid Scheme

From 2010 to present, four criminal legal aid certificates have been issued by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service for the above defendant.

Of these four certificates, three are to defend proceedings in the Magistrates' Court and one is to defend proceedings in the Crown Court.

Only one claim for payment has been received. This is a report from a solicitor for Magistrates' Court proceedings and the fees have not yet been determined.

Maghaberry Prison: Fire

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 9474/11-15 (i) how a prisoner in the Care and Supervision Unit was in a position to attempt to start a fire; (ii) what article was used to ignite the fire; (iii) whether the prisoner was entitled to be in possession of this article; and (iv) whether the prisoner has been charged with a criminal offence following this incident.

(AQW 10288/11-15)

Mr Ford: The prisoner in question was a smoker and as such was given permission to retain a cigarette lighter while residing in the Care and Supervision Unit (CSU). He then attempted to set fire to his bedding using the lighter.

It is not unusual for prisoners to be permitted to retain cigarette lighters while in the CSU. A needs and risk assessment is carried out by CSU staff in the first instance and consideration is given to allowing them to retain cigarette lighters. The prisoner in this case had been permitted to retain a cigarette lighter which was subsequently removed.

The incident was referred to the PSNI at that time and the prisoner was interviewed. The case is ongoing.

Prison Service: Staffing

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Justice what plans the Prison Service has in place to cover the period between the 151 staff leaving in March 2012 and the newly recruited staff taking up their posts.

(AQW 10319/11-15)

Mr Ford: The new Target Operating Model, which was launched on 1 April 2012, reduces the Prison Service staffing requirement by 200 and in this context 151 staff left NIPS on 31 March as a result of the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme. As the Prison Service implements the new Target Operating Model over the next six months, and as we work towards the recruitment of Custody Officers, work will be reprioritised and the use of overtime deployed if required.

Department for Regional Development

Westminster Justice Committee: Review of Freedom of Information Act

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his Department's position in relation to the submission made by the Civil Service to the Westminster Justice Committee's review of the Freedom of Information Act.

(AQW 10041/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department contributed input to OFMDFM, which co-ordinated material from all Departments and made the response to the review.

My officials noted that:

- 2011 represented a typical year for DRD. Over that year DRD received 370 requests of which 10 were returned for Internal Review and only 3 were appealed to the Information Commissioner. The vast majority of requests were answered to the satisfaction of the recipient and within the timeframe required by the Act. This indicates that the public is generally satisfied with DRD's performance and that the Act is working for them.
- The strengths of the FoI Act appear to be:
- FOI helps focus the Department's need to pro-actively publish as guided by the ICO Publication Scheme.
- It promotes better record keeping and record management.
- It promotes accountability and openness.

There are issues such as:

- The Act overlaps with the operation of the Environmental Information Regulations which causes confusion for public authorities and the public alike.

- The Act is often used by individuals to make repeated requests which are a considerable expense to public funds. We have experience of individual requestors who have literally made hundreds of requests on a wide variety of subjects which have not been motivated by need.
- There are also those who make wide-ranging requests in the hope of finding something of interest but, again, processing and considering these has to be done at a cost to the tax-payer.
- FOI is resource intensive and has to be delivered regardless of resources available, which often leads to considerable diversion of resources from other front-line activities.
- Some of these issues could be addressed by the introduction of a modest registration fee – say £25 or £50 – similar to the practice other jurisdictions. This should not prove to be a barrier for those with a real need to know.

A26: Dualling between Glarryford and Coleraine

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the preparatory work for the dualling of the A26 between Glarryford and Coleraine.

(AQW 10181/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Draft Orders and Environmental Statement for the proposed A26 Glarryford to A44 Drones Road junction scheme were published on 20 March 2012. An exhibition presenting the scheme proposals was held in the Tullyglass House Hotel, Ballymena on the 27 and 28 March 2012.

Should anyone wish to express an opinion to Roads Service regarding the Environmental Statement or draft Orders, they may do so by 11 May 2012. Depending on the type and number of comments received, I will make a decision on whether or not a Public Inquiry for the scheme will be held later in the year.

Water Charges: Non-Domestic Customers

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the impact on small and medium sized businesses of the above-inflation increase in water charges for non-domestic customers; and what consideration has been given to a relief scheme to help businesses which might struggle with these bills.

(AQW 10193/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that for the 2012/13 year the combined water and sewerage bill will increase by 6.9% for measured customers and 8.4% for unmeasured customers. However, taking account of inflation, water charges decreased in real terms while sewerage charges were increased above the rate of inflation.

The increases were unavoidable due to the effects of inflation and the substantial cost of necessary improvements to the water and sewerage infrastructure to meet demanding regulatory standards and improve the quality of services provided. The charges were agreed with the Utility Regulator in order that customers pay the fairest rate for the water and sewerage services they receive. However, in recognition of the difficult economic climate NIW gained agreement to limit any tariff increases as much as possible. A small to medium size shop or hairdressing salon will see an increase of up to 50p per week. An average sized farm will see an increase of up to 20p per week, while a medium to large factory or office will see an increase of up to £4 per week.

Customers experiencing payment difficulties can contact NIW to discuss alternative arrangements such as smaller or more frequent payments and it will ensure that every effort is made to work with customers to secure a reasonable payment arrangement. NIW also offers a number of reliefs and allowances from which the vast majority of business customers currently benefit.

NI Water: Infractions

Mr Ó hÓisín asked the Minister for Regional Development what infractions NI Water has incurred for non-compliance with (i) waste water standards; and (ii) drinking water quality directives, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 10206/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Infraction proceedings are the process by which the European Commission takes an EU member state to the European Court of Justice for breach of its obligations under EU Treaties. This can arise in relation to implementation or transposition of European directives. In the case of non-compliance in Northern Ireland, the member state is the United Kingdom.

My Department has been involved in three infraction cases relating to the implementation and enforcement of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (91/271/EEC) in Northern Ireland in the past five years.

One case (EC2005/4479) centred on Water Service benefiting from Crown Immunity and therefore not being subject to effective regulatory and enforcement mechanisms to secure compliance with EU legislation. On 1 April 2007 Northern Ireland Water, a government owned company, was created. The company did not benefit from Crown Immunity status and is subject to full environmental regulation and enforcement. Once this change in status was communicated to the European Commission the case was closed.

Two cases (EC 2004/2036 & EC 2003/2008) related to non-compliance with EU waste water treatment requirements. Both these procedures involved the failure of waste water treatment works to meet appropriate waste water standards. I can confirm that these works are now considered compliant and the Northern Ireland elements of these cases have been closed.

My Department has been involved in one infraction case (EC 2006/2005) relating to the Drinking Water Directive (98/83/EC) in the past five years. This related to failure to adequately transpose the requirements of the Directive. Appropriate amendments were made to the relevant legislation and the case is now closed.

Reservoirs: Capacity

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development, as of March 2012, what was the percentage capacity of reservoirs; and whether any restrictions will be put in place for Summer 2012.

(AQW 10256/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that around 51% of water supplied comes from impounding reservoirs with the remainder provided from natural loughs (mainly Lough Neagh) and rivers. Overall storage in impounding reservoirs and lakes (excluding Lough Neagh) at the end of March 2012 was in a satisfactory position of almost 90% of total capacity.

However, water is a finite resource and NIW will continue to encourage the public to reduce the demand for water and avoid wastage. Water levels in impounding reservoirs are monitored on a regular basis and NIW will take all reasonable steps to maximise water storage and enhance the security of supply.

Subject to normal weather conditions and water continuing to be used wisely, NIW has no plans to introduce water restrictions this Summer, at this point in time.

Roads Service: Winter Costs

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how much was spent by Roads Service on (i) staff overtime; and (ii) grit for the (a) winter 2009/10; (b) winter 2010/11; and (c) winter 2011/12 periods.

(AQW 10305/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service does not maintain an analysis of its winter service costs for non-industrial staff, however, details of winter service costs for industrial staff are set out in the table below:

Year	Industrial Overtime (£k)	Industrial Normal Hours (£k)	Hired Drivers (£k)
2009/10	£425	£345	£388
2010/11	£462	£539	£655
2011/12	£217	£194	£236

I have assumed that the Member's request relates to rock salt, the primary material used by Roads Service for its winter service programme, rather than grit. The purchase of road salt by Roads Service is subject to tender and I am not able to disclose the cost of purchase for reasons of commercial sensitivity and in the interests of securing best value for money in future negotiations. However, details of the volume of rock salt used during the last three winter seasons are set out in the table below:

Winter Season	Rock salt Used (tonnes)
2009/10	100,632
2010/11	110,351
2011/12 to 1 April 2012	47,000

A5 and A8 Road Schemes

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will publish the data on which he based his claim of 14 February 2012, that the A5 and A8 road schemes have the potential to create at least 2,500 new jobs; and for a breakdown of (i) the number of jobs relating to each scheme; and (ii) the different grades and specifications of the workers involved.

(AQW 10306/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that the press statement said there was the potential to create an estimated figure of 2,500 construction sector jobs. This was derived from experience of other recent major projects and consultation within the Industry, including the Construction Employers Federation.

A breakdown of jobs by project, grade or specification is not available.

Department for Social Development

House Repossessions: North Down Area

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in the North Down area have been repossessed in each of the last four years.

(AQW 10163/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): My Department does not hold the information requested. However, the Department of Justice has provided me with the following information.

Possession orders made in respect to mortgages 2008-2011 – North Down constituency

	2008	2009	2010	2011[1]
North Down	69	87	86	77

[1] All 2011 figures are provisional

Notes

Not all writs and originating summonses lead to eviction or re/possession.

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.

Former British Army Bases: Regeneration and Development

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development what funding is available for the regeneration and development of former British army bases, such as Ballyhornan, Co Down.

(AQW 10204/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The following table details the Department for Social Development funding which is available for the regeneration and development of former British army bases:

Year	Location	Amount of funding	Purpose of funding
2012/13	Fort George	£3.15 million	Decontamination
	Girdwood	£500k	Strategic Enabling Infrastructure
	Forkhill Military Base	£33.5k (DSD element)	DSD will cover 50% of the consultancy costs for the planning application but DARD will be the main funder of capital works
2013/14	Fort George	£2 million	Decontamination / Infrastructure works
	Girdwood	£500k	Strategic Enabling Infrastructure
2014/15	Fort George	£2 million	Infrastructure works

Additionally Special EU Programmes Body funding of £9.6m has been provisionally granted to Belfast City Council for the development of a Community Hub on the Girdwood site, supported by DSD.

In respect of Ballyhoran the Department for Social Development funded a small social housing scheme to address the housing need. Responsibility for all other matters at this site, fall outside the remit of this Department. However, housing need for Ballyhornan area will be met through 4 units proposed for the nearby Ringawaddy area.

Ministerial Cars and Drivers

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of departmental staff who have availed of ministerial cars and drivers in each of the last three years; (ii) the cost of providing the service; and (iii) whether the benefit derived is subject to income tax.

(AQW 10297/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Responsibility for Ministerial transport was transferred to departments with effect from 1 April 2011. It was agreed that when not needed for Ministerial purposes, cars would be available for other Departmental use including the transport of officials. Driver log sheets are maintained but not in a format which would enable use by departmental officials to be identified. No additional cost is incurred for non –Ministerial use of the car.

Mary Portas: Review of UK High Streets

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Social Development which recommendations from Mary Portas' review of UK high streets he is planning to implement and when.

(AQW 10309/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have established a taskforce of senior officials to respond to the difficult trading challenges facing Northern Ireland's High Streets. The taskforce will review the support which the Department already provides to regenerate town centres to see whether this might be further strengthened in light of the recommended actions identified by Mary Portas in her recent report to the UK Coalition Government ('The Portas Review: An independent review into the future of our high streets'), and also reflect Northern Ireland's particular trading circumstances. The taskforce will submit its report to me in June 2012 and I intend to publish my Department's response following consultation with my Executive colleagues.

Town Centre Business Rates: Revaluation

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions he has had with the Minister of Finance and Personnel in relation to a revaluation of town centre business rates.

(AQW 10311/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As a member of the Executive I considered and agreed proposals put forward by the Minister of Finance and Personnel for a revaluation of non-domestic property in 2015.

Mary Portas: Review of UK High Streets

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Social Development what plans he has to replicate the actions of the UK Government which has accepted the main recommendations from Mary Portas' review of UK high streets.

(AQW 10313/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Further to my reply to AQW 10309/11-15 the taskforce of senior officials will also consider the UK Coalition Government's response to Mary Portas' review published on 30 March 2012. I wish to ensure that the work of the taskforce not only takes account of proposed initiatives for high streets in England but also reflects Northern Ireland's particular trading circumstances. The taskforce will therefore hold a series of local meetings with traders across Northern Ireland before submitting its report to me in June 2012.

Public Realm Scheme: Phase Two

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will consider including the remaining main commercial streets in Dungannon in the Phase Two enhancement of the Public Realm Scheme.

(AQW 10318/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Dungannon Public Realm Scheme was developed through extensive consultation with Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council, Dungannon Regeneration Partnership and the local community. This process identified the main commercial streets in Dungannon and the preferred phasing of the Public Realm scheme. It was decided that the scheme should be delivered in two phases. Phase 1 of the scheme will include Castle Hill Street, Market Square, Irish Street and Church Street. The tender documents for the construction of Phase 1 have been prepared and will issue shortly. It is proposed that Phase 2 of the Public Realm will include Upper and Lower Scotch Street, Georges Street, William Street, Anne Street, Thomas Street and Perry Street.

Chronic Pain: Absenteeism

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development (i) for his assessment of the correlation between chronic pain and absenteeism from employment; and (ii) for an estimate of how many working days per annum are lost within his Department as a result of chronic pain.

(AQW 10322/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Sickness absence in the NICS, including the Department for Social Development, is recorded using codes from the Sickness Absence Recording Tool (SART). Chronic pain may be a symptom of many conditions and is not recognised as a separate category within SART, therefore it is not possible to comment on any possible correlation between chronic pain and absenteeism from employment in the NICS. For that reason it is also impossible to estimate the number of working days per annum lost within my Department as a result of chronic pain.

Social Housing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the revenue and capital budgets for social housing, including new builds and maintenance in each year of the 2011-15 budget period; and (ii) the current number of Housing Executive houses that require multi-element improvements, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 10328/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Table 1 below details the Housing Executive's revenue and capital budgets for the Social Housing Development Programme and maintenance in each of the 2011-15 budget periods.

	2011/12 (£m)	2012/13 (£m)	2013/14 (£m)	2014/15 (£m)
Capital	143.1 (SHDP)	93.1 (SHDP)	83.9 (SHDP)	91.4 (SHDP)
Revenue	137.9 (Maint)	171.1 (Maint)	190.0 (Maint)	186.9 (Maint)

It should be noted that a 5% rental income uplift has been assumed in years 2013/14 and 2014/15.

The information for part (ii) of the question is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not collate information by parliamentary constituency. The Housing Executive has identified that 5,676 homes require Multi Element Improvement work and these homes are listed below. MEI work can only be funded through capital budget.

District	Properties
East Belfast	119
North Belfast	202
Shankill	36
South Belfast	767
West Belfast	194
Antrim	323
Ballymena	747
Carrickfergus	161
Coleraine	355
Larne	313
Newtownabbey 1	403
Newtownabbey 2	115
Armagh	225
Banbridge	106
Dungannon	62
Lurgan/Brownlow	131
Newry	282
Portadown	62
Bangor	224
Castlereagh	67
Lisburn	131
Newtownards	229
Cookstown	34
Limavady	193
Magherafelt	36
Omagh	35
Strabane	10
Waterloo Place	114

District	Properties
Total	5,676

Central Investment Fund for Charities

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development by how much the fund managers for the Central Investment Fund for Charities exceeded the agreed benchmark for investment returns over the past five years.

(AQO 1711/11-15)

Mr McCausland: For the five years to December 2011 the Fund returned an annualised total return of 2.9% against the benchmark return of 3.8%.

- The Fund has had an income bias in terms of its investment objective and this was reaffirmed through the introduction of the principle aim of achieving an income equivalent to a 20% premium to the Benchmark and thereafter long term capital growth. This objective is being achieved.
- Over different time periods income stocks have generated a lower return when compared to growth stocks - for example over the five years to 31 December 2011, the FTSE All Share Index (the broadly based UK equity index) generated an annualised return of 1.2%. Over the same period, the FTSE 350 High Yield Index generated an annualised return of -1.3%. With a focus on income, the Fund Manager is required to invest in higher yielding shares which, as these figures suggest, have underperformed lower yielding (growth orientated) companies.

Welfare Reform

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Social Development what opportunities exist to mitigate the negative impacts of Welfare Reform.
(AQO 1713/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I welcome and recognise the need for many aspects of the reform of our Welfare System. Whilst there are many positive improvements, equally I accept that we need to protect the vulnerable in our society from some of the less welcome proposals from the Coalition Government.

I and my Executive colleagues on the Executive Sub-Committee have, over the last number of months, been exploring areas where we believe flexibilities could exist within the confines of parity.

This is important work but is still at an early stage.

We are focused on identifying areas where we can introduce changes within the reforms which will help mitigate any negative impacts to ensure that those who are most vulnerable to the changes will be protected.

I am open to suggestions on possible flexibilities within parity for the Executive Sub-Committee to consider. All executive parties are represented on the Executive Sub-Committee.

I will be continuing to review the different measures to ensure understanding of the impact of the Welfare Reform policy.

I have regular meetings with Department for Work and Pensions Ministers and will ensure that all possible opportunities for flexibilities to be introduced are raised during discussions with them and I will be having a further meeting with Lord Freud next month.

Urban Renewal

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development how many Urban Renewal projects are currently under way in towns and how many are planned over the next three years.

(AQO 1714/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department continues to pursue a very active programme of town centre regeneration work in towns outside the two main cities right across Northern Ireland.

Currently, the Department is working on or about to complete six public realm schemes in Portrush, Carrickfergus, Larne, Newry, Downpatrick and Ballycastle. A further six revitalisation projects funded by the Department are currently underway. These are in Larne, Lurgan, Portadown, Armagh, Downpatrick and Portrush. Work is also being done to finalise four masterplans, for Cookstown, Enniskillen, Coleraine and the towns on the South Down coast.

A substantial programme of public realm improvement schemes and revitalisation projects is planned for the period of this Comprehensive Spending Review. My Department is working on a further 40 schemes in towns across Northern Ireland which we hope to implement between now and March 2015, subject to the availability of funding and all the necessary approvals.

My Department is working to promote regeneration schemes on 12 derelict or underused sites in towns across Northern Ireland. Although this work is not helped by the current condition of the property market, we are looking at what might be done to accelerate these schemes.

In April 2011, the Urban Development Grant scheme became fully available to towns outside Belfast and Londonderry. There has been a high level of interest in this scheme and to date over 30 applications and 120 expressions of interest have been received.

Window Replacement Scheme: Lagan Valley

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the level of uptake of the Window Replacement Scheme in the Lagan Valley constituency.

(AQO 1715/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I assume the Member is referring to the double glazing programme for Housing Executive houses, where I ensured that the Programme for Government contains a priority to improve the thermal efficiency of Housing Executive stock and ensure full double glazing in its properties.

The Housing Executive currently installs double glazing as part of its External Cyclical Maintenance programme. Extra funding secured through the monitoring rounds has enabled an increase in this activity. However, the Housing Executive is working to identify those additional properties which still require double glazing. Once this information is available, it will prepare a programme for the installation of glazing to all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015.

In relation to the Lagan Valley constituency, the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary constituency. However, I can advise that there is currently one window replacement scheme ongoing at Ballymacoss/Old Warren, Lisburn for 294 properties. The scheme commenced in December 2011 and to date, refusals from tenants have been minimal.

Communities: Early Intervention

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions he has had with his Executive colleagues in relation to the development and implementation of early intervention strategies in local communities in partnership with the voluntary and community sectors.

(AQO 1716/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department via Neighbourhood Renewal, the Executive's strategy for tackling social deprivation in urban areas, continues to work with all Departments and the voluntary and community sector to develop and implement early interventions in our most deprived local communities.

I am personally committed to encouraging early interventions as it is clear they yield the most return in terms of influencing the life chances of our young people. I have already met with the Minister for Education and the Minister for Health regards how we can embed early interventions at the heart of Departmental policies. Furthermore, I met with the Minister for Justice where I raised the need for early interventions in respect of the effect they can have on reducing crime and anti social behaviour. I will continue to take every opportunity when meeting with my Executive colleagues to raise the need for and benefit of such interventions.

Portrush Regeneration Scheme

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his Department's investment in the regeneration of Portrush.

(AQO 1717/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Portrush Western Peninsula Strategy published in 2007 set out the strategic approach for the regeneration of Portrush. Since then my Department has worked closely with Coleraine Borough Council to help deliver the initiatives set out in that strategy. To date my Department has provided funding for the following:-

- £420,000 towards public realm improvements at the East Strand. These works were completed in June 2011.
- Up to £1,322,000 towards the Station Square public realm scheme that is due to be completed before the busy summer season of 2012.
- £15,000 towards the costs of a consultancy assignment to determine if it is feasible to re-locate Portrush train station to potentially free up ground for a 4* star hotel with conference and spa facilities.
- Up to £150,000 for a re-vitalisation scheme for Main Street in Portrush, to help businesses improve the appearance of their premises and the overall competitiveness of the town.

In addition, my Department is considering a number of applications for funding for Urban Development Grant to redevelop vacant or derelict property in Portrush and I have nominated a senior official to work with Coleraine Borough Council to assist them in the off-course management arrangements for the Irish Open this year.

My Department will continue to work with Coleraine Borough Council to ensure that the other initiatives in the Portrush Western Peninsula, such as the extension and development of the harbour, are taken forward to ensure that Portrush can realise its full potential over the coming years.

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development how many medical assessments of Employment and Support Allowance claimants have been carried out in the last year.

(AQO 1718/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There have been 25,307 medical assessments of Employment and Support Allowance claimants carried out in the last year (March 2011 to February 2012).

Social Housing

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department is taking to increase the amount of shared social housing. **(AQO 1719/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: In 2010/11 social housing made up just over 16% of the total number of homes in Northern Ireland with the Private Rented Sector making up a further 16% and the remaining almost 68% being owner occupied.

I do not believe that we should continue to build single tenure estates of social housing alone as this can often further segregate people. I want to see how we can develop more social and affordable housing alongside each other so that people can have greater choice and flexibility about where they live and who they live beside. It is not about forcing anything on anyone, we need to allow people to share housing because they want to, not because Government says they must.

This is equally the same when we talk about shared housing for people from different community backgrounds, race or religion. Again I want to see how we can provide choice for people to come together in a more natural way and not through the results of social engineering that will simply not work.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 27 April 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Project 5873: Photography Services

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the cost of employing an in-house photographer, when necessary, as opposed to the £400,000 cost of Project 5873 Executive Information Service - Provision of Photography Services for the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

(AQW 9358/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): There are no professional in-house photographers in the employment of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Photography services are secured via secondary competition between six photographers who were successful following a tender competition which was administered by the Central Procurement Directorate of the Department of Finance and Personnel in accordance with procurement regulations. We believe it represents better value to use local photographers as required, rather than recruiting permanent photographic staff.

Project 5873

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the contract for Project 5873, why the figure of £400,000 is only an estimate.

(AQW 9566/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The contract is for an initial period of one year, with the option to extend by three further periods of one year each. The figure is based on all of the extension options being taken up.

Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation: Training of Departmental Staff

Mr Frew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what strategy is in place to train departmental staff in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

(AQW 10153/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are required to have an adequate and appropriate number of staff trained in the application of first aid to ensure all our staff have access to first aid services if required. Training in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation is provided for those staff by the Red Cross and St John's Ambulance. Within OFMDFM, we currently have nine volunteer staff trained to provide first aid services. In addition, six staff working in Stormont Castle have been trained in Adult Life Support and use of automated external defibrillator resuscitation equipment which is located in the Castle.

Ilex: Directional Signage

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when ILEX will install directional signage at Glendermott Road/Ebrington Terrace for the entrance to the Peace Bridge.

(AQW 10255/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Ilex is currently assessing a project to fit directional signage to the Peace Bridge.

Energy Efficiency Vires

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on proposals to concentrate energy efficiency vires in a single department.

(AQW 10271/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In February 2011, the Executive commissioned a review by the Sustainable Energy Interdepartmental Working Group (SEIDWG) of energy vires across departments to consider:

- (a) Whether there was a need to amend energy vires currently available to departments.
- (b) To explore the scope for consolidating and streamlining sustainable energy activities, as and where appropriate.

SEIDWG, having initiated the review, referred the issue to be taken forward by the Sustainable Development Champions' Group (SDCG) under the Chairmanship of OFMDFM, as a neutral department in respect of energy vires and in line with its role for co-ordination of cross-cutting, strategic policy issues.

A policy review was undertaken by DETI officials, and a paper was presented to SDCG on 20 January 2012, presenting evidence gathered by the review, and making recommendations. SDCG has agreed a set of recommendations in respect of the energy vires issue that we intend to bring forward for consideration by the Executive in the near future.

Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse

Mr Elliott asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether any time limits have been set on how long the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse will take; and what are the estimated costs.

(AQW 10316/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: On 29 September 2011, the Executive announced the establishment of an Inquiry and Investigation into Historical Institutional Abuse here. The Executive have stated that the Inquiry and Investigation should conclude within two and a half years of its commencement. The Chair of the Inquiry must submit a report of their findings to the Executive within six months of the conclusion of the Inquiry.

Work is ongoing to scope the estimated costs for the Inquiry and Investigation and secure the necessary financial approvals. Estimated costs are therefore not available at this time.

Government Advertising: Weekly Newspapers

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) whether the Executive has any plans to curtail Government advertising in weekly newspapers, with concentration on daily media outlets; and (ii) what consideration has been given to the impact on equality of access, given the limited and declining circulation of many of the daily press.

(AQW 10463/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In the current financial climate, advertising expenditure will be subject to the same scrutiny and control as other areas of expenditure. The Executive has agreed to introduce tight controls on advertising expenditure, open up classified advertising to competition and change the legislation to allow greater use of online and other media for classified advertising. Opening up classified advertising to competition will ensure compliance with procurement regulations and deliver better value for money.

A full equality impact assessment was undertaken as part of the fundamental review of classified advertising (2006). As part of the consultation on the change in legislation, a further equality impact assessment will be carried out.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Rivers: Guidance on Use by Farmers

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 9541/11-15, to outline her Department's guidance on the use of rivers by farmers for access to fields.

(AQW 10455/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Under the Drainage (NI) Order 1973, my Rivers Agency has no remit or role regarding the use of rivers by farmers for access to fields.

Rivers: Guidance on Use by Farmers

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 9541/11-15, what protection her Department gives to rivers that are not designated under the Drainage (NI) Order 1973 and that are being used for access to fields by farm tractors and machinery.

(AQW 10456/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Rivers Agency is the statutory drainage and flood protection Authority for NI. Under the terms of the Drainage (NI) Order 1973, the Agency only has powers to maintain watercourses and sea defences which have been designated by the Drainage Council for NI. The maintenance of non designated watercourses falls to the riparian landowner, Rivers Agency has no remit or role regarding the use of rivers by farmers for access to fields.

Rivers: Guidance on Use by Farmers

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 9541/11-15, what advice her Department provides under the Water Framework Directive for the protection of rivers that are used for access to fields by farm tractors and machinery.

(AQW 10457/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The introduction of Water Framework Directive (WFD) in the north is the responsibility of the Department of Environment, who through NI Environment Agency (NIEA) are the Competent Authority. I would therefore refer my colleague Mr C McDevitt to address any queries he has on the WFD to NIEA.

EU Welfare of Laying Hens Directive

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 9950/11-15, for an update on the current position of the 13 non-compliant member states and their efforts to ensure compliance.

(AQW 10604/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Since the EU ban on conventional cages came into force on 1 January 2012, the Commission has done what it said it would do and has taken robust action to deal with the wide-scale non-compliance across the EU.

In addition to writing formal infraction letters to all 13 non-compliant Member States, the Commission is reviewing Member States' action plans on a monthly basis at the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFAH). These action plans include the commitment that eggs from conventional cages may only go for processing in the Member State of origin and cannot be exported. These egg products must only be used in food products or industrial products manufactured within the Member State of origin and only these food products can then be exported.

The action plans also include the agreement that no new hens may go into conventional cages and any production sites using conventional cages must close by 31 July 2012. Evidence to date shows this measure seems to have worked as eggs are being kept in the Member States of origin and producers are either closing or moving to more welfare friendly systems of production.

This is one reason why there was a shortage of eggs used in processing across Europe in February and March, with processors and food manufacturers being hit the hardest. The shortfall in supplies of eggs from compliant systems for the table egg market, particularly when combined with an increased demand over the Easter period, has led to a considerable increase in wholesale egg prices. However, the Commission has confirmed that egg prices have started to fall again quite quickly in the last few weeks, potentially indicating that the market is now beginning to stabilise.

The Commission's Food and Veterinary Audit Office inspections for 2012 are being targeted at non-compliant Member States.

Single Farm Payment

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers had not received their Single Farm Payment by (i) 1 April 2012; and (ii) 20 April 2012.

(AQW 10677/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As the 1 April 2012 fell on a Sunday, I am providing figures for Monday, 2 April 2012 and Friday, 20 April. In replying to the question on this basis, I can report that on 2 April 2012 and 20 April 2012, totals of 2,344(6.1%) and 2,075(5.4%) of the claims submitted under the 2011 Single Farm Payment were not finalised. Not all of the remaining claims may be due a payment because of ineligibility or the application of penalties under scheme rules.

Single Farm Payment

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers had received their Single Farm Payment by (i) December 2011; (ii) January 2012; (iii) February 2012; and (iv) March 2012.

(AQW 10678/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department had finalized 32,289 (85.3%) claims to SFP by the end of December 2011, 34,144 (90.2%) by January 2012, and 34,977 (92.4%) by the end of February 2012. A further 530 claims were finalized during March 2012 resulting in a total of 35,507 (93.8%), of all claims having been completed and over £247 million paid out to farmers at that time.

My Department is obliged to administer the SFP scheme in accordance with the EU rules and this means that the results of validation checks, including on-farm inspections, must be applied to individual claims in order to calculate the correct amount due before a payment can be released. Some assessments are complex, particularly for claims that have had an on-farm inspection, and take longer to clear. The remaining claims are outstanding for a number of reasons such as inspection results to be applied to claims, probate not yet completed or the farmer has not provided bank account details to allow payment to be credited to their bank account. Not all the remaining claims may be due to receive a payment because of ineligibility or the application of penalties under scheme rules.

Single Farm Payment

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the approaching deadline for Single Farm Payment applications, how many farmers were awaiting updated copies of their farm maps 4 weeks before the deadline; and to explain the reasons for the delay.

(AQW 10679/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Maps were made available online as they were produced, with the first being online on 23 March. All maps produced were online from 5 April at the latest, which was more than 4 weeks before the deadline.

Maps were not produced for businesses which were the subject of an inspection in 2011. For these farmers, the inspection reports provide a more detailed, up-to-date and therefore more accurate assessment of eligible land on these holdings. These businesses received a letter advising them to use their inspection report to inform their Single Application.

Hard copy maps were posted to farmers from 30th March. The vast majority of maps (more than 99%) were posted by 18 April. All maps were posted by 20 April.

It had been planned that maps would issue by the end of the second week in April. The majority were posted in this timeframe, with the remainder posted in the following week. In my Press Release on the 12 April, I advised farmers who hadn't received their map at that stage that they could access it online or alternatively their local DARD Direct office could provide one for them.

As farmers had a range of sources through which to access their farm maps, either online, a posted hard copy or by getting a copy from a DARD Direct office, I cannot be certain how many did not have access to a copy 4 weeks before the deadline.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Fishing: Legal Catches

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what data has been recorded on the number of fish caught by legal netsmen over the last five years.

(AQW 10401/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): DCAL licensed netsmen are only required to provide numbers of fish caught for salmon and sea trout through the carcass tagging scheme.

DCAL is the fishery owner on Lough Erne and issues a small number of permits to netsmen operating there. It is a requirement of the permit that the netsmen provide returns on the weight of their catches.

Fishing: Identification of Legal Nets in Lough Neagh

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what identification measures are used to mark legal nets in Lough Neagh; and to outline how the enforcement teams carry out their work.

(AQW 10505/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Regulations regarding the identification of legal fishing nets on Lough Neagh already exist and are clearly specified in the 1966 Fisheries Act and associated regulations.

Each net or row of nets of a single wall set net or trammel net used for the taking of trout and coarse fish on Lough Neagh must be marked at each end with a float not less than 30 centimetres in diameter, of a bright yellow colour projecting not less than 30 centimetres above the surface of the water.

Each float must have clearly and legibly painted or fixed in figures of not less than 12 centimetres in height, the number allocated to the licence-holder by the Department (or any number the Department has allocated to the net or row of nets of which the float shall be a mark) and at all times when the net or row of nets is in use such number must be clearly legible.

A team of 3 DCAL Fisheries Protection Officers, under the management of a Senior Fisheries Officer, operate from their base at Derrycrow on the southern shore of the Lough. They carry out regular boat and shore patrols of the Lough and its tributaries to detect, disrupt and deter those involved in illegal fishing activities.

When necessary Fishery Protection Officers based in other areas can be tasked to assist with operations with the Lough Neagh team.

Waterways: Departmental Jurisdiction

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the waters on which her Department has jurisdiction, including loughs, river basins and shorelines.

(AQW 10506/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department is responsible for the conservation and protection of fish in all inland waters within the DCAL jurisdiction and salmon in the coastal waters off the jurisdiction. The Department does not retain a definitive list of all waters in the jurisdiction.

The Crown Estate has jurisdiction over shorelines.

In terms of the direct provision of public angling, the Department manages all loughs, rivers and canals as listed on the following website as Public Angling Estate waters www.nidirect.gov.uk/angling

Netting: Lough Neagh

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she is considering reducing the period in which netting is permitted in Lough Neagh.

(AQW 10510/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The seasons which determine the period in which netting is permitted on Lough Neagh are defined in the 1966 Fisheries Act and subsequent Regulations.

At this time I am not actively considering a revision on the length of seasons as there is currently no data indicating a need for change.

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 10240/11-15, and given that the information requested was not provided in her answer, to detail (i) the job description deployed; (ii) the person specification; (iii) how the vacancy was made known; (iv) how many candidates were considered; (v) the criteria against which candidates were judged; (vi) what regard was given to avoiding any imbalance of religious belief; and (vii) what documentation exists pertaining to the appointment.

(AQW 10547/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The DCAL Special Adviser was appointed in accordance with the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers and the Civil Service Commissioners (NI) Order 1999 as amended.

Lottery Funding

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether Northern Ireland's full Lottery funding will be restored fully after the 2012 Olympics.

(AQW 10580/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The levels of Lottery funding will be returned to the pre-Olympics level position at the end of this financial year.

Boddagh and Black Boddagh Fish: Lough Neagh

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the estimated stock levels of (a) boddagh; and (b) black boddagh fish in the Lough Neagh Basin and its arterial rivers in each of the last ten years; and (ii) which rivers have spawning runs of each fish.

(AQW 10645/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

- (i) I am unable to estimate the stock levels of boddagh and black boddagh fish in the Lough Neagh basin.
- (ii) Trout spawn in all major catchments draining to Lough Neagh. The cues that determine if and when juvenile trout choose to migrate to feed in Lough Neagh are complex and will have genetic and environmental components. Likewise, the factors that determine the characteristics that trout develop whilst feeding and maturing in Lough Neagh, and when they return from feeding to spawn in rivers, are varied.

Netting: Lough Neagh

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she is considering reducing the period of time that netting is allowed in Lough Neagh.

(AQW 10726/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The seasons which determine the period in which netting is permitted on Lough Neagh are defined in the 1966 Fisheries Act and subsequent Regulations.

At this time I am not actively considering a revision on the length of seasons as there is currently no data indicating a need for change.

Trout Fishing: Closed Season

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she is considering extending the trout fishing closed season to allow kelp a chance to return to the lough and regain their condition.

(AQW 10729/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Trout after they have spawned are referred to as Kelt and are not generally sought due to their physical appearance and lower body weight.

The current closed period for trout fishing in Lough Neagh operates from the 20 August until the 1 March the following year. This generally allows Kelt approximately 3 months to recover from spawning activity which takes place from mid October to the end of November.

I am not currently considering extending the closed season for trout fishing in Lough Neagh.

Department of Education

Nursery Schools: First Preference Choice

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the current number of children who have not received their first preference choice of nursery school, broken down by Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 10399/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The information sought is from the admissions process for places in pre-school education in the 2012/13 academic year. This is a two stage process which is currently ongoing. Statistics will not be available until after the process is completed on 1 June 2012.

GCSEs and A Levels

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many pupils sat GCSEs and A Levels in each of the last three years, broken down by examination body.

(AQW 10402/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table. The data from which this information is drawn is held at subject level, not pupil level. As such this table shows the number of entries for GCSE and A-Level courses in each examination board. Individual pupils may make entries in several examination boards. Equivalent qualifications at either GCSE or A-Level are not included in the table.

A-Level and GCSE entries by Examination Board 2008/09 to 2010/11.

		Examination Board					
		EDEXCEL	WJEC	CCEA	OCR	AQA	TOTAL
2010/11	A-Level	2631	455	22918	859	4478	31341
	GCSE	1388	650	113157	4669	41585	161449
2009/10	A-Level	2506	453	22197	892	4649	30697
	GCSE	724	783	110700	5939	45721	163867
2008/09	A-Level	3106	456	20497	842	5107	30008
	GCSE	700	680	111419	6084	46044	164927

Source: RM Data Solutions

Note: Excludes equivalent qualifications

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Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the resources expended by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, in each of the last three years, for the purposes of disseminating information and training to schools on examinations and assessment.

(AQW 10403/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been advised by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment that the information is not available in the format requested and would only be available at disproportionate cost.

Teachers without Jobs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education what steps he intends to take to ensure that the 8,500 qualified teachers without jobs can apply their skills in the education sector.

(AQW 10416/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Whilst there are currently around 8,500 teachers on the Substitute Teachers' Register (NISTR), not all those registered are currently seeking permanent employment; indeed, many wish to be employed on a substitute basis and are successful in securing a temporary post that suits their individual needs. On any given day, there will only be a certain number of teachers available for employment; the number varies from day to day depending on an individual teacher's personal preferences and on the number of teachers employed in schools on that day.

Furthermore, it does not necessarily follow that all those who have not secured a teaching post are currently unemployed. Statistics from the Department of Trade and Investment for February 2012 show that there were 27 claimants under the age of 30 whose occupation sought was teaching and who were unemployed for more than 26 weeks.

The issue of employment opportunities for teachers is something I take very seriously indeed, particularly given the current economic situation when employment opportunities in many areas are limited and there is increased competition for jobs in various walks of life. However, teachers are highly qualified professionals and, as such, possess skills and attributes that would prepare them for many jobs in related areas. Therefore, it is important that they are flexible in the choices that they make to determine their career paths.

I am also keen to ensure the numbers joining approved initial teacher education (ITE) courses reflect the needs of our school system. In light of falling rolls, my Department has reduced the overall intakes to ITE courses from 880 in 2004/05 to 663 in 2011/12 – a reduction of nearly 25%. I am currently giving careful consideration to the 2012-13 ITE intake numbers.

Over the years, my Department has also introduced a range of measures to maximise the employment opportunities of newly and recently qualified teachers and to discourage the employment of prematurely retired teachers. My Department has repeatedly advised employers that prematurely retired teachers should only be re-employed to provide short-term cover where newly qualified teachers (NQTs) or experienced nonretired teachers are unavailable.

Most recently, my Department has introduced a flat rate of pay, based on salary levels applicable to NQTs, for substitution cover provided by prematurely retired teachers who have received discretionary compensation. Alongside complementary amendments to the Common Funding Scheme, this is intended to serve as a disincentive to prematurely retired teachers to seek re-employment.

On foot of the consultation on the review of teacher education, I am considering a draft strategy for the way forward for teacher education here which will include a proposal for the Department to develop a cost-effective scheme whereby NQTs not in full-time permanent teaching posts will have access to sufficient teaching experience in order to facilitate completion of Induction.

Nursery School Places: Derry City Council Area

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many children in the Derry City Council area have not received a nursery school place for the 2012/13 academic year; and (ii) how many places are still available in that area, broken down by electoral ward area.

(AQW 10490/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information sought is from the admissions process for places in pre-school education in the 2012/13 academic year. This is a two stage process which is currently ongoing. Statistics will not be available until after the process is completed on 1 June 2012.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education what action he is taking to identify and support pupils with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, given its significant impact on educational attainment.

(AQW 10497/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have statutory responsibility for identifying, assessing and meeting the special education needs (SEN) of the children in their area. They take into account the individual needs of each child and provide tailored support as appropriate.

The ELBs have advised that a range of measures are used to identify and support children who have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder including:-

- Guidance booklets for teachers and parents;
- Training for school staff on school/classroom management strategies and interventions;
- Advice and support from ELBs' Behaviour Support teams and Educational Psychology Services;
- Education other than at school may be provided in some cases.

Harbinson

Primary School Enrolments: Glenravel Ward

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils enrolled at each primary school in the Glenravel ward in each of the last seven academic years.

(AQW 10504/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Enrolments at primary schools located in the Glenravel ward, 2005/06 – 2011/12

School name	2005/ 06	2006/ 07	2007/ 08	2008/ 09	2009/ 10	2010/ 11	2011/ 12
Clough Primary School	139	140	152	155	161	168	191
Glenravel Primary School	126	131	143	143	149	155	163

School name	2005/ 06	2006/ 07	2007/ 08	2008/ 09	2009/ 10	2010/ 11	2011/ 12
St Mary's Primary School Glenravel	86	87	78	75	74	72	66

Source: NI school census

Note:

- 1 Figures include children in nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.

Cross-Border Pupils

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to list the schools on both sides of the border that accept cross-border pupils. (AQW 10527/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Legislation currently requires all schools in the north to give priority in admissions to children resident in the north. Any northern school can accept a child from the south, but only after it has first considered all applications from northern children and it has places available. In the south, there is no legal requirement for a school to prioritise southern over northern residents, so all schools can accept northern children in line with their admissions criteria.

A list of northern schools in 2011/12 which have children with addresses in the south is provided below.

The Department does not hold information on pupils in schools in the south of Ireland.

Primary schools with pupils who are resident in the south of Ireland, 2011/12

School name

- Artigarvan Primary School
- Aughnacloy Primary School
- Ballougry Primary School
- Barrack Street Boys' Primary School, Strabane
- Belleek(2) Primary School
- Bunscoil an Iuir
- Christian Brothers' Primary School, Armagh
- Cortamlet Primary School
- Culmore Primary School
- Enniskillen Model Primary School
- Florencecourt Primary School
- Gaelscoil na Daroige
- Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh
- Groarty Primary School
- Hollybush Primary School
- Holy Family Primary School, Ballymagroarty
- Londonderry Model Primary School
- Longtower Primary School
- Meadow Bridge Primary School
- Nazareth House Primary School, Derry
- Newtownhamilton Primary School
- Oakgrove Integrated Primary School
- Royal School, Armagh
- Sion Mills Primary School
- St Anne's Primary School, Derry
- St Anne's Primary School, Strabane
- St Brigid's Primary School, Derry
- St Brigid's Primary School, Glassdrummond
- St Caireall's Primary School, Castledearg
- St Columba's Primary School, Strabane
- St Davog's Primary School, Belleek
- St Eithne's Primary School, Derry
- St John's Primary School, Derry
- St Joseph's Convent Primary School, Newry
- St Mary's Boys' Primary School, Strabane
- St Mary's Girls' Primary School, Strabane
- St Mary's Primary School, Aughnacloy
- St Ninnidh's Primary School, Derrylin
- St Patricks Primary School, Pennyburn, Derry
- St Ronan's Primary School, Lisnaskea
- St Tierney's Primary School, Roslea
- Steelstown Voluntary Maintained Primary School
- Strabane Controlled Primary School

Post-primary schools with pupils who are resident in the south of Ireland – 2011/12

School name

- Abbey Christian Brothers Grammar School, Newry
- Aughnacloy High School
- City Armagh High School
- Devenish College
- Erne Integrated College
- Holy Cross College, Strabane
- Immaculate Conception College, Derry
- Lisneal College
- Loreto Grammar School, Omagh
- Lumen Christi College, Derry
- Newtownhamilton High School
- Oakgrove Integrated College

- Our Lady's Grammar School, Newry
- St Aidan's High School, Derrylin
- St Brigid's College, Derry
- St Brigid's High School, Armagh
- St Catherine's College, Armagh
- St Cecilia's College, Derry
- St Ciaran's High School, Ballygawley
- St Colman's College, Newry
- St Columb's College, Derry
- St Comhghall's College, Lisnaskea
- St Eugene's College, Roslea
- St Eugene's High School, Castledearg
- St Fanchea's College, Enniskillen
- St Joseph's Boys' School, Derry
- St Joseph's College, Enniskillen
- St Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen
- St Mary's College, Derry
- St Mary's High School, Belleek
- St Mary's High School, Newry
- St Michael's College, Enniskillen
- St Patrick's High School, Keady
- St Paul's High School, Bessbrook
- St Peter's High School, Derry
- Strabane Academy
- The Royal School, Armagh
- The Royal School, Dungannon

Source: School census

Note:

- 1 Figures may include boarders.

Consultation Documents and Official Reports: Cost

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Education what was the cost to his Department of producing (i) consultation documents; and (ii) official reports in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 10535/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below:

2010/2011	i) Consultation documents	ii) Official reports
Cost (£)	11,559	5,349

The above costs do not include staff or postage costs as these are not calculated separately.

Preschool Education: Upper Bann

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education what proportion of children in the Upper Bann area have received a year of pre-school education, funded by his Department, in each of the last three academic years.

(AQW 10545/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of children in funded pre-school education places located in the Upper Bann constituency in each of the last three academic years has been provided in the table below. Information on the total number of pre-school children living in Upper Bann is not available for all of the time periods specified and therefore it is not possible to present the proportions requested.

Children in funded pre-school education places located in the Upper Bann constituency 2009/10 – 2011/12

Year	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Children	1,487	1,565	1,583

Source: NI school census.

Note:

- 1 Figures relate to children in funded places in voluntary and private-pre-school centres, in nursery units, in nursery schools or in reception classes in primary schools.
- 2 Figures relate to schools and pre-school centres located in the Upper Bann constituency.

Relationship and Sexuality Education in Schools

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education whether his Department plans to standardise Relationship and Sexuality Education in schools, given that each school has different methods and means of delivery.

(AQW 10553/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education has no plans to standardise the delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in our schools.

The Revised Curriculum, which has been taught to all pupils of compulsory school age in grant-aided schools since 2009/10, provides teachers with the flexibility to use their professional judgement, across all curricular areas, to tailor their teaching to meet the needs of their pupils. During the development phase of the Revised Curriculum the Department was left in no doubt that teachers wished to have such a level of flexibility in delivering the curriculum in the classroom.

I consider this flexibility to be of particular importance in the delivery of RSE which needs to be taught in a sensitive matter, in harmony with the ethos of the school and reflect the moral and religious principles held by parents and school management authorities.

Statutory Nursery School Places

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education how many statutory nursery school places were available after the (i) first; and (ii) second round of applications for the 2012/13 academic year, broken down by Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 10572/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information sought is from the admissions process for places in pre-school education in the 2012/13 academic year. This is a two stage process which is currently ongoing. Statistics will not be available until after the process is completed on 1 June 2012.

Enrolment Numbers

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education to detail the process by which a school can enrol more pupils than its maximum enrolment number.

(AQW 10586/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A school's permanent approved enrolment number is set each year by the Department following consultation with school Boards of Governors, and the Education and Library Board, and takes account of a number of factors including the teaching accommodation available at the school. By law, a school cannot exceed its approved enrolment number without first obtaining prior approval from the Department. If the Department agrees to this request, after consultation with the Education and Library and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, where appropriate, this is called a temporary variation of the enrolment number.

If a school wishes to request a temporary variation they must put their request in writing to the Department. The school must provide the Department with all relevant details of the pupil(s) they wish to admit above the enrolment number, including confirmation that the pupil(s) the school wishes to admit are next in line for a place after the application of the school's published admissions criteria.

The Department considers each request for a temporary variation on its own merits against a range of factors including the resulting proposed enrolment at the school against the available teaching accommodation. In order to maintain a viable school's estate, however, a key consideration of the Department must be the availability of places at other schools in the same educational sector within reasonable travelling distance of the address(es) of the pupil(s) for whom additional place(s) are being sought.

Temporary variations which are approved, apply for one academic year only.

Enrolment Numbers

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education, for each of the last two years, to detail how many post-primary schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area have exceeded their maximum enrolment number and by what percentage.

(AQW 10587/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is provided in the table below.

	% Over Approved Enrolment Number	
	2010/11	2011/12
Ballyclare High School	0.3	0.2
Ballyclare Secondary School	2.4	4.4
Ballymena Academy	0.3	1.3
Cambridge House Grammar School	1.1	n/a
Carrickfergus Grammar School	n/a	1.1
Coleraine High School	1.4	0.4
Cross and Passion College, Ballycastle	3.2	2.2
Dalriada School	3.3	4.3
Dominican College, Portstewart	0.4	2.3

	% Over Approved Enrolment Number	
	2010/11	2011/12
Dunclug College	1.7	5
Larne Grammar School	n/a	0.4
Magherafelt High School	5.2	n/a
St Colm's High School, Draperstown	20.9	19.7
St Louis Grammar School	n/a	0.1
St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt	0.6	0.1
St Paul's College, Kilrea	10	8.5
St Pius X College, Magherafelt	0.8	2.1
Ulidia Integrated College	n/a	0.4

Note:

- The figures are derived from the difference between a school's approved enrolment number and the number of pupils enrolled at the school excluding the enrolments of pupils in receipt of a statement of special educational needs, and pupils in their first year of enrolment in a school following their admission on appeal by the Education and Library Board appeal tribunals or by direction of the independent Exceptional Circumstances Body, as these are admitted over and above a school's approved enrolment number.
- A school can exceed its approved enrolment number for a number of reasons, such as:
 - the Department's approval of a temporary variation to a school's enrolment number for children seeking admission to sixth form in line with Departmental policy of supporting the increasing numbers of children wishing to undertake sixth form studies;
 - the admission of children on appeal by the Education and Library Board appeal tribunals or by direction of the independent Exceptional Circumstances Body who have been enrolled in a school for more than 1 year as these are no longer supernumerary to a school's approved enrolment number; and
 - The Department's approval of a temporary variation to a school's enrolment number because of demographic pressure in an area in a particular year.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education what assessment he has made of the impact of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder on the educational attainment of (i) male; and (ii) female students.

(AQW 10591/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware that there is a considerably higher prevalence of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in boys than girls and many of these children achieve a lower level of educational attainment. In order to meet the special educational needs of each child with ADHD, the Education and Library Boards, as the bodies with statutory responsibility for such provision, provide tailored support including:

- Guidance booklets for teachers and parents;
- Training for school staff on school/classroom management strategies and interventions;
- Advice and support from ELBs' Behaviour Support teams and Educational Psychology Services;
- Education other than at school may be provided in some cases.

Prompt Payment Targets

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the prompt payment targets, to detail the percentage of invoices across all Education and Library Boards paid within (i) 30 days; and (ii) 10 working days in the 2011/12 financial year.

(AQW 10606/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Details of the percentages of invoices paid by the Education and Library Boards (ELB) within the prompt payment targets in the 2011/12 financial year are shown in the table below:

ELB	30 days %	10 days %
Belfast Education & Library Board	81.11	41.77

ELB	30 days %	10 days %
North Eastern Education & Library Board	83.34	58.43
South Eastern Education & Library Board	90.21	59.67
Southern Education & Library Board	89.21	47.85
Western Education & Library Board	85.38	48.72

School Provision: Holywood Area

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what plans his Department has for school provision in the Holywood area in the next five years.

(AQW 10616/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As you are aware, I have commissioned the Education and Library Boards, working with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and engaging with other school sectors, to develop plans for a sustainable and affordable pattern of schools which will deliver a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils.

Boards were asked to submit plans for the post-primary phase to the Department by the end of March. Initial draft plans have been received from all boards and are being assessed by the Department to determine whether they are consistent with the Terms of Reference. If the plans are consistent they will be issued for public consultation following which they will be considered for approval.

Plans for primary provision are due to be submitted by the end of June.

Until this work is completed I will not be in a position to comment on any individual school or area.

Amalgamation of the Former Convent of Mercy Girls Primary School and St Mary's Boys Primary School, Rostrevor

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education to provide a breakdown of the £459,000 works to facilitate the amalgamation of the former Convent of Mercy Girls Primary School and St Mary's Boys Primary School, Rostrevor, to be known as St Bronagh's Primary School.

(AQW 10628/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Breakdown of £458,627.42, for 'enabling works' to facilitate amalgamation of the former Convent of Mercy Girls Primary School and St Mary's Boys Primary School, Rostrevor, to be known as St Bronagh's Primary School.

is as follows:-

Contractor	Consultants Fees
£393,830.09	£64,797.33

The 'enabling works' contract, included works to provide mobile classroom accommodation, works to the School Meals Accommodation, works to provide girls toilets and site works.

The £64,797.33 for Consultants fees included work carried out by, Project Manager, Architect, Quantity Surveyor, Consulting Engineer and Civil Engineer.

Welfare Reform: Entitlement to Free School Meals

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education what assessment his Department has carried out of the implications of Welfare Reform on entitlement to free school meals.

(AQW 10648/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The provision of free school meals has an important role to play in ensuring that children from nonworking and low income families receive a healthy, nutritious, meal each day in school. I am committed to ensuring that those families most in need continue to receive this benefit.

The Universal Credit, which the British Government intends to introduce next year as part of the welfare reform proposals, will replace a number of existing benefits which are currently used to determine eligibility for free school meals and clothing allowances. It will be necessary, therefore, to amend the eligibility criteria to take account of this change.

I have tasked my officials to explore the options available to me with a view to setting out proposals in the Autumn.

Legislation

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) what proposals for legislation, subject to Executive approval, he has introduced or intends to introduce between April 2012 and March 2015; (ii) the anticipated timescale for the introduction of each Bill; and (iii) the intention of each Bill.

(AQW 10653/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) In the period up to March 2015, I plan to introduce an Education Bill, a General Teaching Council for NI Bill, a Special Educational Needs and Inclusion Bill and a General and Vocational Qualifications Bill to the Assembly.
- (ii) There is a Programme for Government commitment to bring forward the Education Bill for scrutiny and approval of the Assembly in 2012/2013. However, the introduction of Bills in the Assembly will be subject to Executive agreement and potentially Executive prioritisation.
- (iii) An Education Bill will provide for the establishment and functions of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA); the dissolution of a number of existing statutory education bodies; and the transfer of their assets, liabilities, functions and staff to the ESA.

A General Teaching Council for NI Bill will repeal the existing General Teaching Council for NI provisions in the Education (NI) Order 1998 (as amended) and replace them in order to provide for: the extension of the existing remit of the Council to cover Further Education (FE) lecturers; additional disciplinary functions of the Council; and the establishment of the Council as a body wholly independent from Government.

A Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Inclusion Bill will introduce legislative changes to support my Department's SEN and Inclusion policy following a policy review of SEN and Inclusion.

A General and Vocational Qualifications Bill will put in place new arrangements for the regulation of general and vocational qualifications.

Bills and Invoice Payments

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of non-Education and Library Boards bills and invoice payments processed on behalf of his Department by Account NI between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012 within (i) 30 calendar days; and (ii) 10 working days.

(AQW 10655/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of payments processed by Account NI on behalf of the Department of Education for the 2011/12 financial year, within 30 calendar days and 10 working days are:

Total number of invoices processed by Account NI	Number processed within 30 calendar days	Number processed within 10 working days
3,529	3,462	3,263

Welfare Reform: Entitlement to Free School Meals

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education for an estimate of the number of children whose entitlement to free school meals will be affected by the changes proposed by Welfare Reform.

(AQW 10667/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: An estimate of the number of children whose entitlement to free school meals will be affected by the changes proposed by Welfare Reform is not available at this time.

No decisions on the future arrangements have been taken at this time.

The provision of free school meals has an important role to play in ensuring that children from nonworking and low income families receive a healthy, nutritious, meal each day in school. I am committed to ensuring that those families most in need continue to receive this benefit.

The introduction of Universal Credit will mean that I will have to introduce new criteria for eligibility for free schools meals. I have tasked my officials to develop proposals by the Autumn, only then will it be possible to determine the numbers affected, if at all.

Primary Schools: Flexible Starting Age

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education what research his Department has carried out into the introduction of a flexible starting age for entry into primary school.

(AQW 10668/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has not carried out research on the introduction of a flexible starting age for entry into primary school. However a key aspect of the draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy is the transition from pre-school to the Foundation Stage of the revised curriculum, which aims to ensure children are introduced to education in a way and pace that takes account of their age and level of maturity.

During consultation on the draft Early Years Strategy reference to the school starting age has attracted interest. The draft Strategy acknowledges the flexibility provided by the Foundation Stage of the Curriculum in providing a range of educational approaches to meet the needs of individual children who learn at a different pace and in differing ways.

I am aware that we have one of the lowest school starting ages in Europe and therefore while I have currently no plans to make a change to the school starting age, following the publication of the Early Years Strategy, I will study the comments made and issues raised, including any implications these might have for the school starting age.

Primary Schools: Flexible Starting Age

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education what action his Department intends to take to allow parents the flexibility of deferring their children's entry into P1.

(AQW 10672/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Currently the only provision in education legislation which allows for a child to be retained in a nursery school, and not commence primary school upon reaching compulsory school age, is under Article 16 of the Education (NI) Order 1996 which relates to young children of compulsory school age with Statements of Special Educational Needs.

During consultation on the draft Early Years Strategy reference to the school starting age has attracted interest and therefore while I have currently no plans to make a change to the school starting age, following the publication of the Early Years Strategy, I will study the comments made and issues raised, including any implications these might have for the school starting age.

Autism: Strategy for Children

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to develop a specific coherent strategy for children with autism.

(AQW 10733/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Autism Act 2011 requires the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in co-operation with other departments, to prepare a coherent autism strategy for children with autism. The Department of Education is playing an active role in this process given the multi-agency aspects of services that must be addressed within the strategy.

Autism: Teachers and Classroom Assistants

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Education what steps his Department intends to take to ensure that all teachers and classroom assistants who regularly work with children with autism have the appropriate training.

(AQW 10734/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The education and library boards are responsible for providing autism-specific training in mainstream schools and all boards deliver a range of autism-specific training for school staff.

In addition, the Middletown Centre for Autism has provided a comprehensive range of training opportunities for those supporting children with autistic spectrum disorders (ASDs) across all schools. Each year schools receive a detailed prospectus of training courses available from the Centre.

The training provided by the Centre is tailored to the needs of educational professionals, school staff and parents. A range of sessions are specifically designed to the needs of staff in mainstream schools. In partnership with the inter-board ASD teams, the Centre also provides tailored whole school training for schools upon request.

Education: Area-based Planning

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education how he will ensure that consultation responses on Area Plans from Boards of Governors, which differ from the preferred option of the Education and Library Board, are considered as part of the consultation process.

(AQO 1756/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Area Planning is an important driver for achieving my Department's vision for education which is to ensure that every learner fulfils their full potential at each stage of development.

The Terms of Reference which issued on 15 December require active engagement with all sectors in the preparation and development of the area plans. The development of the area plans is an important process. All who wish, particularly schools, boards of governors and representative bodies should have an opportunity to submit views and ideas for consideration. I expect the Boards to ensure that the appropriate mechanisms are in place to allow this to happen.

In addition there will be public consultation on the draft area plans. This will allow all affected and interested parties the opportunity to comment and present their views before plans are finalised.

The Boards will be required to take account of any feedback and findings it and the planning group consider pertinent in finalising the Area Plan for consideration by my Department.

Schools: Closure

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the recent University of Ulster report 'The Economics of School Closures in Northern Ireland' which indicates that the potential savings from closing post-primary schools to create larger schools would be just 0.9 percent of the annual schools budget.

(AQO 1757/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have only recently had sight of this report and am not in a position to comment on the its detail.

However, the analysis in the report is based on closing schools simply because they fall below the enrolment threshold.

This is clearly not the case.

A school's educational sustainability is assessed using the full set of six criteria in the Sustainable Schools policy and taking account of individual circumstances.

I do have a duty to make best use of public money and that must inform my considerations.

However, the principal aim of the Sustainable Schools policy is to ensure that children get a high quality education, regardless of their background or where they live.

Schools: Viability Audit

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education how he will ensure that Boards of Governors and parents are kept informed of any decisions which may flow from the Viability Audit.

(AQO 1758/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Viability Audits are a "snapshot" of the position of schools in terms of enrolments, quality of education or finances. They showed that many schools are under stress in one or more areas. This information will inform the area planning process currently underway.

However, I have asked the Boards to ensure that, where a school is demonstrating high levels of stress, steps are taken to protect the educational wellbeing of the pupils.

In some cases this will mean offering schools additional professional support or training. In other cases the managing authorities will want to consider the reshaping of education provision in order to secure high quality education for all pupils.

Any significant change to a school such as closure or amalgamation will be subject of a development proposal. This will ensure that those directly affected will be consulted.

All comments received are taken into consideration when I make my decision on the Proposal.

Any proposal for a closure or amalgamation must be reflected in emerging area planning recommendations.

Lurgan College

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education for an update on the future of Lurgan College following the completion, in March 2012, of the strategic area planning exercise.

(AQO 1759/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Draft area plans for the post-primary sector were received from the Education and Library Boards on the 30 March. My officials are now considering 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.

I am not in a position at this time to comment on any specific school or potential project or what capital builds may be considered.

There is, however, a need to ensure that we continue to invest strategically in the schools' estate. When appropriate I will announce my future plans for capital investment.

Portadown College

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Education whether the capital scheme for a new build at Portadown College will be approved.
(AQO 1760/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As I set out in my Statement to the Assembly on Monday 26 September 2011, I 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.

To date I have received, from all Boards, draft area plans for Stand Alone Special Schools and draft area plans for post-primary provision. Primary area plans will be submitted by end June 2012. My officials are considering these plans against Departmental policies and are engaged in dialogue through the Area Planning Coordination Group that has been established.

No school will be looked at in isolation but must be considered in the context of the wider area.

Previously identified projects, such as the proposed new build for Portadown College, 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.

I am not in a position at this time to comment on any specific school or potential project or what capital builds may be considered.

There is, however, a need to ensure that we continue to invest strategically in the schools' estate. When appropriate I will announce my future plans for capital investment.

Education and Skills Authority Bill

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education when he expects to introduce the Education and Skills Authority Bill.
(AQO 1761/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Bill was sent to Executive colleagues for consideration on 6th March 2012. I will introduce it as soon as possible after receiving Executive agreement.

Teachers: Employment

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Education how many of the newly qualified teachers who graduated in 2010/11 have secured a permanent teaching position.
(AQO 1762/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There were 678 NI Graduates in financial year 2010/2011 of which 584 have registered with the General Teaching Council and 54 have secured permanent employment.

Department for Employment and Learning

Ministerial Cars and Drivers

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the number of departmental staff who have availed of ministerial cars and drivers in each of the last three years; (ii) the cost of providing the service; and (iii) whether the benefit derived is subject to income tax.
(AQW 10335/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Responsibility for Ministerial transport was transferred from DFP to departments with effect from 1 April 2011. It was agreed that, when not needed for Ministerial purposes, cars would be available for transport of officials. This provides good value for money. Based on records held, some 56 staff from my Department have made use of this provision since 1 April. It is not possible to break down the driver and car expenses to determine the cost of transporting officials. There are no income tax implications.

Apprentices: Improved Wages

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department is taking to improve wages for young apprentices.
(AQW 10383/11-15)

Dr Farry: Under ApprenticeshipsNI, all apprentices must be employed to avail of ApprenticeshipsNI training. Apprentices, as employees, are remunerated by their individual employers and the level of remuneration is as agreed between the apprentice and the employer. Employers participating in the ApprenticeshipsNI programme must adhere to the National Minimum Wage Act 1998. However, under ApprenticeshipsNI guidelines, they are encouraged to pay an apprentice a wage commensurate with the industry rate for the job.

Scottish Meat Training Qualifications

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what Scottish Meat Training qualifications can be awarded by the local Further Education colleges.
(AQW 10392/11-15)

Dr Farry: Scottish Meat Training, which is the training arm of the Scottish Federation of Meat Traders Associations, offers training to the retail and wholesale meat sector. The qualifications offered by this organisation include Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ), National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) and unique Federation Diploma & Craft Certificates.

Meat qualifications, at level 2 and level 3, delivered by Scottish Meat Training in Scotland and approved by the awarding organisation the Scottish Qualification Authority, are currently on the Qualification Credit Framework (QCF). As such, these courses could be offered by our further education colleges.

However, it is for each college to decide what courses and qualifications to offer, for example from the QCF, to meet the needs of learners and employers in their areas. My understanding is that, currently, the courses in question are not offered by further education colleges here.

Regarding apprenticeships, the Scottish Federation of Meat Traders Association, of which Scottish Meat Training is a subsidiary, had previously worked in partnership with the Food and Drink Training Council (FDTC) to deliver the NVQ element only of the ApprenticeshipsNI Food Manufacture Framework (Food and Poultry). In May 2010 the contract was withdrawn from FDTC, and apprentices were transferred to other training suppliers to finish their apprenticeship.

Away-Days and Team-Building Exercises: Cost-Effectiveness

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 9949/11-15, what priority he gives to value for money when assessing the effectiveness of away-days and team-building exercises.
(AQW 10582/11-15)

Dr Farry: Value for money is a key part of the evaluation process for organisational development and team building events. Costs are tightly controlled and approval for any spend must be justified in advance of final plans being made. Plans must describe sound output-based objectives and modest resource requirements in line with the Department's internal organisational development policy. Year on year we continue to drive costs down while achieving the objectives of such events.

Graduate Employment

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the numbers of young people being encouraged to pursue a university education in the current climate when many graduates are unemployed.
(AQO 1765/11-15)

Dr Farry: There is no substance to the argument that this is not the time to encourage young people to apply to higher education. The employment rate of graduates in Northern Ireland at 87% is considerably higher than that for non-graduates at 63%.

So this is exactly the time to invest in education because it is not a short-term matter. The raising of a country's intermediate and higher level skills base cannot be measured in weeks, months or even years. The focus should not, however, be exclusively on full-time undergraduate provision. The up-skilling of the existing workforce through flexible part-time higher education provision is also a priority. The emerging Strategies for Higher Education and Widening Participation will look beyond the confines of the current economic downturn and lay the foundations for future economic and social progress.

We must ensure that local employers remain competitive and the workforce is appropriately qualified.

However, I and my Executive colleagues also recognise the impact of the current economic situation and my Department has a range of programmes in place to enhance the employability of unemployed graduates.

The Executive has recently given policy approval for a range of new measures to tackle youth unemployment, and I am currently engaging with the Finance Minister regarding the resources needed to bring these into effect. These will complement the programmes already in place to enhance the employability of unemployed graduates.

In addition, in terms of preparing young people to make decisions on future career paths, schools play a significant role, and my Department's Careers Service provides impartial careers information and guidance on a range of opportunities, tailored to an individual's career aspirations and ability level, including higher education provision where appropriate. Careers advisers use up-to-date, relevant labour market information to ensure that young people entering higher education are well informed about the opportunities for the future.

Dissolution of DEL

Mr Cree asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he is engaging with further and higher education institutions in relation to the dissolution of his Department.
(AQO 1773/11-15)

Dr Farry: Any decision about the future of my Department will be taken by the Executive and the Assembly, not by me. I remain fully focussed with my work programmes and continue to engage with both further education and higher education institutions on a wide range of issues.

Further Education: Working-class Communities

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what further action his Department can take to encourage people in working class communities to take up further education opportunities.
(AQO 1774/11-15)

Dr Farry: As the main providers of adult education throughout Northern Ireland, further education colleges continue to encourage working class communities to avail of further education opportunities delivered in their main campuses and network of around 600 community outreach centres. Colleges hold regular outreach events to encourage groups and individuals to avail of their cutting edge facilities and courses. Enrolment statistics for courses being delivered in the colleges show that those from more

deprived areas in Northern Ireland are more than represented compared to their representation in the general population, whereby 22% of students came from the 20% most deprived areas compared to 14% from the 20% most affluent areas.

As major providers of Essential Skills, colleges continue to increase their capacity to deliver free, high quality programmes to adults, particularly those from working class communities. Such courses are now embedded across all DEL funded programmes from entry level to level 2.

My Department also developed and implemented the Learner Access and Engagement Pilot Programme. Through the Pilot, which concluded on 31 March 2012, colleges entered into contracts with third party organisations for the provision of learner support. This support was directed at 'hard to reach' adults who were economically inactive, with few or no qualifications, to encourage them to enrol on and complete further education courses.

PricewaterhouseCoopers have recently submitted a longitudinal evaluation of the programme which will be considered carefully and used to inform future policy decisions.

In addition to these measures, the NI European Social Fund (ESF) Programme provides opportunities to reduce economic inactivity and increase workforce skills, in particular for those groups at a disadvantage and those from working class communities. These groups include people with disabilities and health conditions, lone parents, older workers, and young people not in education, employment or training. Currently under the NIESF Programme, 82 projects are delivering against these objectives throughout Northern Ireland.

Shared Society

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he ensures that all significant new policies introduced by his Department contribute positively to a shared society.

(AQO 1775/11-15)

Dr Farry: I am strongly committed to the creation of a shared and integrated society in Northern Ireland.

I am pleased to tell you that I have recently developed a shared future policy proofing tool in my Department and that shortly, all new policies introduced by my Department will be subject to assessment to determine whether they contribute positively to a shared society or inadvertently reinforce divisions or provide services on a segregated basis. Policies that tend towards separation will be avoided, while those that are neutral or positively advance a shared future will be favoured.

This policy tool is broader than the current good relations aspect of equality proofing. I believe that this approach represents a groundbreaking development in the policymaking process and demonstrates a solid commitment by my Department to building a shared future.

Europe 2020: Flagship Initiatives

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what work his Department is undertaking as part of the Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative.

(AQO 1776/11-15)

Dr Farry: EUROPE 2020, the European Union strategy for Jobs and Growth, proposes three priorities:

- smart growth – developing a knowledge and innovation based economy;
- sustainable growth – promoting a more resource efficient, competitive economy; and
- inclusive growth – delivering economic, social and territorial cohesion.

My Department plays a major role in contributing to this agenda by promoting research and development activity, raising the skills profile of the population and helping people address barriers which are preventing them from realising their full potential.

My Department provides more than £50m per annum in funding for higher education R&D and in supporting its translation into commercial opportunities and scientific breakthroughs.

It is recognised that enhancing the skills profile of the workforce helps to promote a more efficient and competitive economy. In that regard I have committed to delivering over 200,000 qualifications including 44,000 apprenticeships by 2015.

Through the operation of the employment service and the European Social Fund I am contributing to the delivery of economic social and territorial cohesion by helping people to prepare for an access to the labour market. My target is to assist 114,000 working age benefit clients into employment by 2015.

My Department also plays a full part in the Barroso Taskforce Working Group. It chairs the Competitiveness and Employment Group as well as being active participants in other groups.

I am committed through the activities of this group and my department's contribution to the work of the other thematic groups to ensuring that NI achieve its target of increasing its draw down of competitive EU funding by 20% by 2015.

Welfare Reform

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he will ensure that the dissolution of his Department will not have a negative impact on the delivery of Welfare Reform.

(AQO 1777/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department is engaged in important functions which will continue irrespective of where the functions will ultimately lie.

The Department's role across all areas is to increase the skill levels of the working age population and, within the Employment Service, to address specifically the skills barriers of those who are unemployed to help them get into work.

The Member will recognise that Welfare Reform is primarily a matter for the Minister for Social Development.

I have responsibility for the development of the new Employment Programme to replace Steps to Work. This important programme will be integral to the success of the delivery of Welfare Reform and whilst it will complement the Welfare Reform programme, it is a separate initiative. The new Employment Programme should be in place by Autumn 2013 and the intervening period is a critical time for the Department.

I am also a member of the Executive Sub-Committee on Welfare Reform. In addition my officials are involved in a variety of Welfare Reform fora including the Senior Sponsoring Group, Programme Board, Consultative Forum, Benefits Realisation workshop, Risk Review workshop, Steering Groups and meetings to ensure that policy, ICT and delivery issues are addressed.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Committee Papers

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why papers to prepare members of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment for a presentation from her Department on 22 March 2012 were received less than 24 hours beforehand.

(AQW 9927/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): There will be occasions when it proves impractical to meet the set deadline for written briefings.

We will continue to prepare written briefings in the timeliest fashion possible.

Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what role the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association plays, and has played to date, in the process of allocating business developments to industrial parks, such as Bridgewater Park, Banbridge.

(AQW 10263/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is unaware of the involvement of the Northern Ireland Retail Trade Association.

Business Parks

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline how elected public representatives are involved in the process of developing local business parks, such as Bridgewater Park, Banbridge.

(AQW 10264/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has no role or involvement in retail business parks such as Bridgewater Park, Banbridge and cannot comment on any role undertaken by other elected public representatives.

Ministerial Cars and Drivers

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of departmental staff who have availed of ministerial cars and drivers in each of the last three years; (ii) the cost of providing the service; and (iii) whether the benefit derived is subject to income tax.

(AQW 10334/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Responsibility for Ministers' cars was transferred to Departments with effect from 1st April 2011.

At this time it was agreed that when not needed for Ministerial purposes, cars would be available for other Departmental use, including the transport of officials. All use of the DETI Minister's car by DETI staff is solely for official purposes and as such there is no benefit to any DETI personnel in relation to their use.

The information sought on the number of DETI staff who have used the Minister's car in the period 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2012 and the cost of providing the service is not held centrally and therefore could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Strategic Energy Framework Targets

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much of the 1400-1800MW of renewable electricity required to meet the Strategic Energy Framework targets (i) will be from community owned wind farms or turbines; and (ii) will be invested in communities through community benefit funds.

(AQW 10409/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The 40% target is a technology neutral target and there are no requirements for technology specific targets within the 40%. While DETI receives information on the level of electricity generated from all renewable sources, not just wind, by way of monitoring progress against the 40% target, this does not include details of wind farm ownership.

Community benefits and the funds available for such are a commercial matter between the wind farm developer and the local community. No such details are held by DETI.

Wind Farms: Deployment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much community benefit has been accrued through the deployment of wind farms, broken down by project; and how this compares to similar projects in Britain.

(AQW 10410/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am aware that a range of community benefits have been agreed between wind farm developers and communities, and also bi-laterally with individuals, throughout Northern Ireland. These arrangements have been developed and agreed on a voluntary basis and the information you request is not held by DETI.

Minimum Wage

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what role her Department has in setting minimum wage levels.

(AQW 10460/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Executive has no statutory role in setting minimum wage levels. Schedule 3 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 includes 'the subject matter of the National Minimum Wage Act 1998' amongst the matters reserved to the UK Government. My officials do, however, engage with other Northern Ireland departments, the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Low Pay Commission to ensure that Northern Ireland circumstances are taken into account when the minimum wage is being set.

Minimum Wage

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what opportunities exist for the Executive to vary minimum wage levels in Northern Ireland from that of the national level.

(AQW 10461/11-15)

Mrs Foster: None. The National Minimum Wage Act 1998 does not permit regional variation in the minimum wage.

NI2012

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much has been spent on promoting NI2012 (i) locally; (ii) in the Irish Republic; and (iii) overseas.

(AQW 10465/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the Member to the reply I gave to AQW 9224/11-15.

'Our Time, Our Place' Programme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 9647/11-15, to detail (i) the occasions when Co Fermanagh has featured as part of the NI2012 campaign; and (ii) what visitor attractions were promoted.

(AQW 10472/11-15)

Mrs Foster: To date Co. Fermanagh has featured extensively across the ni2012 campaign in various media channels across both the Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland marketplace. These media channels have included TV, outdoor, local and national press, press releases and digital activation through ni2012.com and the NITB social media channels.

To date Co. Fermanagh has received £359,793 worth of media value through the ni2012 campaign, with a focus across a wide variety of visitor attractions including: Fermanagh Lakelands, The Happy Days International Beckett Festival, Waterway Ireland Classic Fishing Festival, Enniskillen Castle and Lough Erne Resort.

Broadband Provision: Funding

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what funding programmes are available for broadband provision; (ii) who is responsible for administering the programmes; and (iii) how much funding is allocated to each programme.

(AQW 10482/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A range of technologies are used to deliver broadband services in Northern Ireland. These include fixed line, wireless, mobile and satellite. Under funding packages such as the Northern Ireland Broadband Fund and the Remote Broadband Services Contract my Department has supported companies such as North West Electronics and Onwave to deliver widespread access to high speed fixed wireless and satellite options for those premises unable to obtain a fixed line service.

There are no programmes currently available in Northern Ireland for broadband provision. My Department is developing two further investments under our published Telecommunications Action Plan. These will deliver a broadband service of at least 2megabits per second and increase access to mobile voice and data services. A range of Northern Ireland Executive, UK Government and European funding streams will be used for their delivery.

Belfast is one of the ten UK cities named under the UK Government's £100m Super-Connected Cities initiative. Funding under this initiative is allocated by the Department of Culture, Media and Sports. Belfast City Council will administer funding in Northern Ireland. The amount of funding will not be known until summer 2012.

Gas Wells

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how frequently the Health and Safety Executive will be required to inspect gas wells, should fracking proceed.

(AQW 10516/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Under the powers of the Health and Safety at Work Order (Northern Ireland) 1978, HSENI has the power to inspect any work activity, at any time and without prior notification.

The frequency of inspection of any exploration drilling project will be determined by a range of factors, including the type and number of drilling operations, the stage of development of the drilling and the levels of risk and management control. Inspection frequency will be assessed on a case by case basis and will include both announced and unannounced visits.

Any exploration drilling operator, will by law, need to give HSENI 30 days notification prior to the commencement of any drilling and also provide HSENI with daily drilling reports to allow monitoring.

As no detail is currently available in relation to proposed fracking activities it is impossible to determine the frequency at this time.

Bridgewater Park, Banbridge: Expansion

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her Department's position on the expansion of Bridgewater Park, Banbridge, with specific reference to the investment and job creation possibilities for Banbridge and the surrounding area as a result of the proposed Tesco Extra Superstore.

(AQW 10540/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has no role or involvement in retail business parks such as Bridgewater Park, Banbridge.

Invest NI: Northern Ireland Audit Office Report

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to the Northern Ireland Audit Office report on the performance of InvestNI, how many of the reported 42,600 jobs that were created in the last three years were attributable to the (i) Enterprise Development Programme; and (ii) Social Enterprise Programme.

(AQW 10543/11-15)

Mrs Foster: It should be noted that the 42,600 jobs reported by the NI Audit Office was based on a period of 9 years (2002/03 – 2010/11) and not 3 years, as stated in the question.

Both the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) and Social Enterprise Programme provided capability development support and were delivered by an External Delivery Organisation. As such, there were no jobs for either of the programmes included in the figure of 42,600.

However,

The EDP Monitoring Report, undertaken by KPMG, estimated that there were nearly 4,400 jobs created by the programme during its lifetime (1st April 2009 – 30th September 2011), and

There have been 742 jobs created since the Social Entrepreneurship Programme began in June 2006.

Craigavon Borough Council: Grant Moneys

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 1338/11, for an update on any action either taken, or proposed to be taken, in relation to recouping grant monies from Craigavon Borough Council for the provision of biomass boilers.

(AQW 10584/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A writ of summons was served on Craigavon Borough Council in November 2011 and DETI continues to work with Craigavon Borough Council to resolve the matter.

Wind Farms: Development

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration she has given to the establishment of a not-for-profit body, akin to Renewable Energy Scotland or Community Energy Wales, to implement best practice in terms of community engagement and community benefit in the development of wind farms.

(AQW 10595/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Last year, my Department established a group on Planning & Renewable Energy with a remit to work together to ensure that renewable energy projects and installations are delivered in time to meet Executive renewable energy targets. It has been set up as a sub-group of the Sustainable Energy Interdepartmental Working Group (SEIDWG) and includes representatives from DETI and DOE. The sub-group will consider available guidance and good practice in other regions relating to community benefits and determine if additional government guidance or actions are required.

Wind Farms: Public Register of Community Benefits

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration she has given to the development of a public register of community benefits from wind farm projects, similar to that currently being developed by the Scottish Government.

(AQW 10597/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I refer to the answer given in response to AQW 10595/11-15.

Legislation

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) what proposals for legislation, subject to Executive approval, she has introduced or intends to introduce between April 2012 and March 2015; (ii) the anticipated timescale for the introduction of each Bill; and (iii) the intention of each Bill.

(AQW 10626/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI has identified its potential legislative requirements for the remainder of the mandate of the Assembly. However, these proposals are subject to consideration by the Executive and it would therefore not be appropriate or possible to pre-empt this consideration by providing the information you request.

Procurement: Enterprise Northern Ireland and Invest NI

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what were the terms of settlement in the action over procurement between Enterprise Northern Ireland and InvestNI; and what procurement changes have been made by InvestNI as a result.

(AQW 10745/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A settlement on the action taken by Enterprise NI (ENI) against Invest NI's procurement of the Business Start Programme was reached on the following basis:-

- The Parties, whilst continuing to differ in their views in relation to the issues raised in the litigation, have agreed that Invest NI will terminate the current procurement process, and that the legal action will end, on the basis that Invest NI will be going back out to the market with a revised proposal for the provision of a business start service.
- In seeking to agree a deal, ENI requested that Invest NI make a contribution to its legal costs, at an amount which Invest NI did not consider either realistic or feasible. Following negotiation, Invest NI agreed to make a proportionate contribution towards ENI's legal costs.
- A joint public statement was agreed by both parties.

The case was not abandoned or conceded by Invest NI. Invest NI remains firmly of the opinion that the process was transparent, fair and robust. Invest NI will continue to use Central Procurement Directorate to facilitate future procurement competitions.

T-Mobile: Network Service in the Glenariffe Area

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has discussed with T-Mobile its decision to switch off its network service in the Glenariffe area; and whether she will ask that the service be reinstated immediately.

(AQW 10817/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My officials have contacted T-Mobile to obtain further information. I also understand that the Member has also been in contact with the company, which is examining ways to restore services. The mobile telecommunications sector is a regulated and privatised market and it is a commercial decision for Mobile Network Operators to decide how to manage their networks and address coverage commitments associated with licensing conditions. I have agreed to sponsor the Mobile Operators Event on 2 May 2012. This forum presents an excellent opportunity for Members of the Legislative Assembly to raise matters such as this with the network operators.

Renewable Energy

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline any discussions she has had with her counterparts in the Republic of Ireland about maximising all-island economic and employment opportunities within the renewable energy sector.
(AQO 1798/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have had no recent discussions with my ministerial counterparts in the Republic.

However my department maintains close contacts with the relevant departments on both policy and operational issues. In particular, Invest Northern Ireland has been working on a range of initiatives to maximise the economic opportunities from the renewable energy sector.

In recent years Invest Northern Ireland has co-published two studies on marine offshore energy in collaboration with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland. It maintains links with the Marine Institute in Dublin and Galway on renewable energy technologies and other organisations through the Marine Renewables Industry Association.

Vion Food UK

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact that the recent jobs announcement at Vion Foods UK will have on the economy.
(AQO 1799/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The recent investment announcement by Vion Food UK Ltd at its Cookstown site will directly result in the creation of 164 new jobs in a disadvantaged area. In addition, the £11.5 million investment will see an increased capacity at the site which will enable the company to accept more pigs from local farmers. This will impact positively on other areas of the supply chain such as feed suppliers, haulage and distribution companies.

Jobs Fund

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the Jobs Fund.
(AQO 1800/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The £19 million Jobs Fund was launched last year to help businesses create new, sustainable jobs that will tackle our current levels of unemployment.

To date there has been a very encouraging uptake across the range of Jobs Fund measures and this is already making a positive impact on the target of creating 4,000 new jobs by March 2014. The largest single project announced under the fund so far was the 336 job announcement by Capita Life and Pensions in Belfast. I also recently announced 164 new jobs at Vion Foods UK as part of an expansion at its operation in Cookstown.

The Jobs Fund also includes support for new business starts by residents of Neighbourhood Renewal Areas and by young people Not in Employment, Education or Training and this support has already led to the creation of more than 200 new jobs to date.

I hope to be in a position soon to confirm these job creation numbers for the first full year of operation. I am very confident that they will clearly demonstrate the immediate and positive impact the Jobs Fund is having on new job creation.

Film Production

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact of the UK Budget 2012 on the growth of the film industry in Northern Ireland.
(AQO 1801/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The proposed tax incentive for high end television drama announced in the Chancellor's recent Budget coupled with existing funding mechanisms including the Northern Ireland Screen Fund will greatly enhance the opportunity for Invest NI and Northern Ireland Screen to secure new high value cinematic television projects, such as 'Game of Thrones'. This production alone, over the first two series, has led to investment of approximately £40million across a range of activities and geographic locations in Northern Ireland.

Through the work of NI Screen, HBO have recently confirmed that the third series of Game of Thrones will be filmed in Northern Ireland and the agency continues to work on securing other significant productions for the current financial year.

When considered alongside the Paint Hall and the new Titanic Studios in Belfast; the Linen Mill Studio in Banbridge and the many stunning locations available, Northern Ireland is well placed to benefit from this proposed new incentive when further details become available later this year.

Film and Television Production

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her Department has to attract TV and film companies to work in Northern Ireland following the tax credit for this sector announced in the UK Budget 2012.
(AQO 1802/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI financial assistance to Northern Ireland Screen includes support for a range of high level marketing activities to attract internationally mobile film and TV projects to Northern Ireland. These include, among others, hosting events at the Cannes Film Festival and attendance at MIPTV and MIPCOM – two of the most important trade events in the production calendar. The proposed tax incentive for high end television drama announced in the Chancellor's recent Budget coupled with existing funding mechanisms including the Northern Ireland Screen Fund will greatly enhance the opportunity for Invest NI and Northern Ireland Screen to secure new high value cinematic television projects.

When considered alongside the Paint Hall and the new Titanic Studios in Belfast; the Linen Mill Studio in Banbridge and the many stunning locations available, Northern Ireland is well placed to benefit from this proposed new incentive when further details become available later this year.

Foreign Direct Investment

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the importance of Foreign Direct Investment to economic recovery.

(AQO 1803/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The NI Economic Strategy recognises that Foreign Direct Investment, FDI, can play an important role in Northern Ireland's economic recovery. In order to compete more effectively within the global economy we need to attract and embed greater levels and higher quality inward investment into Northern Ireland.

FDI is not only an important source of employment and increased prosperity, it can also provide Northern Ireland with extended market reach, new management skills, knowledge and opportunities for our locally-owned companies to enter global supply chains.

Over the last three years we have seen inward investors commit to over 130 new investments which promoted over 9,000 jobs.

Offshore Renewable Energy Strategic Action Plan

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the extent of the targets within the Offshore Renewable Energy Strategic Action Plan.

(AQO 1804/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Offshore Renewable Energy Strategic Action Plan 2012-2020 does not set specific targets but rather identifies the opportunity to develop up to 900MW of offshore wind and 300MW of tidal energy in Northern Ireland waters up to 2020 without significant impact on the environment or other marine users.

Informed by this, the current Crown Estate Offshore Renewable Energy Leasing Round is seeking a 600MW offshore wind project off the South Down coast and multiple tidal projects around Rathlin of up to 200MW. The successful development of these projects will contribute to the overall target within the Strategic Energy Framework of 40% renewable electricity by 2020 and to future targets beyond that date.

Food Harvest 2020

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline any discussions she has had, or intends to have, with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about the potential economic opportunities for Northern Ireland within its Food Harvest 2020 strategy.

(AQO 1805/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have not had any discussions with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about the Food Harvest 2020 Strategy and none are currently planned to take place.

Fuel Costs

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact that rising fuel costs is having on large energy users.

(AQO 1806/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Large energy users tend to negotiate individual contracts with their energy suppliers, hence it is difficult to quantify the impact of rising fuel costs. However such increases will be unwelcome, and may impact on their competitiveness.

As I advised the Assembly on 13 March, Invest NI, under its Selective Financial Assistance schemes, will consider, on a pilot basis, providing assistance to a limited number of large energy users who have proposals for capital expenditure which will make a significant impact on energy efficiency and therefore reduce their costs and improve competitiveness.

Department of the Environment

District Councils: Former CEOs

Mrs D Kelly asked Minister of the Environment, in each of the last five years (i) how many former CEOs of district councils have obtained consultancy work through the Local Government Staff Commission; (ii) how many former CEOs were not recommended for consultancy work; (iii) the reasons why they were not recommended for this work; and (iv) to outline the process for selection.

(AQW 9560/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The information requested is as follows:

- (i) Three former CEOs had notified the Local Government Staff Commission that they were interested in consultancy work and subsequently obtained assignments
- (ii) None
- (iii) Not applicable
- (iv) Situations occasionally arise where a need for the short term injection of independent expertise for business or training purposes is identified by councils. To ensure it is possible to meet this need quickly, and in line with its responsibility on recruitment matters, the Staff Commission maintains a standing list of individuals suitable to carry out assignments on a consultancy basis. Councils decide which individual they wish to carry out the work identified.

The standing list compiled by the Commission following public advertisement and open competition in October 2009 has been periodically topped up with suitable applicants. A further open competition will be advertised in September 2012 to refresh the standing list which will comprise individuals identified as suitable.

Northern Coast: Funding for Derelict Sites

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will extend the funding for derelict sites on the North Coast to Ballycastle.

(AQW 10343/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I would very much like to extend the principle of my Portrush/Portstewart intervention to other districts suffering similar problems. The principle of such intervention remains one in which I believe and a goal towards which I continue to work.

Such projects can only be tackled, however, if supporting funding is available. One potential mechanism to take this type of initiative forward may be through in year monitoring rounds, or if unspent monies become available at the end of the financial year.

Statutory Off Road Notification Certificates

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment whether a Statutory Off Road Notification Certificate must be applied for annually for a vehicle that is permanently off the road.

(AQW 10378/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The law requires that the registered keeper of a vehicle must either license it or, if it is being kept off the road, make an annual statutory off-road notification (SORN).

The requirement to make a SORN on an annual basis ensures that vehicle keepers have to make contact with the Driver & Vehicle Agency at least once a year, and that helps to ensure that the vehicle details on the register are up to date. An accurate record is vital to support enforcement efforts, the work of the police and other enforcement agents, and road safety generally.

SORN also underpins the system of continuous registration that has contributed to the reduction in motor tax evasion to below 1%.

However, the Department for Transport, which has policy responsibility for vehicle licensing throughout the UK, is considering the issue under the Red Tape Challenge, and I am advised that removing the need for motorists to make an annual SORN is one of the measures being considered.

Planning Management Board: Referrals

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 4434/11-15, (i) how many of the 22 Planning Management Board referrals were in relation to large-scale residential development sites; and (ii) how many housing units were involved in each case.

(AQW 10419/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Of the 22 Planning Management Board referrals referred to in AQW4434/11-15, 11 applications include residential development as all or part of the proposal.

These are detailed below:

Reference	Number of residential units
Z/2009/0181	121

Reference	Number of residential units
F/2007/0432	11
Q/2007/0720/F	28
Z/2006/2906	291
M/2006/1492	15
U/2006/0604	9
U/2006/0534	31
U/2006/0209	4
Y/2006/0087	93
W/2005/0668	45
H/2004/1285	26

It is important to note that in considering whether or not an application meets the criteria for a Management Board Referral, as set out in the 'Guidance to the Management Board Referral Process within Planning Service' which was issued to Councils in May 2007, the Department will take into account a variety of factors such as the zoning in the area plan and the planning history; the number of residential units is only one of these factors.

Planning Management Board: Referrals

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 4434/11-15, (i) how many of the eight Management Board referrals, where the decision was overturned, were in relation to large-scale residential development sites; and (ii) how many housing units were involved in each case.

(AQW 10478/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Of the eight applications referred to in AQW4434/11-15, where the decision was overturned by the Planning Management Board, five applications include residential development as all or part of the proposal.

The numbers of units in each of the five applications, along with the detail of the decision change, are detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Number of residential units in applications where the Management Board have overturned decisions, and the nature of the decision change

Reference	No. of units	Decision Change
F/2007/0432	11	Approval recommendation changed to Refusal; Appeal dismissed
Q/2007/0720	28	Approval recommendation changed to Refusal; Appeal withdrawn
M/2006/1492	15	Approval recommendation changed to Refusal
U/2006/0209	4	Approval recommendation changed to Refusal
W/2005/0668	45	Approval recommendation changed to Refusal

Taxis: Licensing

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment how he will ensure that the introduction of legislation to require taxi operators to be licensed by his Department will not disproportionately affect smaller businesses.

(AQO 1700/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The consultation on fees for taxi operator licensing which took place in early 2011 resulted in the department further reviewing the proposed fees as the proposals received mixed support in the responses, whilst the concept of operator licensed was overwhelming endorsed in the responses. In listening to the taxi industry I have reduced the fees and made provision for 1, 3 or 5 year licences to make the licensing regime more affordable particularly for the small operator.

On 15 March I agreed to the introduction of taxi operator licensing as from 1 September 2012, as I believe that these new regulations will form the foundation for a modern taxi industry which is customer focused and able to deliver a first class taxi service to Northern Ireland. I also consider that the taxi industry will benefit from increased customer confidence and the more targeted enforcement that is provided for by the regulations.

In recognition of the impact that the current economic climate has had on the taxi industry I have set aside departmental monies which I will use to offset some of the costs of obtaining a taxi operator licence. This means that I have been able to reduce the

fee by £100 for all applications received between 1 September and 31 October 2012. This reduction will particularly benefit small operators as a one year operator licence for those that fall into this category will cost £95.

Retail Outlets: Border Regions

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of the Environment what account is taken of cross-border impacts when retail impact assessments are being considered for major out-of-town retail outlets in border regions.

(AQO 1704/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In the consideration of all major retail applications it is important to determine the catchment population the proposed development will serve. Where the catchment extends into the Republic of Ireland, my Department takes into consideration the effect of cross border expenditure which is drawn to the proposed development when it is assessing the potential retail impact of the proposed retail development. The Department will examine where trade is drawn from for each application, be it from other jurisdictions or other towns, cities or other places. Where it is considered appropriate transboundary consultation will be undertaken in line with The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (NI) 2012 with the relevant Government authorities (in the Rol) to ensure a full and comprehensive assessment of the application.

European Union Habitats Directive

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of our performance in meeting the obligations of the European Union Habitats Directive, particularly in relation to Strangford Lough.

(AQO 1705/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The European Commission's Habitats Directive has made a significant contribution to nature conservation throughout Europe since it came into operation in 1992. It has presented us with many challenges in Northern Ireland but overall I consider our performance has been very satisfactory.

The most visible outcome of the Directive has been the identification and designation of 55 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in Northern Ireland. Once two additional marine SACs at the Skerries and Causeway and at the Maidens have been confirmed, I shall be satisfied that Northern Ireland is moving positively to complete its obligations.

SACs and Special Protection Areas designated under the related Birds Directive together comprise the Natura 2000 Network of European Sites. These sites are afforded protection under the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc) Regulations 1995 (as amended) which transpose the Habitats Directive in Northern Ireland.

Article 17 of the Habitats Directive also commits each Member State to reporting to the EC, every six years, on progress that has been made within its territory on restoring and/or maintaining favourable conservation status of both habitats and species that are of particular Community interest. This reporting obligation generates a substantial work programme, involving detailed scientific survey of each SAC and subsequent data assessment. NIEA is presently engaged in the third reporting cycle covering the period 2007 to 2012, and the resultant report is due for submission to the EC in June 2013.

Strangford Lough has been designated as both an SAC and SPA. To ensure that its features of European importance were widely known and understood, the Department produced a Statutory Management Scheme for the Lough in 2001, in conjunction with the then Strangford Lough Management Committee.

Members will know of the ongoing issues in relation to restoring the Modiolus reefs in the Lough from damage. Members will be aware that the Commission is not satisfied that sufficient progress is being made in implementing a Restoration Plan that was agreed in 2006. I have had several meetings with the DARD Minister on this issue and we shall shortly be meeting again. The situation is serious. The Commission has initiated a pilot case infringement action. I believe there is now a need for a decisive approach to recognise the risk of significant financial penalties, to fully demonstrate the right response to the Modiolus damage, think and act innovatively in respect of fishing interests and ensure this issue is resolved once and for all.

Planning Management Board: Referrals

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what is the average length of time between a planning application being referred to a Management Board and a decision being made on whether it meets the criteria.

(AQW 10559/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In the business year 2011-12, 19 planning applications were referred to the Management Board. With regard to these applications, the median time period between a planning application being referred to the Management Board and a decision being made as to whether it meets the criteria is 43 working days.

In responding to this question, the median has been used as the measure of "average" processing performance, in line with standard planning reporting practice.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Servants: Full-time Trade Union Officials

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 5792/11-15, what is the gross annual cost to the public purse of employing these 28 officials.

(AQW 6628/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The gross annual cost to the public purse of employing the 28 trade union representatives is £915,459. This figure represents the total of the current annual salary spine points, the employers' National Insurance Contributions and the employers' pension contributions of the trade union representatives.

I have asked officials to review this with Departments.

Civil Servants: Bonuses

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) the number of civil servants who received bonuses; and (ii) the total amount of the bonuses paid, broken down by Department.

(AQW 9774/11-15)

Mr Wilson: For each of the last three years, (i) the number of civil servants who received bonuses and (ii) the total amount of bonuses paid, broken down by Department is demonstrated in the table.

Department	Year	Number of Staff	Total Amount
DARD	2009/10	144	69,800
	2010/11	261	41,901
	2011/12	96	53,056
DCAL	2009/10	68	17,525
	2010/11	77	20,550
	2011/12	25	9,100
DE	2009/10	202	41,750
	2010/11	161	35,370
	2011/12	126	36,197
DEL	2009/10	116	43,253
	2010/11	142	46,472
	2011/12	44	13,100
DETI	2009/10	41	21,220
	2010/11	44	28,250
	2011/12	35	19,850
DOE	2009/10	129	51,457
	2010/11	8	3,950
	2011/12	0	0
DFP	2009/10	332	117,730.20
	2010/11	466	140,595
	2011/12	475	146,693
DHSSPS	2009/10	95	38,085
	2010/11	57	27,300
	2011/12	69	24,750

Department	Year	Number of Staff	Total Amount
DOJ	2009/10	287	76,966
	2010/11	393	93,323
	2011/12	347	78,169
DRD	2009/10	164	72,975
	2010/11	98	32,400
	2011/12	74	30,550
DSD	2009/10	1,245	235,066
	2010/11	805	176,370
	2011/12	841	216,560
OFMDFM	2009/10	40	13,850
	2010/11	44	13,200
	2011/12	34	11,928
PPS	2009/10	394	53,972
	2010/11	120	35,298.80
	2011/12	213	34,816

Note: 2011/12 information is provided for the year to date up to the end of February 2012

Construction Sector Jobs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) to provide the data on which he based his claim that the projects announced on the 14 February 2012 will generate in excess of 2,500 construction sector jobs; and (ii) to provide a breakdown of (a) the number of jobs relating to each project; and (b) the different grades and specifications of the workers involved.
(AQW 10307/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In my statement to the Assembly on 14th February I announced the outcome of the Executive's deliberations on how to address the financial consequences of the Irish Government's decision to materially revise its funding commitment to the A5 and A8 road schemes. I gave details of the investment in two sections of the A5, the A2 Greenisland Road scheme; the A8 Belfast to Larne dual carriageway; the next phase of the Altnagelvin Hospital refurbishment; and acceleration of both the new Omagh Hospital and Phase B of the Ulster Hospital. The experience of the two departments concerned in these projects (DRD and DHSSPS) and their consultation within the industry, including the Construction Employers Federation, indicates that these projects have the potential to create in excess of 2,500 construction sector jobs.

I am not in a position to provide a detailed breakdown of the individual jobs relation to each project, or the different grades and specifications of the workers involved.

Petrol and Diesel Duty Rates: Devolution

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what analysis his Department has carried out on the benefits having devolved powers to set petrol and diesel duty rates.
(AQW 10500/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Department of Finance and Personnel has not carried out any analysis on the benefits of having devolved powers to set petrol and diesel duty rates.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Bonuses: Senior Managers in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total amount of bonus payments received by senior managers in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years.
(AQW 10347/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): No bonuses were paid to the senior management in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust in any of the last three years. My Department took the decision not to allow bonus payments in this period in light of the current economic climate.

Hospitals: Security Staff

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many security staff are employed on a full-time basis at each hospital.

(AQW 10349/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of security staff employed on a full-time basis by hospital was provided by the Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Trusts and is given in the table below. These figures have not been validated by the Department.

Number of security staff employed on a full-time basis by Hospital as at March 2012

Trust	Hospital	Headcount
Belfast	Belfast City Hospital	21
	Mater Hospital	8
	Musgrave Park Hospital	22
	Royal Victoria Hospital	39
Northern	Antrim	2
	Causeway	1
	Holywell	2
South Eastern	Downe	2
	Lagan Valley	5
	Ulster	19
Southern	Craigavon Area	See notes below.
	Daisy Hill	
Western	Altnagelvin	See notes below.
	Erne	
	Tyrone & Fermanagh	
	Tyrone County	

Source: Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Trusts

Notes:

- 1 The Northern Trust have a contract with Securitas Ltd who provide 2 full-time staff in Antrim Area Hospital who cover 3pm to 6am, 1 full-time staff in Causeway Hospital who covers 10pm to 6am and 2 full-time staff in Holywell Hospital who cover 5pm to 6am.
- 2 Security at Craigavon Area Hospital and Daisy Hill Hospital is provided by the portering service. These staff carry out a range of duties including security; therefore they do not provide security on a full-time basis.
- 3 Security at the Altnagelvin Hospital is provided by the portering service on a 24/7 basis. These staff carry out a range of duties including security; therefore they do not provide security on a full-time basis.
- 4 Security at the Erne Hospital is a contracted-in service and security staff are not directly employed by the Western HSC Trust. The contracted workers are part-time.
- 5 Only part-time staff are employed to provide security at Tyrone & Fermanagh and Tyrone County Hospitals.

Hospitals: No Smoking Zones

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 9711/11-15, why smoking cannot be prohibited immediately at all Health and Social Care Trust properties.

(AQW 10352/11-15)

Mr Poots: As stated in my response to AQW 9711/11-15, the Smoking (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 only covers public and workplaces which are enclosed or substantially enclosed. In order for the Department to prohibit smoking entirely on all Health and Social Care Trust properties, the introduction of new legislation would be required, a process which would take at least six months to complete.

My Department is already engaged in a comprehensive programme of legislative change with regards to tobacco control. In addition to banning the sale of tobacco from vending machines, which took effect from 1 March 2012, I will be commencing regulations to ban the display of tobacco products in shops later this year. The Northern Ireland Executive has also recently agreed to the drafting of a Tobacco Retailer Sanctions Bill which I hope to introduce to the Assembly in November.

In light of this, I feel that it is more appropriate at present for the matter of smoking on Trust grounds to be addressed by individual Trusts through their workplace smoking policies. It should focus on prohibiting smoking at the entrance to hospitals.

Proposals to move towards smoke-free Trust grounds will require effective planning in order to ensure that the needs of patients and staff are considered and that effective implementation measures are put in place.

Prisoners: Prescription Medicines

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 10076/11-15, (i) to provide a breakdown (a) of the prescription medicines that were used; and (b) by gender; and (ii) whether a risk assessment was carried out on each prisoner.

(AQW 10353/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is set out below:

(i)(a) the prescription medicines that were used

Year	Prescription medicines used
2009/10	Betahistine Dihydrochloride, Peptac Liquid, Topiramate, Tramadol, Diazepam, Co-Codamol, Floxetine, Chlorpromazine, Diclofenac, Zispin, Eflexor, Paracetamol, Pregabalin, Mitrazapine, Migraveve, Ventolin Inhaler, Lansoprasole, Lyrica, Phenergan, Seroquel
2010/11	Naproxen, Paracetamol, Epilim, Co-Codamol, Diclofenac Tramadol, Diazepam, Sertraline, Tegretol, Amitryptaline, Chlorpromazine, Mitrazapine, Pregabalin, Citalopram, Ventolin Inhaler, Propranolol, Lyrica, Zopiclone, Thiamine, Buspar, Laxoberal
2011/12	Co-Codamol, Paracetamol, Pregabalin, Diazepam, Tegretol, Seroquel, Epilim, Tramadol, Naprosyn, Amitryptaline, Zispin, Peppermint Oil capsules, Chlorpromazine, Carbocisteine, Ventolin Inhaler, Zopiclone Mitrazapine, Hyoscine Butylbromide, Quetiapine Fumate

(i)(b) the gender of prisoners who overdosed on prescription medicines¹

Year	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Female	6	7	8
Male	17	18	27

1 These figures include confirmed overdoses along with alleged and suspected overdoses on prescription medicines.

(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 the location.

Gay Men's Clinic: Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why a replacement consultant has not been sought for the Gay Men's Clinic at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast.

(AQW 10355/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Belfast HSC Trust recently advertised for a locum consultant to cover maternity leave at the gay men's clinic, which is part of the genito urinary medicine (GUM) clinic; however, this recruitment exercise was unsuccessful. As an interim measure, until the consultant returns from maternity leave, the remaining GUM consultant staff have taken on additional work to cover the work associated with the vacant post but unfortunately it had not been possible to cover the gay men's clinic in the evening. All patients are now given appointments for GUM clinics during the day. The Trust has confirmed it intends to reinstate the evening clinic when the consultant returns from maternity leave.

Quality, Improvement and Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 2003

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether all the establishments and agencies defined by the Quality, Improvement and Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 are subject to the same registration process, including the application form and inspection process, under the Regulation and Improvement Authority (Fees and Frequency of Inspections) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

(AQW 10356/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 (the Order) requires any person who carries on an establishment or agency, as defined within the Order to be registered with the RQIA. The Order requires such persons to make an application to the RQIA providing information as prescribed in Regulations and to provide any other information which RQIA reasonably requires.

The Regulation and Improvement Authority (Registration) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, as amended, require the same registration process to be completed for all establishments and agencies on a form approved by RQIA.

The Regulation and Improvement Authority (Fees and Frequency of Inspections) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, as amended, provides for frequency of Inspections of regulated establishments and agencies, which varies according to the particular establishment or agency. Nursing Homes, Children's Homes and Residential Care Homes must be inspected at least twice annually (to include one announced and one unannounced visit), whereas other establishments and agencies are inspected annually and in the case of voluntary adoption agencies every three years.

Cigarette Vending Machines: Ban

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the compliance with the recent ban on cigarette vending machines.

(AQW 10361/11-15)

Mr Poots: As you are aware, regulations prohibiting the sale of tobacco products from vending machines, were introduced from 1 March 2012.

While there are no official figures available, unofficial reports from district council enforcement officers indicate high levels of compliance with the new legislation.

Dentists

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why dentists are required to use procedures and equipment that are deemed unnecessary by their counterparts in England and Scotland.

(AQW 10364/11-15)

Mr Poots: The majority of equipment and procedures used by dentists are not prescribed by my department. Certain specific types of equipment are underpinned by regulation and guidance such as radiological equipment and decontamination equipment. Radiological equipment is governed through regulations and is mandatory. England Scotland and Northern Ireland have issued separate guidance, within the last two years, on local decontamination in dental practices. This guidance is based on a broad evidence base ranging across; acts & regulations, codes of practice, British, European & International standards, research papers, official publications and expert opinion.

The guidance in Northern Ireland is largely consistent with that in the rest of the United Kingdom and was drafted with input with experts in local decontamination from across the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland using the best available information available at the time. There are some areas of the guidance which rely purely on expert opinion and there is some variance in this expert opinion across the United Kingdom countries.

In response to concerns recently raised by the British Dental Association (BDA) regarding variations in the guidance, my department issued an offer to the BDA on the 9 March 2012 to discuss the matter further and reach a common understanding on the guidance and deliver a way forward. My departmental officials await a response from the BDA on this offer.

Ballymena Health and Care Centre

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 5129/11-15, to detail the sources of capital funding secured for the completion of the new Ballymena Health and Care Centre.

(AQW 10374/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have set aside almost £25m funding for this project, to be met from the Departmental capital budget of £947.6m over the current Budget 2010 period ending in March 2015.

Inter-Ministerial Group on Sexual and Domestic Violence

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) which Ministers are part of the Inter-Ministerial Group on Sexual and Domestic Violence; and (ii) how many times and when it has met in the last 12 months.

(AQW 10377/11-15)

Mr Poots: Membership of the Inter-Ministerial Group (IMG) on Domestic and Sexual Violence is comprised as follows:

- Minister Poots - Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety;
- Minister Ford - Department of Justice;
- Minister Wilson - Department of Finance and Personnel;
- Minister McCausland -Department for Social Development;
- Minister O'Dowd -Department of Education;
- Minister Farry - Department for Employment and Learning, and
- Junior Minister Anderson and Junior Minister Bell - Office of the

First and Deputy First Minister.

IMG has met on three occasions, 21 May 2008, 30 September 2009 and 29 June 2010. The group has not met in the last 12 months but is due to meet again in May 2012. In the intervening periods between IMG meetings, any issue requiring ministerial involvement is dealt with by written correspondence.

Action for Children Annual Review 'Child Neglect 2011'

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, what strategies he intends to introduce to address Action for Children's annual review 'Child Neglect 2011' which stated that neglect is a primary or contributory reason in 50 percent of child protection registrations, the highest proportion when compared with other regions in the UK,

(AQW 10387/11-15)

Mr Poots: Safeguarding children, including children experiencing neglect in Northern Ireland, is a Programme for Government commitment. My department will ensure that account is taken of the findings and recommendations of Action for Children's report, Child Neglect in 2011: An Annual Review, in the course of developing and implementing a range of child safeguarding strategic initiatives to deliver on that commitment. These include the revision of existing child safeguarding policy and the establishment of a new child Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland, both of which have the potential to begin to address the problem of child neglect in Northern Ireland on a multi-disciplinary and inter-agency basis by ensuring that it identified and responded to at an earlier stage. A new Social Work Strategy for Northern Ireland, launched on 16 April 2012, will also make a significant contribution to this agenda.

This will build on a number of other strategies already in place, which are relevant to tackling neglect. These include: Care Matters in Northern Ireland, which outlines a strategic vision for wide-ranging improvements in services to children and young people in and on the edge of care; and Families Matter which gives priority to early intervention and prevention in family support services.

In addition, the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP), which is led by the Health and Social Care Board and includes representation of key children's agencies at the most senior level, is another mechanism of ensuring that a more integrated, evidence-based approach is taken to planning and coordinating the delivery of early help to families in Northern Ireland. Action for Children is represented on the CYPSP.

Independent Clinics

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) for his assessment of the expenditure incurred in the last two years to treat patients in independent clinics; (ii) whether waiting lists and meeting Government targets have been a contributory factor in the decisions to treat patients in independent clinics; and (iii) for his assessment of value for money when patients are treated in independent clinics.

(AQW 10394/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is important that people receive the appropriate care in a timely way. Supplementing healthcare capacity through the use of the independent sector is used as a short term measure to deliver improvements in waiting times.

Use of the independent sector is targeted at reducing waiting times across a wide range of services, particularly where there is insufficient in-house capacity. In recent years Independent Sector services have made a very significant contribution in ensuring people receive treatment in a timely manner.

The Health and Social Care Board is responsible for negotiating and managing contracts with the independent sector on behalf of the five trusts in Northern Ireland. Contracts for the procurement of assessment and/or treatment services are negotiated through a competitive tendering process aimed at ensuring best value for money. The Board carries out pre-contract quality assurance checks before contracts are let.

Incidents at Hospitals: Investigations

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what advice he has given to Health and Social Care Trusts to ensure the independence of investigations into incidents at hospitals.

(AQW 10415/11-15)

Mr Poots: Current guidance from the Department to the HSC on conducting incident reviews is contained in circular HSS (SQSD) 18/2007 – Conducting Patient Service/Look Back Exercises. This was issued in March 2007 and gives advice on how to conduct an independent incident review. A copy of the guidance can be accessed at http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/microsoft_word_-_hss_sqsd__18-07_patient_service_review_guidelines_-_final_feb07.pdf

Further guidance is contained in circular HSS (SQSD) 34/2007- HSC Regional Template and Guidance for Incident Review Reports. This was issued to the HSC in September 2007. A copy of the guidance can be accessed at http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hsc_sqsd__34-07_guidance.pdf

It is intended to carry out a review of the 2007 guidance within the next twelve months.

Umbilical Cord Blood

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether facilities exist to process umbilical cord blood, and if not, whether there are plans to obtain the necessary facilities.

(AQW 10424/11-15)

Mr Poots: Umbilical cord blood can currently be processed and stored at the Belfast Cord Blood Bank, which is part of the Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service.

Sexual Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there are any plans to update and renew the Sexual Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan 2008-2013, given that it expires in 2013.

(AQW 10437/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Sexual Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan 2008-2013 was published in December 2008 and contains provision for review of its Action Plan after 5 years. My Department has requested an interim progress report from the Public Health Agency, through the Sexual Health Improvement Network, to assess progress made towards achieving the Strategy's aim, objectives, targets and actions; identify any issues related to timescales and consider the need for any new objectives, targets or actions. Recommendations made to the Department on the basis of the findings will help inform decisions to update or renew the Strategy.

Dental Officers Employed by the Business Services Organisation

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many dental officers are currently employed by the Business Services Organisation; and (ii) whether this figure will change following the proposed amendments to the Statement of Dental Remuneration.

(AQW 10438/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Business Services Organisation does not employ any dental officers. However, the Health and Social Care Board employs 1 dental adviser and 4 dental officers who carry out a range of duties across the Health and Social Care Board and Business Services Organisation. It is not anticipated that this figure will change following the proposed amendments to the Statement of Dental Remuneration.

Reversal Colorectal Surgery: Waiting List

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people, at 1 April 2012, were on the waiting list for reversal colorectal surgery and what was the longest waiting time on the list.

(AQW 10466/11-15)

Mr Poots: At midnight on 31st March 2012, provisional inpatient waiting time data report that there were 17 patients on the waiting list for reversal colorectal surgery. The patient with the longest waiting time had been waiting 35 weeks.

Non-Animal Alternatives: Scientific Research

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he has taken to promote the use of non-animal alternatives in scientific research.

(AQW 10469/11-15)

Mr Poots: Animal experimentation is only permitted when there is no means of obtaining necessary knowledge other than by authorised animal experiments.

When assessing research proposals, the Department's Animal (Scientific Procedures) Act Inspector ensures that full consideration is given to alternatives, not only the replacement of procedures with others which do not use animals, but also the reduction of the number of animals used and the refinement of procedures to minimise pain and suffering. These three principles – replacement, reduction and refinement, known as 'the 3Rs' – are well established in the research community.

Animal Experiments

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to encourage universities to release more information on the animal experiments that they have undertaken.

(AQW 10471/11-15)

Mr Poots: Section 21 (7) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 requires appropriate information with respect to the use of protected animals for experimental or other scientific purposes to be published and to be laid before the Assembly each year. The universities provide DHSSPS with the information required for these purposes.

In addition to meeting this obligation, the universities also meet with school groups to discuss the use of animals in scientific experiments.

Animals: Testing of Household Products

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he intends to follow the decision, taken by authorities in the rest of the UK, to ban the testing of household products on animals.

(AQW 10473/11-15)

Mr Poots: In Northern Ireland no animals are being used for the testing of household products and my Department is not aware of any plans or proposals to do such testing in Northern Ireland.

I have no plans at present to bring forward legislation to ban such testing.

Fire and Rescue Service: Capital Programme

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 9871/11-15, in relation to the Fire and Rescue Service's Capital Programme, to detail the estimated cost of (i) red fleet; (ii) vehicles; (iii) information, communication and technology; (iv) preparing a business case for (a) a replacement fire station; and (b) refurbishing a fire station; and (v) preparing a business case for a replacement for Cushendall Fire Station.

(AQW 10479/11-15)

Mr Poots: NIFRS has a rolling programme for the replacement of red fleet, vehicles and ICT.

For 2012/13 NIFRS's indicative Capital Programme includes the following proposed expenditure:

(i) Red Fleet;

During 2012/13 NIFRS plans to spend some **£1.5m** replacing and upgrading the Emergency Red Fleet.

(ii) Vehicles;

During 2012/13 NIFRS plans to spend some **£0.6m** replacing and upgrading Rapid Response vehicles and ancillary vehicles.

(iii) Information, Communication and Technology;

During 2012/13 NIFRS plans to spend some **£1.3m** replacing and upgrading the ICT infrastructure.

(iv) preparing a business case for (a) a replacement fire station; and (b) refurbishing a fire station; (c) a replacement for Cushendall Fire Station.

A number of staff within NIFRS are involved in these processes across various directorates in addition to other duties and responsibilities. The input for each business case is specific to the project under consideration and the costs and time spent on development depend on the individual circumstances such as site feasibility studies, surveys etc. NIFRS does not maintain timesheets or costings in respect of such individual activities and therefore cannot provide an estimate of costs for such workstreams. In addition, input and commentary may be provided by departmental officials. No costing information is available at this level of detail.

Eating Disorders: Patients Transferred to the Republic of Ireland

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been transferred to the Republic of Ireland for treatment associated with eating disorders in each of the last three years.

(AQW 10484/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below shows the number of patients transferred to the Republic of Ireland for treatment associated with eating disorders in each of the last three years.

Year	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Number of patients transferred	2	0	0

Source: HSC Board

Eating Disorders: Patients Transferred to England

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 10200/11-15, how many patients received treatment associated with eating disorders prior to being transferred.

(AQW 10486/11-15)

Mr Poots: Of the 39 patients transferred to England for treatment associated with eating disorders between 2009/10 and 2011/12, all would have received treatment in Northern Ireland prior to transfer. Patients care is only authorised for transfer after the Health and Social Care Board has approved an Extra Contractual Referral which has been received from a consultant within the HSC in Northern Ireland. The consultant will make a referral if, in their clinical judgement, the patient requires specialist services.

Tackling Violence at Home Action Plan

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety who completed the assessment on the 'Tackling Violence at Home Action Plan: October 2010 to March 2012' and when was it completed.

(AQW 10487/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Tackling Violence at Home Action Plan covered an 18 month period from 1 October 2010 to 31 March 2012. Implementation of the Action Plan has been taken forward through various working and sub-groups, comprising key statutory and voluntary stakeholders.

The Regional Strategy Group on Domestic Violence is responsible for monitoring progress of actions and associated activities.

DHSSPS and DOJ are currently in the process of updating the final status of the actions within the Action Plan.

Draft Action Plan on Tackling Domestic and Sexual Violence 2012-13

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which stakeholders were involved or consulted during the development of the Draft Action Plan on Tackling Domestic and Sexual Violence 2012-13.

(AQW 10489/11-15)

Mr Poots: A joint Action Plan on Domestic and Sexual Violence has been developed to cover the period April 2012 to September 2013.

This Action Plan was developed on a collaborative basis in consultation with key statutory and voluntary sector organisations to ensure continued progression towards achieving the overall aims and objectives contained in the "Tackling Violence at Home" and "Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse" Strategies.

Actions for inclusion in the Action Plan were comprehensively considered by the relevant governance groups including the Regional Strategy Group on Domestic Violence; the Prevention and Support Sub Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence; the Protection and Justice Sub Group on Domestic Violence; and the Protection and Justice Sub Group on Sexual Violence. These groups comprise representation from key statutory and voluntary stakeholders.

Draft Action Plan on Tackling Domestic and Sexual Violence 2012-13

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on whose advice was an action point for 'Work Place Policies' not included in the Draft Action Plan on Tackling Domestic and Sexual Violence for 2012-13.

(AQW 10491/11-15)

Mr Poots: To date, the 5 Domestic Violence Partnerships (DVPs) have been at the forefront in delivering on actions with regard to workplace policy initiatives. DVPs in conjunction with their member organisations and in liaison with employer representative bodies, continue to actively promote workplace policies to offer support to employees who are experiencing domestic violence.

As the promotion of workplace policies with employers is now mainstreamed as an integral part of the work undertaken by the DVPs, an action in the Tackling Domestic and Sexual Violence Action Plan 2012-2013 was not considered necessary. This allows for new and emerging work to be prioritised and to feature in the Action Plan.

All actions for inclusion in the Tackling Domestic and Sexual Violence Action Plan 2012-2013 were carefully considered by the relevant governance groups which include representation from key statutory and voluntary stakeholders.

Domestic Violence: NICS Workplace Policy

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the NICS Workplace Policy on Domestic Violence was last reviewed and what amendments were made.

(AQW 10492/11-15)

Mr Poots: The NICS Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy has not been reviewed since it was introduced in 2006.

Domestic Violence: NICS Workplace Policy

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many times the NICS Workplace Policy on Domestic Violence has been accessed in each of the last five years.

(AQW 10493/11-15)

Mr Poots: The NICS Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy was introduced in 2006. It is not possible to ascertain the number of times it has been accessed in the last 5 years.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the process followed by Health and Social Care Trusts when diagnosing and treating patients with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, including the treatments which are licensed for (i) adults; and (ii) children.

(AQW 10494/11-15)

Mr Poots: In all Trusts assessment and treatment for ADHD for children and young people are dealt with by experienced paediatricians, and are in line with guidance published by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE).

Initial referral for assessment can come from a number of different sources, including GPs, Health Visitors, and education professionals.

Following referral, assessment for ADHD will always include a general assessment of mental health in order to exclude other causes for attention deficits such as mood disorders, anxiety or conduct disorder. Assessment involves detailed medical history, developmental history and history of childhood and school attendance and a cognitive assessment (if poor academic ability indicates it) in order to rule out learning difficulties or disabilities. Conners' Rating Scale questionnaires are used to assess attention and hyperactivity across all environments. The assessment may include school observation and liaison with any appropriate agencies involved e.g., GPs, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Educational Psychologists.

Where ADHD is diagnosed, treatment programmes include: psychological therapies such as psycho education, family support, cognitive behavioural therapy and other behaviour management strategies; and licensed medications including Concerta XL (methylphenidate), Equasym XL (methylphenidate) and Strattera (atomoxetine).

There is currently no dedicated service in Northern Ireland for adults with ADHD. However, mental health services may be able to provide interventions and support to alleviate some of the presenting symptoms.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Psychiatrist Treatment Waiting Times

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average psychiatrist treatment waiting times for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 10495/11-15)

Mr Poots: The figures requested are not available centrally within the DHSSPS, and they could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Waiting Times for an Initial Diagnosis

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average waiting times for an initial diagnosis for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in each Health and Social Trust area, including the average waiting times for a review appointment.

(AQW 10496/11-15)

Mr Poots: The figures requested are not available centrally within the DHSSPS, and they could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Lifeline

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many calls have been made to Lifeline in each month since its establishment.

(AQW 10509/11-15)

Mr Poots: Calls made to Lifeline each month since its establishment are as follows:

Feb 08	Mar 08	April 08	May 08	Jun 08	Jul 08	Aug 08	Sep 08	Oct 08	Nov 08	Dec 08
4435	5281	3048	4727	5677	4312	5939	4474	4684	4917	5226

Jan 09	Feb 09	Mar 09	Apr 09	May 09	Jun 09	Jul 09	Aug 09	Sep 09	Oct 09	Nov 09	Dec 09
6939	8376	9059	5380	6239	6990	6172	6086	4882	6632	8492	7528

Jan 10	Feb 10	Mar 10	Apr 10	May 10	Jun 10	July 10	Aug 10	Sep 10	Oct 10	Nov 10	Dec 10
8660	7465	7082	6626	8230	7654	7109	6870	8359	8708	7629	6836

Jan 11	Feb 11	Mar 11	April 11	May 11	Jun 11	Jul 11	Aug 11	Sept 11	Oct 11	Nov 11	Dec 11
8141	8396	7204	6625	8456	8314	8708	7893	7638	9042	8083	8657

Jan 12	Feb 12	March 12
9685	8092	9596

Meals on Wheels Service

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 9894/11-15, whether Health and Social Care Trusts will consider reimbursing customers for charges levied above those stated in the departmental circular. (AQW 10512/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has received no complaints from those in receipt of the Community Meals service with regard to the charge levied, and I have no plans to ask the Trusts to reimburse clients who paid above the charge set out in the Circular.

Lapatinib

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) whether a specific patient, or her doctor, has been informed why the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust decided not to fund the drug Lapatinib, which was recommended by her doctor to combat cancer, and which has already been prescribed for a number of patients; (ii) whether the criteria used by the Trust to make such decisions are published; and (iii) whether there is an appeal mechanism for such decisions or when an appeal mechanism will be introduced. (AQW 10518/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have been advised that the decision not to fund the drug Lapatinib in this specific case is the subject of a judicial review. It would be therefore not be appropriate for me to comment further on this case.

With regards the criteria used to make such decisions, the HSC Board wrote to all Health and Social Care Trusts on the 30 March 2012 disseminating the Individual Funding Request (IFR)/ Extra Contractual Referral (ECR) protocols to all relevant staff. Information on the criteria being applied is contained within the protocols which are available to the public on request. The protocols include guidance on the procedure if a request is declined.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the process followed by each Health and Social Care Trust when diagnosing patients with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, from initial GP appointment to treatment. (AQW 10533/11-15)

Mr Poots: In all Trusts assessment and treatment for ADHD for children and young people are dealt with by experienced paediatricians, and are in line with guidance published by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE).

Initial referral for assessment can come from a number of different sources, including GPs, Health Visitors, and education professionals.

Following referral, assessment for ADHD will always include a general assessment of mental health in order to exclude other causes for attention deficits such as mood disorders, anxiety or conduct disorder. Assessment involves detailed medical history, developmental history and history of childhood and school attendance and a cognitive assessment (if poor academic ability indicates it) in order to rule out learning difficulties or disabilities. Conners' Rating Scale questionnaires are used to assess attention and hyperactivity across all environments. The assessment may include school observation and liaison with any appropriate agencies involved e.g., GPs, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Educational Psychologists.

Where ADHD is diagnosed, treatment programmes include: psychological therapies such as psycho education, family support, cognitive behavioural therapy and other behaviour management strategies; and licensed medications including Concerta XL (methylphenidate), Equasym XL (methylphenidate) and Strattera (atomoxetine).

There is currently no dedicated service in Northern Ireland for adults with ADHD. However, mental health services may be able to provide interventions and support to alleviate some of the presenting symptoms.

Consultation Documents and Official Reports: Cost

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what was the cost to his Department of producing (i) consultation documents; and (ii) official reports in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 10538/11-15)

Mr Poots: The costs requested are:

- (i) The total cost to the department of producing consultations was £5840. This cost was incurred in producing an easy-read version of the Equality Impact Assessment for new Mental Capacity Legislation and Service framework for Mental Health and Wellbeing. As the department publishes its consultation documents on its website, these costs are kept to a minimum.
- (ii) The cost of producing official reports for this year was £6,221.50.

For breakdown of costs, see below

DHSSPS Official Reports produced during 2010/11

- Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals 2009 - £493.75
- DHSSPS Resource Accounts 2009-10 - £1,354.80
- HSC Pension Scheme Resource Accounts for year ended 31 March 2010 - £1,131.25
- HSC Superannuation Resource Accounts 2009-10 - £1,060.45
- NI HSC Pension Scheme Resource Accounts 2009-10 - £1,131.25
- DHSSPS Resource Accounts 2008-09 - £1,050.00

Total Cost for 2010/11 - £12,061.50

Sexually Transmitted Infections: Asymptomatic Testing

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether asymptomatic testing for sexually transmitted infections can be integrated into GP practices, given the difficulties for patients accessing genito-urinary medicine services.

(AQW 10554/11-15)

Mr Poots: With advances in testing procedures, it is now possible for GP Practices to perform check-ups on patients who are asymptomatic. In light of these advances a six month pilot, using a new model of sexual health care which will provide a sexual health check, is currently being undertaken in 12 GP Practices in the North Down area. Following an evaluation on its acceptability to patients and cost effectiveness, consideration will be given to the potential for rolling the service out across a wider area.

Nursing and Residential Care: Financial Support

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his Department's assessment of the cost of bringing the financial support for nursing and residential care up to the same standard as that provided in Scotland.

(AQW 10563/11-15)

Mr Poots: In 2007, the Assembly debated the possibility of introducing free personal care for care home residents. At that time, the cost of free personal care was estimated to be in excess of £30m and my predecessor in office declared it unaffordable. For my part, while I support the principle behind free personal care, you will appreciate that I have to conclude that it is not affordable within the resources currently available to me.

Cancer Patients: Radiotherapy

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of cancer patients since 1 March 2012 (i) who have been diagnosed with cancer and are due to receive radiotherapy; (ii) who have started radiotherapy treatment; and (iii) who had an appointment to start radiotherapy, but have received notification that their treatment will be delayed.

(AQW 10575/11-15)

Mr Poots: Radiotherapy treatment services in Northern Ireland are provided on a regional basis by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

I have been informed by the Belfast HSC Trust that between the period 1 March 2012 to 20 April 2012:

- (i) 535 patients were referred to the Trust for radiotherapy treatment following a cancer diagnosis;
- (ii) During this period, 529 patients have commenced radiotherapy treatment;

- (iii) Following one of the Trust's eight linear accelerators (LINC) being taken out of use between the 2 April 2012 and 20 April 2012, as the result of a diagnosis of a fault, a total of 14 patients who had been scheduled to start radiotherapy received notification that their treatment would be deferred by between one and three working days.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are currently being treated for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

(AQW 10589/11-15)

Mr Poots: The figures requested are not available centrally within the DHSSPS, and they could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Policy and Services for Children with ADHD were examined under the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability. The Review's report "A Vision of a Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service" estimated the prevalence of this disorder within the children's population to be between 3-7%. Taking account of children's population trend from 2001 to 2010, it is estimated that 9,600 children in Northern Ireland are affected by this disorder.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average waiting time between diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and the commencement of treatment.

(AQW 10590/11-15)

Mr Poots: The figures requested are not available centrally within the DHSSPS, and they could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Policy and Services for Children with ADHD were examined under the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability. The Review's report "A Vision of a Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service" estimated the prevalence of this disorder within the children's population to be between 3-7%. Taking account of children's population trend from 2001 to 2010, it is estimated that 9,600 children in Northern Ireland are affected by this disorder.

Human Trafficking

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services his Department provides to support victims of human trafficking.

(AQW 10593/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and Social Care Trusts (Trusts) have a central role and responsibility with regard to the recovery, support and rehabilitation of child victims of human trafficking and, with the Department of Justice and others, in the recovery and longer term support of adult victims.

Recovered child victims of trafficking are deemed to be "children in need" under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 and therefore the responsibility for provision of care and support to these children, including access to health and social care services falls to Trusts.

For recovered adult victims, the Department of Justice has a contract with Migrant Helpline, together with their delivery partner Women's Aid, to provide accommodation and a range of support services to the adult victim. Longer term access to health and social care services will be determined by the individual's immigration status and is subject to human rights considerations.

Legislation

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) what proposals for legislation, subject to Executive approval, he has introduced or intends to introduce between April 2012 and March 2015; (ii) the anticipated timescale for the introduction of each Bill; and (iii) the intention of each Bill.

(AQW 10636/11-15)

Mr Poots: At this time, I have already stated my intention, subject to the agreement of the Executive, to bring forward a number of Bills during the current Assembly mandate. The table below provides detail on the purpose of each legislative proposal. At this stage, I am not in a position to provide dates for the introduction of the Bills.

Legislation	Purpose
Tobacco Retailer Sanctions	To strengthen sanctions against retailers who regularly break the law with regards to underage sales of tobacco products.
Amendment to the Health and Social Care (Reform) Act (NI) 2009	To ensure that the range of services which the Business Service Organisation (BSO) is charged with providing has a proper regulatory base, and to allow for some expansion in the BSO's range of client bodies.

Legislation	Purpose
Amendment to the Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (NI) 2008	To provide DHSSPS with the necessary powers to create Dental, Ophthalmic and Pharmaceutical Performers' lists.
Amendment to the Health and Personal Social Services Act (NI) 2001	To introduce a more flexible range of sanctions to support the move to a "Fitness to Practice" model for the management of conduct processes in the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.
Mental Capacity (Health, Welfare and Finance)	To provide substitute decision-making arrangements and safeguards for people lacking mental capacity to make decisions for themselves in respect of health, welfare and finance.
Adoption and Children	To modernise the legal framework for adoption to better meet the needs of children and families and provide better quality, consistent and efficient services for everyone affected by adoption.
Devolution of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007	To devolve some powers currently vested in the Secretary of State under the Vetting and Barring Scheme in relation to work with children and vulnerable adults.
Amendment to the Fire and Rescue Order (NI) 2006	To change the composition of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service Board

Bills and Invoice Payments

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of non-Health and Social Care Trust bills and invoice payments processed on behalf of his Department by Account NI between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012 within (i) 30 calendar days; and (ii) 10 working days.

(AQW 10654/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below details the number of non-Health and Social Care Trust bills and invoice payments processed on behalf of my Department by Account NI between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012 within (i) 30 calendar days; and (ii) 10 working days.

Total (non HSC) Invoices Paid on Behalf of DHSSPS by Account NI Between 1 April 2011 – 31 March 2012	Total Paid within 30 working days	Total Paid within 10 working days
6,586	6,175	5,180

Domiciliary Care: Value for Money Audit

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) why the value for money audit of domiciliary care has been cancelled; and (ii) how the cost of domiciliary care will be funded.

(AQW 10670/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) To commission a value for money audit of domiciliary care at this time would risk duplication and generate confusion due to the extensive work programme currently taking place as a result of Transforming Your Care (TYC). TYC sets out the need to reform the whole of health and social care to improve quality, sustainability and safety for patient and clients. It is wide ranging and will undoubtedly include domiciliary service provision.
- (ii) The funding of domiciliary care provision will be considered as an integral part of the overall service-wide transformational change programme outlined in the TYC report, which includes a focus on increasing the services provided at home and in the community.

Social Work Students

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many social workers who registered with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council have not commenced an assessed year in employment; and (ii) how many social work students will be admitted to study at Queen's University, Belfast and the University of Ulster in the 2012/13 academic year.

(AQW 10694/11-15)

Mr Poots: Since 2006 newly qualified social workers are required to register with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) for their Assessed Year in Employment (AYE).

This is a workplace support system designed to assist the transition from student to confident practitioner. Presently there are 145 social workers registered with the NISCC who have not yet commenced their AYE year. The planned intake for the 2012/13 academic year will be 260 places in total available at QUB and UU.

Insulin Pumps

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether his Department has a policy on the provision of insulin pumps for people with diabetes; (ii) whether each Health and Social Care Trust provides insulin pumps; and (iii) how many have been provided by each Trust in each of the last five years.

(AQW 10700/11-15)

Mr Poots: In June 2009 my Department endorsed for implementation in the HSC the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence's Technology Appraisal No. 151 which sets out recommendations on the use of insulin pump therapy. Details of the NICE guidance can be found at <http://www.nice.org.uk/TA151>.

- (i) [//www.nice.org.uk/TA151](http://www.nice.org.uk/TA151).
- (ii) All Health and Social Care Trusts with the exception of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust provide insulin pumps.
- (iii) I refer you to AQW 9863/11-15 which provides unvalidated information supplied by HSC Trusts about insulin pumps, covering the period 2009/10-2011/12. Validated information on the number of insulin pumps provided by each Trust in the last five years is not available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Blood Received from Great Britain

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the countries in Great Britain that Northern Ireland received blood from in (a) February 2012; (b) March 2012; and (c) April 2012 to date; and (ii) the amount of blood received in each month.

(AQW 10717/11-15)

Mr Poots: Northern Ireland has not received any blood from Great Britain since 1 February 2012.

Department of Justice

Republican Separated Prisoners Protest

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 9793/11-15, why the prisoners on protest have not had their republican separated status removed in accordance with the compact.

(AQW 10338/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Prisoners engaged in the ongoing protest in Roe House have not had their separated status removed. The management of the ongoing protest in Roe House is subject to regular review and it has been determined that the most appropriate way of managing this breach of the terms of the separated contract is through the use of Rule 32 (restricted association).

Where it is deemed necessary for the maintenance of good order or discipline, or to ensure the safety of officers, prisoners, or any other person, the governor may arrange for the restriction of a prisoner's association. Prisoners subject to restriction of association can avail of their basic entitlement to visits; telephone; and one hour daily exercise; but are not permitted to participate in evening association.

Furthermore, to remove a prisoner's separated status and return him to integrated conditions could prejudice the safety of that prisoner.

Case Number 11/016273 at Lisburn Magistrates Court

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to case number 11/016273 at Lisburn Magistrates Court, to detail (i) the cost in legal aid of this case and the previous case which was dismissed and then re-listed; (ii) the estimated final cost of the case; (iii) the number of (a) legal firms; and (b) counsel that have been instructed; and (iv) the total cost to date, excluding legal aid, of this case.

(AQW 10340/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) In respect of the original case, £708 (including VAT of £118) has been paid to the solicitor. The fees paid to counsel totalled £550 (no VAT was payable).
- (ii) As case number 11/016273 has not yet concluded, it is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of the final legal aid costs of the case at this stage.

- (iii) One firm of solicitors has represented the Defendant in both sets of proceedings. A different counsel has been instructed for the second hearing.
- (iv) It is not possible to provide actual costs in respect of court and judicial costs. However, the costs associated with the current proceedings are currently estimated at £5,214.

The Public Prosecution Service has identified billed costs and fees to date of approximately £10,850 and £180 for the original contest.

The PSNI have confirmed that there are no additional police costs associated with the current proceedings.

Sexual Offences Prevention Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 9853/11-15, how many breaches of Sexual Offences Prevention Orders are alleged to have occurred per case.

(AQW 10341/11-15)

Mr Ford: Pursuant to my answer to AQW9853/11-15, the 18 prosecutions involve 41 charges of breach of a Sexual Offences Protection Order as detailed below:-

Number of cases with 1 charge	Number of cases with 2 charges	Number of cases with 3 charges	Number of cases with 5 charges	Number of cases with 6 charges	Number of cases with 7 charges	Total
9	4	2	1	1	1	18

Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation: Training of Departmental Staff

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice what strategy is in place to train departmental staff in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

(AQW 10407/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice, in keeping with the Health & Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1982, has a Health & Safety Policy and Plan in place.

Within the policy, Arrangement 5 – First Aid, details a requirement that each Departmental Head of Division has responsibility for ensuring that they have a sufficient number of trained and qualified First Aiders within their Business Area. Guidance on the ratio of First Aiders to staff numbers is also included.

First Aid training provided to Departmental staff is registered with Health and Safety Executive (NI) and includes a module on Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

Ministerial Cars and Drivers

Mr Copeland asked Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of departmental staff who have availed of ministerial cars and drivers in each year since April 2010; (ii) the cost of providing the service; and (iii) whether the benefit derived is subject to income tax.

(AQW 10435/11-15)

Mr Ford: Department of Justice staff do not avail of the services of ministerial cars and drivers.

Prisoners: Day Release

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 10167/11-15, given that the identity of the victim and the accused are protected, to explain how stating whether the accused was on day release when the alleged offences were committed breaches the reporting restrictions that no details pertaining to the identification of the defendant and injured party will be published or released to the media.

(AQW 10453/11-15)

Mr Ford: Due to the relatively low number of young people in custody at any one time, the release of any information specific to a particular case, when combined with local knowledge or other information, could potentially lead to identification of the defendant and/or injured party and therefore constitute a breach of any reporting restrictions.

Legal Aid: Top 10 Earning Counsel

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 10282/11-15, how many cases each counsel (i) won; and (ii) lost.

(AQW 10525/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Legal Aid: Top Four Earning Companies

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 10283/11-15, how many cases each legal company (i) won; and (ii) lost. (AQW 10529/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Paramilitary Activity: Funeral of Seamus Coyle

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether he has sought a report on the paramilitary activity, including the firing of a rifle, at the funeral of Seamus Coyle in Londonderry on 17 April 2012; and what action he expects to be taken and by whom. (AQW 10632/11-15)

Mr Ford: I was made aware of this incident shortly after it occurred.

The policing response is an operational matter for the Chief Constable, and I understand that an Investigating Officer has been appointed.

Department for Regional Development

NI Water Tender: C071

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to NI Water tender C071, (i) on how many occasions in the last year has the head of NI Water's M&E function met with embedded contract staff, broken down by Mechanical and Electrical area; (ii) to detail (a) the reason for; (b) the location of; and (c) who requested these meetings; and (iii) whether the current and previous CEOs of NI Water were made aware of these meetings. (AQW 10371/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I would refer the Member to my answer to AQW 8815/11 on 12 March 2012. I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the meeting on 27 January 2012, referred to in that answer, was the only occasion in the past year that the head of its Mechanical and Electrical Services met with contractor employees.

Department for Social Development

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will review the inequity for people who have accumulated a small occupational pension and move from the contribution based Jobseekers Allowance to income-based Jobseekers Allowance and their pension is utilised to reduce their benefit by virtue of means testing, whereas under the contribution based allowance arrangements the first £50 per week is not taken into account. (AQW 10012/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Government believes that it is right to take a more generous approach to the treatment of occupational pensions in contributory benefits, which entitlement is based on insurance principles and depends on the contributions made during recent paid employment. Income based benefits, on the other hand, take account of all means available to the claimant to meet their immediate financial needs. There are no plans to change this approach.

Housing: St Patrick's Barracks Site, Ballymena

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development why there has been a delay in transferring the housing on the St Patrick's Barracks site, Ballymena, to the Housing Executive. (AQW 10369/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The site is currently owned by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister and I understand they are finalising their business case to transfer the site to my Department. Once that transfer takes place, the site will be made available to Fold Housing Association who have already been appointed to develop it for social housing.

Regional Infrastructure Support Programme

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development (i) whether he sought Legal Counsel's view on the implementation of the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme including the risk of a judicial review and its implications on specific equality groups; and (ii) how many legal opinions he obtained. (AQW 10396/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Answers to the questions raised attract legal professional privilege. As is the norm across Departments, that privilege is not waived in this instance.

Regional Infrastructure Support Programme

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development what consideration he has given to the advice from Legal Counsel on the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme and what action he has taken as a result of that advice.

(AQW 10397/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My answer to AQW 10396/11-15 also refers. I have considered advice from many quarters in relation to the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme and the new arrangements for regional support to the voluntary and community sector. Taking account of issues raised following my speech at NICVA on 8th September I have decided to extend existing regional support arrangements by 6 months through to September 2012 allowing more time for change to happen. In addition I have agreed that the efficiencies arising as a result of the challenging Comprehensive Spending Review settlement should be phased in over the remaining 3 years of the CSR period thereby easing the impact of efficiencies.

Regional Infrastructure Support Programme

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the Equality Impact Assessment his Department carried out on the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme.

(AQW 10398/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Arrangements for regional support and the key recommendations arising from the review of the Regional Infrastructure Programme were subject to equality screening in accordance with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The purpose of that screening was to determine if the policy had an impact or was likely to have a significant impact on equality of opportunity for any of the equality categories stipulated in the Act.

The formal equality screening exercise indicated no adverse impacts or significant implications for equality of opportunity. A copy of the screening document was published on the Departments website in November 2011.

Regional Infrastructure Support Programme

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the consultation with the voluntary and community sectors in relation to the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme.

(AQW 10412/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My assessment is that the Department consulted widely across the voluntary and community sector. This included an analysis of existing arrangements taking account of the views of organisations currently funded and a range of sub regional stakeholders, a pre-consultation stakeholder event to involve representatives from currently funded organisations, funding departments, local councils and sub-regional bodies, and a full formal consultation issued to all stakeholders and made available to the public. Over 2,000 organisations were invited to respond to the formal consultation, generating a total of 326 responses.

Policy Changes: Executive Approval

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development whether a fundamental change in policy within his Department requires Executive approval.

(AQW 10427/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Those matters which should be brought to the attention of the Executive are set out in paragraph 2.4 of the Ministerial Code.

Regional Infrastructure Support Programme

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the adequacy of the consultation with the voluntary and community sectors on the decision to appoint one organisation or a consortia to deliver generic and thematic infrastructure under the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme.

(AQW 10428/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is important to note that the Department plans to appoint a total of five organisations/consortia, one to deliver each of the five elements of regional support to the voluntary and community sector namely; (a) generic regional support services, (b) regional support for voluntary advice services, (c) regional support for volunteering, (d) regional support for women in disadvantaged areas and (e) regional support for faith based engagement.

Whilst a single partner/consortium approach did not form an explicit part of the consultation, the need for better collaboration, joined up working and a reduction in duplication did emerge in the responses to the formal consultation and are also enshrined within the Concordat between the Voluntary and Community Sector and the Northern Ireland Government, recently agreed by the NI Executive. Taking account of the Concordat and of the responses expressed at consultation, one of the key recommendations arising from the review of regional infrastructure support arrangements was that, in circumstances where two or more organisations wish to deliver an element of regional support services, then that should happen by way of a joined up collaborative approach

resulting in a single application for funding, thereby helping to reduce potential duplication and overlap. I am satisfied as regards the adequacy of consultation with the voluntary and community sector on this issue.

Departmental Policy: Judicial Review

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the process for informing the Executive if a departmental policy is assessed as being likely to be subject to judicial review.

(AQW 10429/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Where a Minister considers it necessary that the Executive should be informed that an application for judicial review has been made and/or granted in relation to any matter within his or her responsibility, he or she may write to Executive colleagues to advise them of this.

Fort George: Decontamination Contract

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 9869/11-15, why the decontamination contract for Fort George, which was due to have been awarded by the end of 2011, will now only be entering the tendering phase in September 2012, with tenders to be returned by January 2013.

(AQW 10588/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Fort George Project is a New Engineering "Design and Construct" Contract. The 'Design' and Construct' elements are tendered separately. Following a competitive tender process at the end of 2011, the "Design" element was awarded to Consulting Engineers White Young Green in February 2012. White Young Green will produce the remediation strategy for Fort George, following which, they will produce the tender documents relating to the engagement of a remediation contractor.

It is expected that the "Construct" element will enter the tender process in September 2012 with tenders to be returned by January 2013. The entire Fort George decontamination project is due for completion at the end of 2013.

However, the timeframes for projects of this nature are flexible as the level of variables are high until various tests and technical strategies are produced and agreed with the Northern Ireland Environmental Agency and City Council's Environmental Health.

Housing Executive: Selling Single Storey Properties to Long-Term Tenants

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the policy on selling single storey Housing Executive properties to long-term tenants.

(AQW 10603/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive's statutory House Sales Scheme permits eligible tenants to purchase single storey Housing Executive properties, where these properties are ground floor flats or three or more bedroom bungalows. From September 2002, tenants of one and two bedroom bungalows, whose tenancy commenced on or after 1 September 2002, are not permitted to purchase their home. This policy was put in place in order to protect the future limited supply of properties suitable for elderly and disabled people.

Antisocial Behaviour Policies

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department is taking to ensure that Housing Associations maintain consistent anti-social behaviour policies.

(AQW 10622/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Housing legislation in Northern Ireland provides all social housing landlords, including registered housing associations, with a common set of statutory tools for tackling anti-social behaviour affecting or caused by their tenants or others residing with or visiting their tenants.

The Department's Housing Association Guide sets out the standards expected of all registered housing associations. The Guide places a requirement on all registered housing associations to have published policy and procedures for dealing with anti-social behaviour and provides a model statement of policy and procedures by way of guidance.

Within the Department's inspection process, the Inspection Team reviews the anti-social behaviour policies and practices in place within registered housing associations to ensure that they comply with the Department's guidance and that they are being applied effectively and consistently

Antisocial Behaviour and Neighbourhood Disputes

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the merits of a standardised information sharing protocol for Housing Associations in relation to addressing anti-social behaviour or neighbourhood disputes.

(AQW 10624/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Section 13 of the Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 introduced new powers for the disclosure of information to and between all social housing landlords, including registered housing associations, in respect of anti-social behaviour.

An information-sharing protocol is not necessary to support the operation of these powers although it may prove helpful in certain circumstances. In light of this, I support the production of an information-sharing protocol in the housing association movement and I understand that the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations is working with its members to bring this about.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Recording Equipment in Committee Rooms

Mr Wells asked the Assembly Commission why the recording equipment in committee rooms remains switched on at weekends and during the Christmas, Easter and Summer recesses.

(AQW 10277/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly broadcast team turn off non-essential equipment where possible in order to comply with the Assembly environmental policy to reduce and prevent power wastage. However, some infrastructural and recording equipment remain on standby for the following reasons:

- a) Even if Assembly business is not scheduled, the broadcast team and others with maintenance responsibility for the system carry out essential system checks which are only possible when the system is not in use.
- b) The system generates test signals which the Assembly broadcaster team - who constantly receive our signals - rely upon to prove the system is working correctly.
- c) The broadcast system is actually designed to be left running - as a "no fail" system with failover procedures in place and our broadcast guidance requires the system to remain powered on.
- d) It has been proven that switching professional broadcast equipment on and off can reduce reliability and lifespan.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 4 May 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Play and Leisure Action Plan

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the Play and Leisure Action Plan and its omission from the key commitments within the draft Programme for Government, to detail (i) where leadership, responsibility and accountability for the Play and Leisure Policy and Implementation Plan resides; (ii) for an update on the business case and spend for 2011/12; and (iii) the timescale for the Implementation Plan.

(AQW 8952/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Play and Leisure Implementation Plan is listed in the draft Programme for Government as a Priority 2 building block. OMDFM led the Plan's development and is responsible for 22 of its Actions. As officials are currently costing options for delivering the actions, no OFMDFM expenditure was incurred during 2011-12. The other 15 Actions are the responsibility of other departments. The Plan runs to 2016.

Supporting Life's Journeys Programme

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the Supporting Life's Journeys Programme in assisting voluntary groups that are working with people in hard-to-reach communities to access education programmes designed to help them gain employment.

(AQW 9219/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are aware of the work that Supporting Life's Journeys programme undertakes in regard to mentoring and befriending.

Such programmes can play a supporting role with the disadvantaged, lonely or vulnerable when they need help most.

Child Poverty Act 2010

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they will deliver their commitments under the Child Poverty Act 2010 given the expected impact that the Welfare Reform Bill will have on families and children.

(AQW 9773/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A report to the Assembly on the Executive's efforts to address child poverty in the context of the child poverty strategy is imminent. This report will be the first annual report as required by the Child Poverty Act 2010.

The strategy – Improving Children's Life Chances – has set the context for a robust Action Plan to which all departments will contribute. We continue to co-ordinate efforts to optimise the response of the public sector to the growing demands to support children in light of present financial circumstances.

The Coalition Government's Welfare Reform Bill became law on the 8 March 2012. The Minister for Social Development will now bring forward his proposals for a Welfare Reform Bill to give effect locally to the proposed changes. Whilst it is too early to assess the potential impact of the Welfare Reform Bill on families and children here, we are aware that some have concerns at this stage.

Tackling disadvantage is a key priority for the Executive and is an essential element in our draft Programme for Government. We have therefore included in the Programme for Government a commitment to establish an advisory group, to assist us in alleviating hardship including any implications of the Coalition Government's Welfare Reform Programme.

We will be asking the Group to explore the scope available to ease and lessen poverty and to reduce financial hardship. We have also asked them to take account of the likely prospects for economic growth.

We have asked the Group for particular advice on the impact on individuals and families who are living on benefits or who are dependent on low wages. Alleviating hardship is a key priority for the Executive and we look forward to receiving the advice of this Group over the coming months.

China: Record of Human Rights Abuses

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what concerns were raised with Liu Yandong, during her visit to Northern Ireland, in relation to China's record of human rights abuses.

(AQW 10357/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Madam Liu Yandong visited Belfast to strengthen university, cultural and economic links with China as part of its process to strengthen its relationship with other countries.

Human Rights issues were discussed during private meetings with Madam Liu.

Landslide Incident: Marlborough Terrace Area of Londonderry

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 9750/11-15, why their Department did not take similar action in respect of the landslide at Linen Fields, Huntly Road, Banbridge.

(AQW 10556/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: No similar action was requested, at that time, in respect of that incident.

Legislation

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) what proposals for legislation, subject to Executive approval, they have introduced or intend to introduce between April 2012 and March 2015; (ii) the anticipated timescale for the introduction of each Bill; and (iii) the intention of each Bill.

(AQW 10649/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have already stated our intention, subject to the agreement of the Executive, to bring forward three Bills during the current Assembly mandate.

On 29 September last year, we announced that we will be introducing legislation in the Assembly to confer statutory powers on the Inquiry and Investigation into Historical Institutional Abuse.

On 18 January this year, we announced that we had asked our officials to prepare the necessary legislation to abolish the Department for Employment and Learning and transfer its functions.

Finally, our commitment to progress legislation to extend age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services is contained in the Programme for Government.

The Programme also contains our commitment to introduce any legislation necessary to implement any agreed changes to post-2015 structures of Government, and this will be confirmed in due course.

Other requirements for primary legislation relating to OFMDFM responsibilities may arise during this mandate and these will be reviewed on a regular basis.

Equality Commission

Mr McDevitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the costs incurred by the Equality Commission in relation to the cases which it supported against the Policing Board (396/04 FET) and against the Department for Social Development (164/08 FET).

(AQW 10750/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have asked the Chief Executive of the Equality Commission to respond directly to you as we do not have a role in determining which cases to support or the quantum of that support. Under Article 45 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, where an individual who is an actual or prospective complainant or claimant applies to the Equality Commission for assistance, the Commission shall consider the application and may grant assistance if it thinks fit to do so. That decision is within the Commission's discretion, subject to the matter falling within one of the prescribed statutory grounds and in line with its Policy for the Provision of Legal Advice and Assistance.

Ebrington Barracks Site: Costs of Opening

Mr P Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 7923/11-15, to detail the costs of opening Ebrington Barracks in Derry, broken down by (a) service provider; and (b) all other associated costs.

(AQW 10756/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: An Events Management company was procured by Ilex through an open competition in line with Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) protocol to manage the opening of the Ebrington Parade Ground. The Events Management company appointed the service providers for the opening ceremony. OFMDFM does not therefore hold the information requested.

Ilex: One Plan

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 9876/11-15, (i) why the business case for the Maritime Museum building, as part of the Urban Regeneration Company Limited's One Plan, is only being developed now, given that building should have commenced in the final quarter of the 2011/12 financial year; and (ii) what funding has been secured for the project.

(AQW 10792/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:

- (i) The Maritime Museum, and associated Archive and Genealogy facility, is an initiative led by Derry City Council in partnership with Ilex, and seeks to build on the potential of the Ebrington site and current museum provision within the city. A feasibility study for the project was commissioned by Derry City Council and Ilex and this was completed in November 2010. In 2011, Derry City Council identified funding to procure consultants to commence a full business case. A draft of this business case is due for consideration by Council officials in consultation with relevant partners in May 2012.
- (ii) In March, Derry City Council secured a Stage 1 pass of £1.5m from Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) Tourism Development Scheme. The project partners have also worked closely with Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and a funding application will be submitted to HLF in June 2012 to secure part of the outstanding funding requirement. Ilex has also identified resource of £2m from within its capital programme to support the development of the project, subject to business case approval. Securing the necessary funding remains a key priority for all partners, before the project can commence.

Ministerial Subcommittee on Children and Young People

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail what was discussed at the April 2012 meeting of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People and the actions arising from the meeting.

(AQW 10800/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Ministerial Sub-Committee scheduled to take place on 25 April was postponed. Junior Minister Bell and Junior Minister Anderson have arranged bi-lateral meetings to discuss issues affecting children and young people with Ministerial colleagues.

Housing: St Patrick's Barracks Site, Ballymena

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 10369/11-15, to detail (i) the reasons for the delay in finalising the business case; (ii) when the business case will be completed; and (iii) when the transfer of assets to the Department for Social Development will occur.

(AQW 10844/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The St Patrick's Barracks site was gifted to the Northern Ireland Executive with the intention that proceeds from the sale of the site would be used to defray exceptional pressures associated with the devolution of policing and justice functions. The site was received by OFMDFM under the terms of the Strategic Investment and Regeneration of Sites (NI) Order 2003 (SIRS Order).

In order to ensure that the sale of the former military houses at St Patrick's Barracks to the Department for Social Development (DSD) for use as social housing would achieve maximum value for the Executive, it was necessary to carry out a rigorous business case, taking account of both monetary and non-monetary aspects. Good governance processes required that the business case was reviewed and approved at a high level in OFMDFM and in addition the SIRS Order requires that financial approval for the sale is also given by DFP.

The business case is complete and all financial approvals required have been received. We are currently considering all aspects of the proposed sale and will make a final decision on whether to proceed with the sale of the properties to DSD.

First Legislative Counsel: Salary

Mr Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they approved the potential salary of £205,000 for the position of First Legislative Counsel.

(AQO 1787/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The post of First Legislative Counsel is a key position and was advertised at the existing salary range £98,059 – £205,000.

An appointment has now been made and salary is confirmed at the minimum of the scale, that is £98,059.

Social Investment Fund: Zones

Mr McDevitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they expect the finalised Social Investment Fund zones to be published.

(AQO 1789/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Over 500 people were engaged through the public consultation on the Social Investment Fund (SIF). Whilst we were pleased that so many people took the time to get involved and voice their opinion on how SIF should operate, it did present us with several options for moving forward, all of which require careful consideration.

The most consistent issue raised during the consultation was the geography of the proposed zones and we fully appreciate the importance of finalising the zones to enable us to progress to delivery. However, we have tried to balance the desire to make the Fund as inclusive as possible with an emphasis on targeting resources so they are not diluted to the point of having minimal impact.

We must get this right if the Fund is to make a real difference to the communities experiencing poverty and deprivation.

We are intending to bring an Executive paper on final policy proposals to colleagues shortly.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Rural Development Programme

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many sports clubs in each cluster area have received funding through the Rural Development Programme in each of the last three years.

(AQW 10342/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The Rural Development Programme does not provide funding to sports clubs. However, where such an organisation wishes to promote a project that benefits the wider rural community and which is separate from their primary activity, this may be considered for funding.

In the last three years, five such projects were funded. The breakdown of those projects by cluster area was:

Financial year	Cluster	No. of projects
2009-10	Nil	Nil
2010-11	GROW	1
	NER	1
2011-12	SWARD	1
	GROW	1
	ARC NW	1

Agricultural Shows

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why she plans to attend only eight out of the twelve agricultural shows that are taking place in Northern Ireland this year.

(AQW 10405/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department is unable to attend every local agricultural show that takes place in the north in any one year due to budgetary and staff constraints. However, over a period of three years, my Department will have a presence at all the agricultural shows on at least one occasion and will have a presence each year at the largest show in each county. I personally plan to attend as many shows as my diary permits.

Agricultural Shows

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the future opportunities for farmers to meet with departmental officials at agricultural shows, and how effective such meetings will prove.

(AQW 10406/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In 2011 my Department participated at eight local agricultural shows, the Ploughing Championships, the RUAS Winter Fair and Balmoral Show. We plan to exhibit at a similar number of shows this year.

I fully recognise the contribution made by local Agricultural Shows to the agri-food industry and rural communities. With almost 61,000 visitors to the eight local shows DARD attended last year, they provided an important forum for my officials and the delivery agents for elements of the Rural Development Programme, to meet with a wide range of customers. Staff evaluations of the DARD exhibits at local shows have indicated that they are an effective means of meeting with farmers.

It enables my Department to promote key aspects of our work such as the Rural Development Programme, the Countryside Management Scheme and CAFRE's Development Service.

Rural Community Network

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the funding provided to the Rural Community Network in the (i) 2009/10; (ii) 2010/11; and (iii) 2011/12 financial years.

(AQW 10430/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Funding provided by my Department to the Rural Community Network (RCN) in the financial years 2009/2010 was £461,800; 2010/2011 was £314,040.36 and 2011/2012 was £275,835.21.

Regional Infrastructure Support Programme

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the level of funding that has or will be transferred from her Department to the Department for Social Development to contribute to the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme and the timescale for the transfer of funds.

(AQW 10431/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The proposed maximum level of funding to be transferred from my Department to the Department of Social Development (DSD) as a contribution to the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme is £400K to the end of the current CSR period in March 2015. My officials are currently in discussions with DSD officials regarding the final quantum and timescale for the transfer of funds.

Consultation Documents and Official Reports: Cost

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what was the cost to her Department of producing (i) consultation documents; and (ii) official reports in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 10439/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The cost of producing consultation documents was £3,581. The costs for producing official reports were £12,212.

The above figures exclude staff costs. The Department does not routinely collect information on staff costs associated with the production of consultation documents/official reports.

Rivers: Guidance on Use by Farmers

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 9541/11-15, why environmental studies have not been conducted on the impact of farming practices, including the use of farm vehicles in and along rivers, given the importance of good environmental practice in relation to Single Farm Payments.

(AQW 10458/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Whilst no environmental studies have been carried out, my Department encourages good environmental practice in and along rivers through guidance contained in the Code of Good Agricultural Practice for the Prevention of Pollution of Water, Air and Soil (The Code). The Code aims to provide guidance, to those claiming Single Farm Payment, and other direct payments, which will help them meet the environmental requirements of Cross Compliance conditions. Pages 101 – 102 of The Code provide guidance on various aspects of the management of waterways. This includes the prevention of soil erosion to minimise polluting sediment and the need to reduce contamination by faecal micro organisms. A full copy of the Code can be found at:

www.dardni.gov.uk/ruralni/code_of_good_agricultural_practice_2008_cmb-3.pdf

Single Farm Payment

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 9542/11-15, to detail the number of (i) farms that are recorded and inspected; (ii) inspections that are carried out annually for compliance with the Single Farm Payment scheme; and (iii) breaches that were found during the inspections.

(AQW 10459/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) A total of 37,854 claims to Single Farm Payment (SFP) were received by my Department for 2011. The European Union regulations governing the administration of the SFP scheme require that all Paying Agencies, including my Department, to inspect at least 5% of all such applications received in any given year to ensure that only eligible land is being claimed. In addition, at least 1% of claims are also subject to on-farm checks by the relevant Competent Control Authorities to verify compliance with the Cross-Compliance provisions as relevant to that farm business.
- (ii) During the 2011 SFP scheme year, a total of 3,311 farm businesses were the subject of an on-farm inspection. These inspections covered both land eligibility and Cross-Compliance requirements as detailed in the relevant EU regulations.
- (iii) With regards to the number of breaches that were found during these inspections, information in this respect is not yet available for the 2011 scheme year, but will be notified by my Department to the European Commission in accordance with Article 84 of the European Council Regulation 1122/2009 in July of this year.

Learning Disabilities: Assistance to Groups in Rural Areas

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, when deciding on the eligibility criteria for assistance to groups in rural areas that work for people with learning disabilities, whether there are any stipulations regarding the services and offices being seen to be open and available to all sections of the rural community within the catchment area of the service provider.
(AQW 10474/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Through Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme, delivered by the Councils Clusters, and the Tackling Rural Poverty and Isolation programmes there are opportunities for rural groups to access support. In light of that, my Department does not offer grant assistance specifically on a competitive basis to groups in rural areas that work with people with learning disabilities and therefore have not taken any such decisions on eligibility criteria.

Rural Development Programme

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what consideration she has given to the impact on projects within the Rural Development Programme should capital spending by councils be halted in the run up to the implementation of the Review of Public Administration, given the effect that this halt would have on match funding.
(AQW 10541/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Axis 3 funds are provided to improve the economy and quality of life in rural areas and are available not only to local councils but to the private sector, third sector and non-departmental public bodies and indeed to Farm Families for Farm Diversification.

As you may be aware, Local Action Groups in consultation with their council clusters are reviewing their implementation plans and will shortly be seeking applications for 'Strategic Projects'. I fully expect that any contractual commitments entered into by councils in relation to such projects will be fully honoured. However, there is much competition for funds across the Rural Development Programme and as I have already said I will do whatever is necessary to ensure these funds are invested in rural areas and that money is not returned to Europe.

Rural Development Programme: Chairpersons of Local Action Groups

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to what extent the chairpersons of the Local Action Groups under the Rural Development Programme are remunerated.
(AQW 10548/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Chairpersons of Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme Local Actions Groups (LAGs) serve in a voluntary capacity. They receive no remuneration for their service in the LAG.

As members of a LAG (including serving as chairperson) Social partners may be reimbursed for incurred expenses such as travel, subsistence and childcare costs.

Cod Recovery Plan

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department has taken to ensure that the needs of the Irish Sea fleet are considered in the implementation of the Cod Recovery Plan.
(AQW 10614/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Cod Recovery Plan gives Member States the responsibility for allocating fishing effort to its vessels that fish within the Cod Recovery Zone with certain types of fishing gear. When management measures are taken to avoid catching cod or more selective fishing gears are used our vessels are given more days at sea in recognition of their reduced impact on cod mortality. The local industry together with Seafish, scientists from AFBI and DARD officials are now working on a project to identify a highly selective fishing gear for the Nephrops fleet which will exempt those vessels from the days at sea restrictions imposed by the Cod Plan. That means that the net must be capable of reducing the cod catch to below 1.5%. The outcome of those trials will be known in early June. I am sure that given the involvement of local fishermen the very best solution will be found – one that will contribute to the objectives of the Cod Plan but be suitable and easily used by our fleet.

Cod Recovery Plan

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the outcome of the review of the Cod Recovery Plan.
(AQW 10615/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Last year the Commission asked its Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) to examine how the Cod Recovery Plan was working. The outcome was a detailed technical report which, in summary concluded that with the information available it was not always possible to assess the impacts of the plan since the Plan has only been in place for 2½ years. But STECF concluded that the Plan was not achieving the desired reductions in the fishing mortality for Cod and that effort control was not an effective means to deliver this.

Following discussions with the Commission in the latter part of last year there was an expectation that it would bring forward a revised plan in the spring. At a recent meeting between Member States, STECF and the Commission in March 2012 it became

clear that that would not be the case. During the meeting Member States made suggestions for interim changes to the CRP. The Commission is considering these and other matters and it is understood that it will bring forward proposals for amendments to the Cod Recovery Plan in September 2012.

Emergency Services: Domestic Properties in Rural Areas

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to alleviate the problem being faced by the Emergency Services regarding domestic properties in rural areas not displaying their allocated house number.
(AQW 10744/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: This is obviously an important issue for the emergency services in rural areas. It is the responsibility of Local Government to enforce this issue and my Department has no remit, however, I would support any call for domestic properties to display their allocated house number.

I would be happy to write to Council Chief Executives to remind them of their responsibilities.

Maximising Access in Rural Areas

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the purpose of the Maximising Access in Rural Areas project as part of her Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework.
(AQO 1814/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Maximising Access in Rural Areas project is an initiative based on the premise that visiting people in their own homes and using a "personal touch" encourages them to avail of services and grants which they would not otherwise have known about or had the wherewithal to apply for. The evidence gathered from the original pilot and from phase one of this project, which saw over 4,000 household visits completed between before March 2011, strongly supports this approach.

Using grassroots information the project seeks, in the next 3 years, to identify the most vulnerable 12,000 households across all of the 286 rural super output areas in the north. Trained enablers will visit these households, complete a detailed household and personal assessment and provide a range of information to occupants regarding regional and locally available services. From the information gathered the IT system being used will compile a list of grants, benefits or services that householders may be entitled to and these will in turn be automatically referred to various partner agencies and departments for immediate processing. These referrals will be followed through until such times as the householder receives the grant benefit or service they are entitled to. A second home visit will take place for those households that received a referral.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the proposals she presented to the EU Commission on the Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.
(AQO 1815/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I met with Georg Haeusler, Head of Cabinet for Agriculture Commissioner Dacian Cioloș, to discuss my response to the Commission's legislative proposals on CAP Reform on 19 April. As you will be aware, this response was prepared after a public consultation and takes due account the views of stakeholders. I was determined this should be a constructive response and our approach was to offer amendments or suggestions to make the Commission's proposals more focused and workable.

In particular, I discussed the detail of my suggestions for a smooth and orderly 10 year transition towards a flat rate support regime. With simplification in mind, I suggested combining the Basic and Greening Payments into a single payment. I also presented my proposals to simplify greening so that it is more focused and easier to administer, while avoiding potentially negative and unintended consequences.

In addition, I offered an alternative and much simpler approach to the active farmer test, based on past production activity, which will refocus support on active farmers at the outset. And importantly, I stressed the need for sufficient regional flexibility to permit us to adequately address local needs.

The discussion on CAP reform proposals are still at an early stage, but we should see some movement from the Commission over the coming months and I am very pleased to have had this opportunity for positive engagement at this stage. I intend to build on this and further meetings with Members of the European Parliament are planned in the coming weeks.

Dog Breeding

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the regulation of dog breeding establishments.
(AQO 1816/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's 12-week public consultation on the proposed Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations closed in January this year. That consultation issued to over 2,000 stakeholders, including dog breeders, specialist interest groups, councils and the general public, and provided the opportunity to comment on the proposals contained in the draft Regulations.

A substantial number of responses were received to the consultation and my officials are currently analysing these. The commercial breeding of dogs is a legitimate business both here and across these islands and I do not intend to place any unnecessary burden on small, medium or large scale breeders. I will fully consider all the relevant issues raised in the consultation responses before deciding on the final detail of the draft Regulations. However, I can assure members that sufficient powers will be included in the Regulations to allow action to be taken to improve the conditions in any sub-standard breeding establishments.

The ARD Committee will have an opportunity to consider the draft Regulations in May and the Regulations will be laid in the Assembly in June for debate under the draft affirmative resolution procedure before the summer recess.

Dairy Industry: All-island Discussions

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions have taken place on an all-island basis in relation to the dairy industry after 2013.

(AQO 1817/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In answering your question I assume that you are referring to the ending of EU milk quotas in 2015.

The ending of milk quotas will pose a number of challenges for the dairy sector. In anticipation of this we supported a Dairy Competitiveness Study to help the industry in its strategic decision making processes so that we have a sustainable dairy sector with a structure to enable it to compete globally post 2015. Furthermore, an Implementation Group, chaired by Dairy UK (NI) has begun to take forward the Study's recommendations.

I am pleased to say that the dairy sector has demonstrated continued growth and resilience in the current difficult economic climate. I believe that the sector has the potential to grow further and to exploit opportunities arising from the expansion in world population. However, the sector's future sustainability hinges on it following a market-led approach. The key is to grasp these opportunities and that is why we are establishing an Agri-Food Strategy Board to develop a longer term strategic vision. I look forward to the dairy sector's positive engagement to help set challenging but achievable targets up to 2020. In so doing we will take account of the south's Food Harvest 2020.

On an all-island basis, the dairy sector faces many of the same challenges and opportunities. Where we have areas of common interest I believe that it makes sense to work together. In particular I believe there would be potential benefits to an all-island approach to the marketing of local products rather than the approach being taken by the south's industry-led National Dairy Council which seeks to encourage consumers to purchase milk of southern origin only. We have more to gain if we work together to make in-roads to new markets rather than competing in the smaller domestic market.

Rural Areas: Demographic Change

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she will establish an inter-departmental working group to address the demographic changes in rural areas with ageing populations.

(AQO 1818/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have no plans to establish an inter-departmental group to look at this particular issue, however I am aware of the challenges facing rural communities both now and in the future.

On the issue of demographic changes and ageing population in some rural areas this can present challenges in relation to provision of services - such as transport and health and social care - where the less concentrated population of rural areas often requires a different approach.

However, I think we shouldn't just see challenges in an ageing population, we should also see the opportunities. Many of the older people I meet are a fantastic resource in their local communities. They are well placed to help others because they understand the needs of rural dwellers and there are many examples of projects throughout the north where highly motivated older people's projects and groups actually deliver services for other older people in their communities.

I hope to soon be in a position to publish the Executive's Rural White Paper Action Plan which aims to address a wide range of rural issues and challenges and will help to ensure the future sustainability of our rural communities.

The Rural White Paper Action Plan is an inter-departmental initiative and is the first to focus solely on rural issues and to include commitments by all government Departments. An Interdepartmental Committee on Rural Policy comprising of senior officials from all government departments will play a lead role in monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan.

Marine Bill: Commercial Fishing

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the current consideration of the Marine Bill, whether she can give an assurance that the interests of our commercial fishing sector will be protected and upheld.

(AQO 1819/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Consultation with the fishing sector on marine plans, new marine developments and marine conservation zones is vital to ensure that those areas most important to our fishing sector are secured. My Department has stressed this point to the Department of the Environment throughout the development of the Marine Bill.

Responsibility for marine planning, the licencing of many marine activities and any future proposals for marine conservation zones, ultimately lies with the Department of the Environment and my Department will work with the fishing industry to provide the evidence needed to justify protection of our most important fishing grounds within the future marine planning system.

Rural Development Fund: Administrative Costs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the proportion of Rural Development Funding that is spent on the administrative costs of the clusters.

(AQO 1820/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I realise that administration costs are high but I am confident that the current review of implementation plans and proposals to admit strategic projects will enable JCC's to bring their administration expenditure back into synchronisation with their approved budgets.

Schmallenberg Virus

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the current position in relation to Schmallenberg Disease.

(AQO 1821/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Since Schmallenberg virus was first detected in Northern Europe in November 2011 significant effort has been made at European Commission level to gain a greater understanding of the disease and its impact. As a result of this work, it is now strongly believed that biting midges are responsible for spreading the disease. The number and frequency of reported cases in affected areas supports the theory that the cases are the result of infection during the vector active period last year.

As at 20 April, the disease has been detected in 249 holdings in southern England. It is believed that the disease arrived there as a result of infected midges being blown across the Channel from mainland Europe. Defra has confirmed that all of the affected counties lie within the area that is believed to be at risk from such incursion.

There have been no reported cases here. My Department's position remains that animals, particularly pregnant animals, imported from regions where Schmallenberg virus has been actively circulating pose the highest risk of introduction of the infection to the north. Incursion by infected midges is considered to be a negligible risk unless the virus becomes widespread in the west of Britain.

My Department has considered what contingency arrangements are most appropriate here and our policy is to carry out targeted surveillance on cases that meet the clinical signs of the disease.

The European Commission regards the disease as having a low impact and as such has no plans to introduce any movement restrictions or to make the disease notifiable. In these circumstances, given what is known about the disease the best way to keep Schmallenberg virus out of the north is for those importing animals to source stock responsibly.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Press Guidelines

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 9655/11-15, when she sent her memo on press guidelines to the arm's-length bodies.

(AQW 10337/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The Minister wrote to each of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure arm's-length bodies on the 23 February 2012.

Consultation Documents and Official Reports: Cost

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what was the cost to her Department of producing (i) consultation documents; and (ii) official reports in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 10440/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

- (i) The Department incurred costs of £5,289 in producing consultation documents in the 2010/11 financial year.
- (ii) The Department incurred costs of £2,560 in producing official reports in the 2010/11 financial year.

Arts Council: Budget

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much of this year's Arts Council budget has been allocated to Community Arts in (i) Derry City; and (ii) the North West area; and whether the allocations were equality proofed.

(AQW 10513/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: As this is only the first month of the current financial year, any figures provided would not represent a full and accurate picture of funding allocated to Community Arts in Derry and the North West area. Can I suggest that you write to me again in August, or directly to the Arts Council, when most funding decisions will have been made.

The Arts Council does not equality proof allocations however it periodically carries out a spatial mapping exercise of all of its grants in order to assess geographical distribution.

Legislation

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) what proposals for legislation, subject to Executive approval, she has introduced or intends to introduce between April 2012 and March 2015; (ii) the anticipated timescale for the introduction of each Bill; and (iii) the intention of each Bill.

(AQW 10650/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I intend to bring forward proposals for an Irish Language Bill to the Executive Legislative Programme 2011 – 2015.

An Irish Language Bill will set out to protect and enhance the language, increase the numbers of Irish speakers and increase provision of government and local government services in Irish.

Lough Neagh: Commercial Licences

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she is considering limiting the number of commercial licences on Lough Neagh until accurate data exists on fish stocks.

(AQW 10728/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are already certain restrictions in legislation on who may be granted a commercial licence for Lough Neagh and the length of net that may be licensed.

As Lough Neagh is a private fishery, any proposals to change regulations to restrict the number of commercial licences further on Lough Neagh would have to be done in consultation with the holder of the legal title to the fisheries and in the context of EC law.

I am not currently considering introducing further restrictions on the numbers of commercial licenses available for Lough Neagh

Hollywood Library and Donaghadee Library

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much money has been spent on (i) Hollywood Library; and (ii) Donaghadee Library in each of the last five years.

(AQW 10860/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for the management of libraries in the north of Ireland passed to Libraries NI in April 2009 thus my Department does not hold financial spend information prior to this period.

Libraries NI has provided me with the following information in relation to the consolidated spends on (i) Hollywood Library and (ii) Donaghadee Library for the subsequent three financial years:

(i)

Donaghadee	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Revenue	132,653	115,218	101,613
Capital	0	0	0
Total**	132,653	115,218	101,613

(ii)

Hollywood	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Revenue	263,442	250,932*	192,205
Capital	0	153,737	16,301
Total**	263,442	404,669	208,506

* note that Hollywood recurrent spend for 10/11 excludes a one off redundancy payment because this distorts the trend and also could be traceable to the individual concerned.

** Note the Revenue spend only covers those costs directly coded to the location and mainly covers frontline staff costs and premises costs. It does not include stock which is coded centrally or management costs.

Cycling: Funding

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the funding provided in each of the last three years to organisations which promote the sport of cycling.

(AQW 10871/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is responsible for the distribution of funding for sport in the north of Ireland. Over the last three financial years, Sport NI has allocated the following funding to Cycling Ulster towards the development of all cycling disciplines:

2009/10	£178,066
2010/11	£183,444
2011/12	£152,514
Total	£514,024

This includes funding through Sport NI's Athlete Support Programme to assist a number of talented cyclists develop their full potential.

Cycling: Promotion

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what measures her Department is taking to promote the sport of cycling.
(AQW 10872/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Cycling Ulster is the governing body of cycling sport and therefore responsible for promoting the sport of cycling. Sport NI however, which is responsible for the distribution of funding for sport in the north of Ireland, has provided £514,024 in the last three financial years to assist Cycling Ulster in developing and promoting all cycling disciplines. Furthermore Sport NI has provided a range of advice and guidance to Cycling Ulster and its athletes on matters including governance and modernisation of the sport, talented athlete support, club development, coaching and marketing support.

No to Salmon Nets Group

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the No to Salmon Nets Group will receive further information in relation to monitoring and enforcement, following the recent announcement that there will be no commercial netting taking place in 2012.

(AQW 10948/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL Inland Fisheries Group staff have responded to a number of specific e-mail queries raised by representatives of the No to Salmon Nets Group. All queries have been responded to and DCAL has no record of the No to Salmon Nets Group requesting further information on monitoring and enforcement activities undertaken in relation to commercial netting.

Salmon Inland Fisheries Forum

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the current membership of the Salmon Inland Fisheries Forum.

(AQW 11029/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The current membership of the Salmon and Inland Fisheries Forum is detailed in the table below:

Name	Stakeholder group
Robert Murtland	Unaffiliated angler
Michael Crilly	Unaffiliated angler (current Chair)
Allan Kilgore	Affiliated angler
Jack Tisdall	Affiliated angler
Gary W Houston	Affiliated angler
Robert J Haughey	Affiliated angler
Patrick Close	Commercial Fisheries
Francis G Conlon	Commercial Fisheries
Vacant	Other Representatives of Commercial Fishermen
Patrick McNeill	Other Representatives of Commercial Fishermen

Name	Stakeholder group
Hugh Edward J Montgomery	Fishery Owners and Operators
Martin McNeill	Fishery Owners and Operators
David Laughlin	Landowners
John McWilliams	Landowner (with riparian rights)
Paul Johnston	Fishery Management Interests
Dermot Curran	District Councils
Mark P Horton	Environmental Non-Government Agencies
John Morton	Fish Merchants
Vacant	Erne Fishermen

The Department has placed a public advertisement inviting applications for a representative of commercial fishermen operating on Lough Neagh. The closing date for applications is 8 May 2012.

Department of Education

Draft Education Bill

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the potential impact that the Draft Education Bill could have on Boards of Governors, particularly in relation to their roles in recruitment and staffing.

(AQW 10433/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The draft Bill was circulated to the Executive on the 6 March 2012 and awaits Executive approval.

It would be inappropriate for me to comment on the detail of the draft Bill ahead of Executive approval. However the draft Bill honours the Heads of Agreement as published by the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister on the 16 November 2011

Education and Skills Authority

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Education, given that the legislation to introduce the Education and Skills Authority will alter the responsibilities of the Boards of Governors in grant-aided schools, for his assessment of the benefits that this will have for the education sector.

(AQW 10475/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The draft Bill was circulated to the Executive on the 6 March 2012 and awaits Executive approval.

It would be inappropriate for me to comment on the detail of the draft Bill ahead of Executive approval. However the draft Bill honours the Heads of Agreement as published by the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister on the 16 November 2011

Mobile Classrooms

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education how many additional mobile classrooms have been provided to primary schools in the Ballymena Borough Council area in each of the last four years.

(AQW 10523/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Financial Year	Additional Mobiles
2008-09	2
2009-10	3
2010-11	0
2011-12	1

Preschool Places: Upper Bann Area

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to meet the current demand for pre-school places in the Upper Bann area.

(AQW 10546/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The SELB PEAG have advised that in the Upper Bann area 94 funded places in the statutory and voluntary/private sector remained available at the end of Stage 1 of the Pre-School Admissions. Additional places have been allocated to the voluntary/private sector for Stage 2 of the Process. In addition the Department is currently considering a number of Development Proposals for the establishment of additional statutory nursery provision in the Portadown area.

Away-Days and Team-Building Exercises: Cost-Effectiveness

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 9948/11-15, what priority is given to value for money when assessing the effectiveness of away-days and team-building exercises.

(AQW 10579/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In undertaking away-days and teambuilding exercises the Department of Education is fully committed to ensuring value for money in terms of money spent and staff time.

Portadown College: Refurbishment and Repairs

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 10278/11-15 and AQW 10265/11-15, whether he has made any assessment of the long-term cost effectiveness of the on-going repair work at Portadown College compared with the cost of a new building.

(AQW 10581/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Portadown College is a controlled school. It is the responsibility of the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) to undertake minor capital and maintenance works as required to maintain the integrity of the school building. The SELB has confirmed that the works carried out in the 2010-11 and 2011-12 financial years included the refurbishment of the Art/Design accommodation to facilitate the delivery of the curriculum. The Maintenance spend included general planned maintenance, statutory requirements and Health & Safety work.

Previously identified new build projects such as Portadown College will be critically assessed alongside all other potential projects as part of the ongoing area planning process. This will determine how potential projects will contribute to the overall infrastructure needed in an area and, if identified as a priority within the area plan, might be taken forward

The Board was meeting its responsibilities in ensuring that the integrity of the building was maintained and completing essential statutory and Health and Safety work. It would therefore be inappropriate to carry out an assessment of the costs of such work at Portadown College in comparison to any potential major capital project which may be announced as an outcome of the area planning process.

Protestant Church Schools: Counties Donegal, Monaghan, Cavan, Leitrim and Louth

Mr McKay asked Minister of Education to list the Protestant church schools in counties Donegal, Monaghan, Cavan, Leitrim and Louth which are within the remit of the cross-border survey that he is undertaking jointly with the Dublin Government's Minister for Education and Skills.

(AQW 10605/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been advised by the Department of Education and Skills in the south that the following primary schools within 6 miles of the border and post-primary schools within 12 miles of the border, which have a Church of Ireland or Presbyterian ethos, will fall within the scope of the cross border survey.

Post-primary schools

- Royal School, Cavan, Co Cavan
- Dundalk Grammar, Dundalk, Co Louth
- Monaghan Collegiate, Corlatt, Co Monaghan
- The Royal and Prior School, Raphoe, Co Donegal

Primary schools

- Monaghan Model, Monaghan, Co. Monaghan
- Drunacrutin N S, Drumacrutin, Co Monaghan
- Kilbarron N S, Kilbarron, Ballyshannon, Co Donegal
- Clontibret N S, Clontibret, Monaghan, Co Monaghan
- Ballyconell Central N S, Ballyconnell, Co Cavan
- Fairgreen N S, Belturbet, Co Cavan

- Robertson N S, Ballintra, Co Donegal
- Moville N S, Moville, Co Donegal
- Raphoe Central N S, Raphoe, Lifford, Co Donegal
- S N Domhnach Mor, Castlefin, Lifford, Co Donegal
- Monreagh N S, Monreagh, Carrigans Lifford, Co Donegal
- Dun Dealgan N S, Jocelyn Street, Dundalk, Co Louth

Nursery Schools: Development Plans

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many development plans for nursery schools have been submitted to his Department in the last five years; (ii) how many were successful; (iii) the locations of the approved development plans; and (iv) the rationale for accepting or refusing each development plan.

(AQW 10660/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since January 2007 there have been 58 development proposals published for the establishment of new nursery schools or nursery units attached to existing primary schools.

Of these proposals 32 were approved, 17 were not approved, 2 were withdrawn and decisions on the remaining 7 are still pending.

Details of the proposals, including the locations, are provided in the table below.

School	Date of Publication	Approval Status
Moira Primary School (401-6104)	27/03/07	Approved
Ballynahinch Primary School (401-1567)	01/05/07	Approved
Millennium Integrated PS, Saintfield (406-6644)	01/05/07	Approved
Scoil an Droichid, Belfast (104-6641)	05/07/07	Approved
Blythefield Primary School, Belfast (101-6207)	20/12/07	Approved
King's Park PS, Craigavon (501-1124)	08/01/09	Approved
Windmill Integrated Primary School, Dungannon (506-6554)	29/01/09	Approved
Christian Brothers' Primary School, Armagh (503-1110)	26/02/09	Approved
Fairhill Primary School, Dromara (501-6599)	26/02/09	Approved
Hollywood Nursery School (411-0030)	03/03/09	Approved
Gaelscoil Eadain Mhoir, Londonderry (204-6644)	04/03/09	Approved
Bunscoil an tSleibhe Dhuibh, Belfast (104-6593)	24/09/09	Approved
St Patrick's PS, Dungannon (503-2678)	17/12/09	Approved
St Francis' Primary School, Lurgan (503-6633)	17/12/09	Approved
Millington Nursery School, Portadown (511-6189)	17/12/09	Approved
Gaelscoil Ui Neill - New Irish Medium Nursery Unit Coalisland (504-6637)	17/12/09	Approved
St Colman's Primary School, Annaclone, Banbridge (503-6061)	17/12/09	Approved
Drumnamoe Nursery School, Lurgan (513-6631)	17/12/09	Approved
Gaelscoil Ui Dhocartaigh, Strabane (202-6638)	10/05/10	Approved
Gaelscoil na gCrann, Omagh (204-6677)	10/06/10	Approved
St Anthony's Primary School, Craigavon (503-1184)	26/08/10	Approved
Dundonald Primary School (401-1587)	07/09/10	Approved
St Paul's Nursery School (113-6302) and St Paul's Primary School, Belfast (103-6624)	05/11/10	Approved
Gaelscoil an Chaistil, Ballycastle (304-6653)	08/11/10	Approved

School	Date of Publication	Approval Status
Clough Primary School, Ballymena (301-0834)	15/11/10	Approved
Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain, Belfast (104-6596)	02/12/10	Approved
Ballymoney Nursery School (311-6034)	06/12/10	Approved
Orchard County PS, Portadown (501-6658)	21/04/11	Approved
Drumadonnell PS, Ballyroney (501-6616)	21/04/11	Approved
Waringstown Primary School, Craigavon (501-1598)	21/04/11	Approved
St Patrick's PS, Mayobridge (503-1697)	21/04/11	Approved
Tonagh Primary School Lisburn (401-0885)	28/11/11	Approved
Waringstown Primary School (501-1598)	29/03/07	Not Approved
Oakwood Integrated Primary School, Dunmurry (406-6611)	09/06/09	Not approved
Cranmore Integrated PS, Belfast (106-6580)	11/06/09	Not Approved
All Childrens Integrated Primary School, Newcastle (405-6541)	15/09/09	Not Approved
St Anne's Primary School, Belfast (103-0868)	20/11/09	Not Approved
Tandragee Nursery School (501-1116)	17/12/09	Not approved
St Colmans Primary School, Lambeg (403-3307)	12/01/10	Not approved
Braniel Primary School Belfast (401-1683)	26/01/10	Not approved
Woodburn Primary School, Carrickfergus (301-0696)	13/05/10	Not Approved
Randalstown Primary School (301-0816)	24/02/11	Not Approved
Currie PS, Belfast (101-0063)	03/03/11	Not Approved
Gaelscoil Eanna, Glengormley (304-6685)	14/03/11	Not Approved
Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche, Castlewellan (404-6648)	22/03/11	Not Approved
St Mary's PS, Banbridge (503-6043)	21/04/11	Not Approved
St Francis of Assisi PS, Keady (503-6610)	26/05/11	Not Approved
Gaelscoil na Mona, Turf Lodge, Belfast (104-6671)	02/06/11	Not Approved
Cranmore Integrated PS, Belfast (106-6580)	07/07/11	Not approved
St Comgalls Primary School, Antrim (303-0832)	19/02/07	Withdrawn
St Colmcilles PS (203-6053), Loreto Convent PS (203-2537) Omagh	22/02/07	Withdrawn
Bocombra PS, Portadown (501-6138)	21/04/11	Pending
Seagoe PS, Portadown (504-6137)	21/04/11	Pending
Portadown Integrated PS (506-6553)	21/04/11	Pending
Edenderry Nursery School Portadown (511-0021)	05/09/11	Pending
Primate Dixon PS, Coalisland (503-6590)	15/12/11	Pending
Bronte Primary School Banbridge (501-6612)	16/02/12	Pending
Iveagh Primary School Rathfriland (501-1611)	16/02/12	Pending

Each proposal is considered on its own merit taking account of the local context and all the pertinent issues. The overriding rationale for the decision when considering proposals for nursery units is the level of existing pre-school provision within an area. The Department's target level of pre-school coverage in an area is 90% and the policy is not to displace good quality pre-school provision already in existence, with pre-school provision in an alternative setting.

Primary Schools: Preferred Places

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education how many children did not secure a place at their preferred primary school in each of the last five years, broken down by Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 10661/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Over the last five years, the vast majority of applicants for primary 1 admission (on average over 98%) were placed in their first preference school.

With respect to the less than 2% who were not placed in their first preference school, each year the Department ensures that there are sufficient primary school places available within each category of school and in each area. As a result, in each of the last five years every child has obtained a place in a primary school in accordance with a preference nominated by their parents and, therefore, there are no children who remain unplaced.

Primary Schools: Preferred Places

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education how many children have not secured a place at their preferred primary school for the 2012/13 academic year, broken down by Education and Library board area.

(AQW 10662/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As at 25 April a total of 79 children had not been placed in a primary school in accordance with a preference expressed by their parent(s) for admission in September 2012. Broken down by Education and Library Board area the number of unplaced children is as follows:-

Belfast Education and Library Board	16
Western Education and Library Board	8
North Eastern Education and Library Board	9
South Eastern Education and Library Board	28
Southern Education and Library Board	18

Education Other Than At School: SEELB Area

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children attending Education Other Than At School in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area, broken down by location.

(AQW 10696/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The best place for children and young people to be educated is in school. It is recognised, however, that for some young people a school placement cannot be sustained and that Education Other Than At School provision may be necessary to meet their educational and other needs. Responsibility for making this provision rests with the relevant Education and Library Board.

The South-Eastern Education and Library Board has advised of the following position as at 25 April 2012:

Location	No of Pupils
Home tuition	77
Pupil Referral Unit at Ardmore Special School	12
Pupil Referral Unit at Longstone Special School	12
Lisnasharragh (Castlereagh)	15
Downpatrick	6
Hollywood	15
Lagan Valley Education Centre	24
Beechcroft and Groomsport Intensive Support Learning Units	27
Total	188

Education Other Than At School: Lisnasharragh, Belfast

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children from the North Down area attending Education Other Than At School at Lisnasharragh, Belfast.

(AQW 10697/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I understand from the South-Eastern Education and Library Board that 5 young people who reside in the North Down/Ards area attend Education Other Than At School at Lisnasharragh, Belfast.

Education Other Than At School

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of looked after children attending Education Other Than At School, broken down by Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 10698/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Education and Library Boards have advised that they are currently aware of the following numbers of looked after children in Education Other Than At School:

Education and Library Board	No. of looked after children attending Education Otherwise Than At School
Belfast	19
Western	16
North-Eastern	15
South- Eastern	29
Southern	9

Education Other Than At School: Statemented Children

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils who have been statemented in each Education Other Than At School system, broken down by Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 10699/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I understand from the Education and Library Boards that the position on 26 April 2012 is as follows:

Education and Library Board	No of pupils with statements in EOTAS
Belfast	75
Western	54
North-Eastern	22
South- Eastern	50
Southern	46

Distance Criterion: Primary Schools in East Belfast

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the distance criterion used by some primary schools in the East Belfast area to determine admission for September 2012, to detail for each relevant school the furthest distance from home to school that a child will travel.

(AQW 10711/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not hold the information requested. The Department does not hold personal information relating to pupils applying for primary schools. This information may be available from the schools in question.

P1 Places: North Down Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many P1 places are available in the North Down area for the 2012/13 academic year.

(AQW 10766/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of P1 places available is defined by a primary school's admissions number. Across the North Down constituency there were 1,121 places available at the start of the 2012/13 primary admissions process. The primary admissions process concluded with the issue of placement letters to parents on 18 April 2012. On 25 April 2012 there were 111 places available to any applicants who may still require a P1 place in the North Down area for September 2012. This figure may change from day to day between now and September 2012.

P1 Places: North Down Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many children have not been allocated a P1 place in the North Down area for the 2012/13 academic year.

(AQW 10767/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: On 25 April 2012 five children from the North Down area seeking P1 places remained unplaced following the conclusion of the primary admissions process. One further child resident outside the North of Ireland at the time of the process expressed a preference for primary schools all of which are located within Bangor and that child also remained unplaced.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board endeavours to arrange placements for all children in the area who find themselves in this position at schools which have places still available. The position regarding unplaced children in any area is fluid and may change from day to day.

Nursery School Places: North Down Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many nursery school places are available in the North Down area for the 2012/13 academic year.

(AQW 10768/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In the North Down area there are 78 full-time and 104 part-time nursery school places available for the 2012/13 academic year as follows:-

	Full-Time	Part-Time
Bangor Central Nursery School	26	52
Hollywood Nursery School	0	52
Trinity Nursery School	52	0
Totals	78	104

Pre-school places are also available at nursery units attached to some primary schools, and at non-statutory voluntary/private providers.

Nursery School Places: North Down Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many children, whose parents applied, have not obtained a nursery school place in the North Down area for the 2012/13 academic year.

(AQW 10769/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information sought relates to the admissions process for places in pre-school education for the 2012/13 academic year. This is a two stage process which is currently ongoing. Statistics will not be available until after the process is completed on 1 June 2012.

Special Schools: Applications for Places

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education whether his Department is anticipating an influx of applications for places at special schools, given that under the special educational needs proposals 50 percent of children who are statemented will experience a reduction in the level of the support they currently receive.

(AQW 10773/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is not the case that the proposals from the Review of SEN and Inclusion seek to remove the provision that a statemented child in mainstream currently receives. It is rather that the same supports required to meet the needs of some children will be made available in a more straightforward and less bureaucratic manner than through a statutory assessment. The ELBs will continue to be required to make available supports to the school and the pupil at level 1 of the new framework. The ELBs currently have a duty to educate children with special educational needs in ordinary schools; I do not propose to change this duty. On the basis that ELB supports would continue to be provided, I do not anticipate an influx of applications for places in special schools.

Irish-Medium Schools

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how much each Irish-medium school has paid to landlords for leasing or renting premises in each of the last three years.

(AQW 10780/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: On 13 January 2012, the Department issued Circular 2012/01 which outlines the circumstances and clarifies the conditions under which rental costs for accommodation and sites at grant-aided schools may be met, as provided for under the Common Funding Scheme for all grant aided schools.

The Department is currently working with schools to gather the supporting documentation considered necessary for the payment of rent. When all supporting documentation has been received and the level of rent agreed, the Department will advise the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) as funding authority, to make the appropriate payments.

As part of this exercise the Department will be requesting details from the ELB's of any rent which they have already paid so that this can be cross referenced against any new claims for rent. Until this exercise is complete, I am unable to confirm how much each school has been paid for rent in each of the last three years.

Irish-Medium Schools

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what mechanisms his Department has in place to ensure that Irish-medium schools are operating in premises that are fit for purpose.

(AQW 10781/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department is committed to ensure that accommodation needs in Irish medium schools are addressed.

When a school proves viability and is vested in the schools estate, all potential projects in an area will be critically assessed as part of the area based planning process to determine how they will contribute to the overall infrastructure needed.

For those schools in the early stages of development and where accommodation is being rented, my Department will assess the condition of accommodation at the outset to ensure that it is fit for purpose and of a suitable standard.

In addition to this my Department has already provided Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta with £2m funding to set up an Accommodation Fund to address very serious accommodation deficiencies and needs for developing schools in the sector.

Teachers' Negotiating Committee: Suspension

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to outline the reasons for the suspension of the Teachers' Negotiating Committee and what action he intends to take to remedy the situation.

(AQW 10782/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Both the Management Side and the Teachers' Side of the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC) have agreed to adjourn the Joint Working Party and associated sub-groups pending the resolution of differences within the Teachers' Side. The TNC has not been suspended and the Joint Working Party is scheduled to meet again on 8 May 2012.

GCSEs and A Levels: Changes

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what are the potential implications for the examination system if the United Kingdom Government implements major changes to GCSEs and A Levels in England and Wales.

(AQW 10783/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I will always seek to ensure that qualifications offered here are portable, comparable and meet the needs of all our young people. It remains vital that all qualifications must be recognised and valued by employers and higher education institutions. Young people here must never be disadvantaged in relation to the qualifications they seek to acquire.

In relation to GCSEs, I consulted widely on changes proposed by Michael Gove in England and decided that schools are best placed to make crucial decisions in the best interests of their pupils. That is why I decided to continue to support both a unitised and linear route.

In relation to GCE A Levels, the implications are potentially very significant and consequently, I will want to talk to a wide range of relevant stakeholders before deciding on any proposed changes, and their appropriateness here. I will also be meeting with Ministerial counterparts here and in England, Scotland and Wales to discuss all aspects of any proposed changes.

Education is a matter for the locally accountable governments, both here and in Wales, and I will continue to make evidence-based decisions on the nature and pace of change on critical areas of education such as GCSEs and A Levels.

Every School a Good School

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, in the light of the commitment in the 'School Improvement Policy – Every School a Good School' to develop an added value approach when measuring pupil achievement, what progress has been made in this area since the publication of the policy.

(AQW 10784/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: One of the key aims of Every School a Good School (ESaGS) – a Policy for School Improvement is to increase the proportion of young people attaining at or above the expected levels at each Key Stage. The policy also identifies the importance of assessing and recognising progress made by pupils on an individual level.

The new assessment arrangements being introduced from 2012/13 for Communication and Using Maths, and from 2013/14 for Using ICT, include an expectation that, as well as achieving the expected level by the end of each Key Stage, pupils will progress by at least one level between each Key Stage. By capturing the progress made by pupils between each Key Stage, the new assessment arrangements will provide a measure of 'value-added'. In addition, it may be possible to separate out progress made by, for example, pupils with Free School Meals Entitlement.

School Inspection reports published by the Education and Training Inspectorate also provide a measure of 'value-added' by providing a qualitative, in-depth assessment of a school's provision, taking account of the context within which the school operates.

The Department is currently reviewing the existing commitment in Every School a Good School (ESaGS) – a Policy for School Improvement to develop a Contextual Value Added (CVA) measure. We have learned from international experience which has pointed up the complexities of developing a robust and credible CVA measure.

Private Finance Initiative Contracts

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Education, in relation to each currently active Private Finance Initiative contract in each Education and Library Board, to detail (i) the contract start and expiry date; (ii) the name and address of the business holding the contract; and (iii) the nature of each contract.

(AQW 10787/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are a number of Private Finance Initiative contracts currently active within the Education and Library Boards, details of which are contained in the table below.

Public Private Partnership / Private Finance Initiative contracts in the schools' sector typically have an operational phase of 25 or 30 years, which begins on the first day of operation of a school, following construction. The table provides the date of contract signature and the start and end date of the operational phase of each contract.

PPP / PFI contracts in the schools' sector are let on a Design, Build, Finance, Operate and Maintain basis, commonly known as a DBFOM contract. In some of the PFI contracts, catering and cleaning is the responsibility of the PPP Operator; in other instances these services have been retained by the Education and Library Board.

Education and Library Board	(i) Contract signature date (ii) start and expiry date of operational phase of contract	(ii) the name and address of the business holding the contract	(iii) the nature of each contract
BELB: Wellington College, Balmoral High School and Regional Training Unit PFI Pathfinder Project	5 19 Oct 2000 (ii) Jan 2002 to Jan 2027	Northwin (Balmoral and Wellington) Ltd. 5 Ballygowan Road, Hillsborough, Co. Down BT26 6HX	DBFOM (inclusive of cleaning and catering services)
BELB: Belfast Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) Phase 1 PFI Project (covering Orangefield Primary School, Grosvenor Grammar School, Ashfield Girls High School, Belfast Model School for Girls, Belfast Boys' Model School and Ballysillan Youth Club)	(i) 10 Mar 2008 (ii) May 2009 to Apr 2039	Amey Belfast Schools Partnership PFI Co Ltd. The Sherard Building, Edmund Halley Road, Oxford, OX4 4DQ	DBFOM (cleaning and catering services retained by BELB)
SEELB: Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College and Nendrum College, Comber PPP Project	(i) 01 Sep 2006 (ii) Feb 2008 to Feb 2038	Bangor Nendrum School Services Ltd. Epsilon, Windmill Hill Business Park, Whitehill Way, Swindon SN5 6NX	DBFOM (cleaning and catering services retained by SEELB)
SEELB: Tor Bank Special School, Dundonald	(i) 14 Mar 2011 (ii) Oct 2012 to Oct 2037	Tor Bank School Education Partnership Ltd. c/o Bilfinger Berger PI Ltd, Ground Floor, Quay Gate House, 15 Scrabo Street, Belfast, BT5 4BD	DBFOM (cleaning and catering services retained by SEELB)
SELB: Drumglass High School, Dungannon PFI Pathfinder Project	(i) 01 Jul 1999 (ii) Sep 2000 to Sep 2025	Semperian 118 North Main Street, Carronshore, Falkirk FK2 8HU	DBFOM (inclusive of cleaning and catering services)

Teachers Engaged in Examination Work: Cover

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of providing cover for teachers who were engaged in examination work for which they were remunerated, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 10788/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not hold this information. The Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has provided the information in the table below.

Overall Substitution Cover Costs for Teachers Engaged in Examination Work.

Financial Year	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
Costs	£544,142	£541,150	£519,161

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education how much the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment has paid to teachers involved in all aspects of examination work, including setting and marking papers, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 10789/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below details how much the council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment has paid to teachers involved in all aspects of examination work, including setting and marking papers, in each of the last three years.

Year	Total Inc Expenses
2008-2009	£5,063,187
2009-2010	£5,525,420
2010-2011	£5,496,307

Source: CCEA

Note: figures provided exclude 2011/12 as these are not finalised until June 2012.

Dunmurry High School

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education when he will make a decision on the future of Dunmurry High School and to outline the reasons for the delay.

(AQW 10794/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The development proposal for the closure of Dunmurry High School was published by the South Eastern Education & Library Board on 13 December 2011 and the statutory 2 month consultation period ended on 13 February 2012.

As you are aware, I announced my decision on 25 April that Dunmurry High School should close.

Dromore Central Primary School

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education how his Department intends to spend the 2012/13 capital build budget; and whether any priority provision has been made for Dromore Central Primary School.

(AQW 10795/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The total gross capital budget for my Department in 2012/13 is £104.1m, and is required to cover investment in transport, ICT, youth, early years, minor works and committed major works, as well a number of other capital requirements.

The department's capital allocation is a substantial reduction against figures previously indicated under ISNI2, and this has had a significant impact on taking forward plans to modernise the schools estate. I am continuing to examine the approach to capital investment to ensure that we invest strategically in the schools' estate as we migrate to an area-based approach.

As you will be aware in September 2011, I 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.

To date I have received, from all Boards, draft area plans for Stand Alone Special Schools and draft area plans for post-primary provision. Primary area plans will be submitted by end June 2012. My officials are considering these plans against Departmental policies and are currently engaged in dialogue through the Area Planning Coordination Group that has been established.

Previously identified projects, such as that for Dromore Central PS., 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.

I am not in a position at this time, therefore, to comment on any specific school or potential project or what capital builds may be considered. There is, however, a need to ensure that we continue to invest strategically in the schools' estate. When appropriate, I will announce future plans for capital investment.

P7 Pupils: North Down Area

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education, for each of the last five years, to detail (i) the number of pupils in P7 in each primary school in the North Down area who transferred to post-primary schools; and (ii) of these, how many obtained a place at a grammar school.

(AQW 10819/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Information relating to Year 7 enrolments is provided in Table 1. Information regarding destinations of Year 7 pupils has only been available to the Department since 2010 and has been provided in Table 2 below, for those pupils who transferred during the last two academic years.

Table 1

Year 7 pupils enrolled in primary schools in the North Down constituency 2007/08 – 2011/12

School name	Year 7 enrolment 2007/08	Year 7 enrolment 2008/09	Year 7 enrolment 2009/10	Year 7 enrolment 2010/11	Year 7 enrolment 2011/12
Ballyholme Primary School	92	87	85	81	77
Ballymagee Primary School	58	59	59	60	58
Ballyvester Primary School	12	10	14	14	10
Bangor Central Primary School	79	82	78	80	71
Bloomfield Primary School	43	54	54	40	36
Clandeboyne Primary School	39	35	20	22	23
Conlig Primary School	10	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Connor House Preparatory School	18	21	22	19	n/a
Crawfordsburn Primary School	15	45	32	22	39
Donaghadee Primary School	59	44	46	52	49
Glencraig Integrated Primary School	30	29	27	38	31
Glenlola Collegiate	11	9	9	14	9
Grange Park Primary School	52	49	52	52	52
Hollywood Primary School	61	58	59	51	48
Kilcooley Primary School	16	16	11	17	7
Kilmaine Primary School	86	87	84	88	85
Millisle Primary School	19	21	14	26	16
Rathmore Primary School	51	54	57	71	66
Redburn Primary School	11	9	9	12	7
St Anne's Primary School, Donaghadee	9	4	5	4	5
St Comgall's Primary School, Bangor	43	36	45	49	35
St Malachy's Primary School, Bangor	44	39	55	38	45
St Patrick's Primary School, Hollywood	36	39	32	34	32
Sullivan Upper School	28	27	28	27	26
Towerview Primary School	51	56	59	43	46

Table 2

Year 7 pupils enrolled in primary schools in the North Down constituency who subsequently transferred to a grammar post-primary school in 2010/11 and in 2011/12

School name	Pupils who transferred to a Grammar school in 2010/11	Pupils who transferred to a Grammar school in 2011/12
Ballyholme Primary School	68	61
Ballymagee Primary School	29	25
Ballyvester Primary School	7	*
Bangor Central Primary School	31	40
Bloomfield Primary School	6	11
Clandeboye Primary School	*	5
Connor House Preparatory School	19	17
Crawfordsburn Primary School	15	6
Donaghadee Primary School	18	27
Glencraig Integrated Primary School	21	29
Glenlola Collegiate	8	14
Grange Park Primary School	37	39
Hollywood Primary School	36	26
Kilcooley Primary School	0	0
Kilmaine Primary School	48	53
Millisle Primary School	6	7
Rathmore Primary School	26	28
Redburn Primary School	*	0
St Anne's Primary School, Donaghadee	0	*
St Comgall's Primary School, Bangor	29	27
St Malachy's Primary School, Bangor	15	14
St Patrick's Primary School, Hollywood	25	28
Sullivan Upper School	27	25
Towerview Primary School	27	18

Source: NI school census

Note:

- 1 Figures have been provided for all pupils who could be traced using the Unique Pupil Number in the following year.
- 2 Figures in Table 2 relate to Year 7 pupils in previous academic year.
- 3 '*' denotes fewer than 5 pupils

Primary Schools: Nursery Intake

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many primary schools currently have a larger nursery intake than their capacity for P1 intake.

(AQW 10820/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: For the 2011/12 school year 44 primary schools have an approved nursery unit enrolment that is larger than the capacity (ie approved admissions) number for the school's P1.

Admission to a particular pre-school setting will not guarantee admission to any primary school, but some schools may choose to use attendance at a particular pre-school setting in their admissions criteria. This practice was considered in the recent Review

of Pre-School Admissions Arrangements, announced in January 2012. It is the Department's intention to issue guidance to primary schools ending the use of this criterion as part of admissions criteria and amend the relevant legislation accordingly.

P1 Intake: Towerview Primary School, Bangor

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education, for each of the last five years, to detail the (i) P1 intake; and (ii) cap on P1 intake for Towerview Primary School, Bangor.

(AQW 10821/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is as follows:

Year	P1 Intake	Cap on P1 intake
2011/12	51	46 (rising to 51)
2010/11	48	46 (rising to 51)
2009/10	41	46 (rising to 51)
2008/09	42	58 (rising to 60)
2007/08	55	58 (rising to 60)

The "Cap on P1 intake" is defined by the school's admissions number, and for primary schools this number has a lower limit, rising to an upper limit which may apply provided the school does not exceed its enrolment number which defines the school's approved intake across all year groups.

The intake figures quoted are for admissions via the normal competitive admissions process which directly relate to the school's admissions number. They therefore exclude any supernumerary admissions as a result of either a statement of special educational need, a direction to admit issued by an admissions appeal tribunal, or a direction to admit under a School Attendance Order.

The school's admissions number reduced in 2009/10 as a result of a new school building which contained fewer classrooms.

Towerview Primary School, Bangor: Cap on Intake

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what is the cap on intake at Towerview Primary School, Bangor, for September 2012.

(AQW 10822/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Towerview Primary School may admit up to 46 pupils in September 2012, a limit defined by the school's published admissions number which is set by the Department following consultation with the school.

Primary schools are permitted to exceed their admissions number in any given year by a specified percentage without recourse to the Department to enable them to deal with unanticipated surges in applications, particularly where places at alternative schools are not available. The maximum number of pupils Towerview Primary School may admit if availing of this flexibility would be 51. However, this flexibility may only be utilised provided any additional pupils admitted do not result in the school exceeding its enrolment number.

Irish Language

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the advantages of the protocol between post-primary schools and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta which aims to ensure that the interests of the Irish language are maintained in schools with Irish-medium streams or units; and (ii) whether his Department has considered the advantages of having a similar protocol in primary schools.

(AQW 10831/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The advantages of the protocols developed between Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and school managing authorities have benefited both the host school and the Irish medium stream. Protocols have provided clarity around admissions policy; the range of subjects provided through the medium of Irish; governance arrangements; and introduced an agreement that the school managing authorities will assess the potential viability of the provision to be developed into a stand alone school.

The Report of Review of Irish medium education recommended that the development of new primary and post primary provision in a federation, unit or stream should be preceded by a protocol. In line with these recommendations protocols will be an integral part of the Development proposal process for both primary and post primary provision.

Integrated Education

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Education (i) what percentage of children are currently enrolled in integrated education; and (ii) what plans he has to increase this number.

(AQW 10839/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) 6.79 % of pupils are enrolled in integrated schools.
- (ii) The area planning process will consider the future need for a given area taking account of population projection. The level of demand for each sector will be determined and where there is clear evidence of a need to increase the provision in any sector then this will be built into the plan. As there is a finite number of pupils in an area, growth in any sector, including the integrated sector, will therefore have to be contained within the total planning figure for each Education and Library Board, so that the overall planning figure for all Boards is not exceeded. This means that growth in one sector may lead to a reduction in another sector.

Should proposals come forward within the area plans for increases in the number of places in integrated schools, I will consider these in the context of the area plan.

Proposed Cross-Border Survey

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the timescale for the proposed cross-border survey that he is undertaking jointly with the Dublin Government's Minister for Education and Skills.

(AQW 10849/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The cross border planning survey is currently being designed and undertaken jointly by the Department of Education in the north and the Department of Education and Science in the south. The survey will be conducted in September / October 2012, with the results from the survey and proposals on the way forward to be considered no later than the first North-South Ministerial Council Education meeting of 2013.

Cross-Sectoral Opportunities

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education how cross-sectoral opportunities will be explored through Area Based Planning.

(AQW 10852/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Area planning provides the opportunity to consider all potential solutions to maximise the accessibility of high quality education in local areas. It is a requirement of the process for the Boards to engage with, and seek input from, the other school sectors. Realistic, innovative and creative solutions may be considered and may include options that increase sharing of education provision and infrastructure. I cannot, nor would I wish to, be prescriptive about the nature, or type, of any emerging proposals.

Shared Education Advisory Forum

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education for an update on the establishment of the Shared Education Advisory Forum.

(AQW 10854/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I intend to establish a ministerial advisory group on advancing shared education in the coming weeks.

Vending Machines in Schools

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many schools have vending machines for fizzy/caffeinated drinks; and (ii) whether there has been a reduction in the number of the vending machines in schools in each of the last five years.

(AQW 10857/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not hold the details requested for individual schools.

The provision of vending machines in school dining areas is the responsibility of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) in the controlled and maintained sectors and individual voluntary grammar and grantmaintained integrated schools. Vending machines in all schools, located outside the environs of the school canteen, are entirely a matter for the schools themselves.

I have been informed by the ELBs that only the BELB and SEELB Catering Services provide food or drink to pupils through vending machines. None of these machines contain fizzy/caffeinated drinks. They only stock items which are compliant with the Department's nutritional standards, for example still water, sparkling water and appletizer.

My Department recognises that a healthy, balanced diet is vital for children's growth and development, and for their long term health and well being. It has been working for some time to improve the quality of food in schools here and compulsory nutritional standards for school lunches are now in place in all our schools. Standards for other food and drinks provided in schools, including those through vending machines, breakfast clubs, tuck shops etc, have also been drawn up and schools are expected to adhere to them. They specify that items such as crisps, sweets and fizzy drinks should not be provided in school.

P1 Places: Moira Primary School

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of P1 places available at Moira Primary School; (ii) the number of children that applied; and (iii) how many children were unsuccessful in gaining entry for the 2012/13 academic year.

(AQW 10861/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The admissions number of Moira Primary School is 58, although the school can admit up to 60 pupils provided the overall enrolment capacity of the school is not exceeded. The school considered seventy-seven applications for admission in the 2012/13 academic year; 68 first-preference, 6 second-preference and 3 third-preference. Sixty of these children have been offered places leaving 17 children who were unsuccessful in gaining entry to Moira Primary School.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to detail the dates, in the last two years, of all the meetings between the Chief Executive designate of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) and the Chief Executives, Chairpersons, Members and Officers of Education and Library Boards to plan preparation work for the ESA.

(AQW 10868/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A total of 97 meetings have been held between the ESA Chief Executive (Designate) and Chief Executives, Chairpersons, Members and Officers of the Education and Library Boards in the last two years in preparation for ESA. These are detailed in the table below.

Gavin Boyd, Chief Executive (Designate), ESA

Meetings with ELB Staff, 1 April 2010 –30 April 2012

Date	Details
13 April 2010	BELB
22 April 2010	WELB/SELB/BELB/NEELB
26 April 2010	WELB/SELB/BELB/NEELB
27 April 2010	SELB
30 April 2010	BELB
4 May 2010	5 x ELBs
18 May 2010	WELB,
21 May 2010	SEELB
24 May 2010	WELB/SELB/BELB/NEELB
24 May 2010	5 x ELB
27 May 2010	NEELB
15 June 2010	WELB
18 June 2010	NEELB
29 June 2010	BELB
29 June 2010	BELB
1 July 2010	WELB
2 July 2010	5 x ELBs
2 July 2010	SELB
6 July 2010	BELB
21 July 2010	SELB/WELB
22 July 2010	WELB
27 July 2010	5 x ELBs
27 July 2010	NEELB
30 July 2010	BELB
4 August 2010	5 x ELBs
17 August 2010	WELB/SELB/BELB/NEELB
25 August 2010	WELB

Date	Details
3 September 2010	SELB/WELB
7 September 2010	BELB
8 September 2010	SELB
8 September 2010	BELB
9 September 2010	SEELB
10 September 2010	5 x ELBs
10 September 2010	NEELB
21 September 2010	WELB
27 September 2010	BELB
30 September 2010	SELB/WELB
1 October 2010	WELB
5 October 2010	5x ELBs
8 October 2010	BELB
8 October 2010	NEELB
19 October 2010	NEELB
26 October 2010	NEELB
28 October 2010	BELB
28 October 2010	SELB
29 October 2010	BELB
4 November 2010	5 x ELBs
5 November 2010	WELB/SELB/BELB/NEELB
11 November 2010	WELB
23 November 2010	NEELB
24 November 2010	5 x ELBs
3 December 2010	BELB
14 December 2010	ELB
14 December 2010	SELB/WELB
3 February 2011	WELB
1 March 2011	WELB
4 March 2011	SELB
11 March 2011	WELB
16 March 2011	SELB
21 March 2011	WELB
24 March 2011	SELB
24 March 2011	BELB
23 March 2011	WELB
28 March 2011	SEELB
4 April 2011	SEELB

Date	Details
4 April 2011	BELB
13 April 2011	WELB/SEELB
14 April 2011	WELB
14 April 2011	5 x ELBs
15 April 2011	SEELB
14 June 2011	WELB/SEELB
5 September 2011	NEWLB
9 September 2011	WELB/SEELB
15 September 2011	SEELB
16 September 2011	WELB
20 September 2011	NEELB
21 September 2011	BELB
30 September 2011	SEELB
5 October 2011	BELB
7 October 2011	BELB
17 October 2011	BELB
31 October 2011	BELB
1 November 2011	SELB
1 November 2011	SEELB
9 November 2011	WELB
22 November 2011	NEELB
2 December 2011	SELB/WELB
6 December 2011	WELB/SEELB
13 December 2011	BELB
14 December 2011	WELB
5 January 2012	WELB
5 January 2012	SELB/WELB
11 January 2012	5 x ELBs
13 January 2012	WELB
20 January 2012	SELB/WELB
24 February 2012	WELB/SEELB
27 February 2012	SELB

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to detail the dates, in the last two years, of all the meetings between members of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) Implementation Team and the Chief Executives, Chairpersons, Members and Officers of Education and Library Boards to plan preparation work for the ESA.

(AQW 10869/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A total of 309 meetings have been held between members of the ESAIT and Education and Library Board officers during the last two years. These are broken down by type and date in the table below.

2010

Date	Met with
April	
1st	All ELBs
10th	All ELBs
12th	All ELBs
12th	All ELBs
13th	All ELBs
14th	All ELBs
15th	All ELBs
16th	All ELBs
16th	All ELBs
21st	All ELBs
22nd	All ELBs
22nd	All ELBs
26th	All ELBs
27th	All ELBs
29th	All ELBs

Date	Met with
May	
4th	All ELBs
6th	All ELBs
7th	BELB
10th	All ELBs
12th	All ELBs
19th	All ELBs
20th	BELB
21st	BELB
24th	All ELBs
26th	All ELBs
27th	All ELBs
27th	SEELB
27th	All ELBs
28th	BELB
June	
1st	All ELBs
2nd	Antrim BC Ed Cttee
2nd	BELB
4th	BELB
10th	All ELBs
14th	All ELBs
16th	All ELBs
17th	All ELBs
17th	All ELBs
18th	BELB
21st	All ELBs
22nd	BELB
22nd	All ELBs
23rd	All ELBs
25th	BELB
30th	BELB
30th	NEELB
30th	All ELBs
July	
1st	All ELBs
2nd	All ELBs
2nd	All ELBs

Date	Met with
20th	All ELBs
22nd	WELB
26th	SELB
27th	All ELBs
August	
3rd	WELB
4th	All ELBs
6th	All ELBs
10th	WELB
10th	All ELBs
11th	All ELBs
16th	All ELBs
17th	All ELBs
September	
2nd	WELB
3rd	BELB
6th	All ELBs
7th	All ELBs
9th	SEELB
9th	WELB
10th	All ELBs
10th	All ELBs
13th	All ELBs
13th	All ELBs
14th	All ELBs
14th	All ELBs
15th	All ELBs
21st	All ELBs
23rd	BELB
23rd	All ELBs
23rd	All ELBs
24th	WELB
24th	NEELB
28th	All ELBs
29th	All ELBs
30th	All ELBs

Date	Met with
October	
1st	WELB
4th	All ELBs
5th	All ELBs
5th	All ELBs
11th	WELB
12th	All ELBs
13th	All ELBs
14th	All ELBs
14th	All ELBs
19th	SELB
19th	All ELBs
20th	All ELBs
21st	All ELBs
22nd	BELB
25th	All ELBs
26th	NEELB
28th	BELB
November	
3rd	All ELBs
4th	All ELBs
4th	All ELBs
4th	WELB
5th	All ELBs
8th	All ELBs
10th	All ELBs
17th	All ELBs
17th	All ELBs
23rd	All ELBs
24th	All ELBs
26th	All ELBs
December	
1st	All ELBs
7th	All ELBs
7th	WELB
9th	All ELBs
14th	All ELBs

Date	Met with
16th	BELB
16th	All ELBs
20th	All ELBs

2011	
Date	Met with
January	
5th	All ELBs
9th	BELB
10th	All ELBs
11th	WELB
11th	All ELBs
13th	BELB
13th	All ELBs
13th	All ELBs
14th	All ELBs
17th	All ELBs
17th	SELB
18th	All ELBs
21st	All ELBs
24th	SELB
25th	All ELBs
28th	All ELBs

2011	
Date	Met with
February	
2nd	All ELBs
3rd	All ELBs
7th	BELB
9th	All ELBs
16th	All ELBs
17th	SELB
21st	WELB
21st	SEELB
23rd	All ELBs
23rd	WELB
March	
1st	WELB
2nd	All ELBs
4th	SELB
8th	All ELBs
10th	All ELBs
10th	SEELB
11th	WELB
14th	SELB
15th	All ELBs
16th	All ELBs
16th	SELB & WELB
23rd	BELB
28th	NEELB
29th	All ELBs
29th	All ELBs
30th	All ELBs
April	
4th	BELB
7th	All ELBs
8th	All ELBs
11th	All ELBs
13th	All ELBs
14th	All ELBs
14th	All ELBs
15th	All ELBs

2011	
Date	Met with
19th	BELB
19th	All ELBs
20th	All ELBs
20th	All ELBs
May	
3rd	WELB
10th	BELB
11th	WELB
12th	All ELBs
17th	All ELBs
19th	NEELB
20th	SELB
24th	BELB
25th	SELB
26th	All ELBs
June	
1st	All ELBs
6th	All ELBs
8th	WELB
9th	All ELBs
10th	All ELBs
13th	SELB
14th	All ELBs
14th	SEELB
14th	All ELBs
15th	All ELBs
16th	All ELBs
21st	All ELBs
22nd	All ELBs
27th	All ELBs
28th	All ELBs
July	
7th	All ELBs
21st	All ELBs
28th	All ELBs
28th	All ELBs

2011	
Date	Met with
August	
4th	All ELBs
10th	All ELBs
16th	All ELBs
18th	All ELBs
26th	WELB
31st	All ELBs
September	
1st	All ELBs
2nd	SELB
5th	All ELBs
6th	All ELBs
7th	All ELBs
7th	All ELBs
8th	All ELBs
8th	BELB
9th	All ELBs
9th	All ELBs
12th	All ELBs
13th	All ELBs
13th	BELB
15th	All ELBs
16th	All ELBs
16th	All ELBs
21st	All ELBs
26th	All ELBs
28th	All ELBs
29th	All ELBs
30th	All ELBs
October	
4th	All ELBs
4th	All ELBs
5th	All ELBs
5th	All ELBs
5th	WELB
6th	All ELBs
10th	All ELBs

2011	
Date	Met with
13th	All ELBs
18th	All ELBs
19th	WELB
20th	All ELBs
26th	All ELBs
27th	WELB
28th	WELB
November	
2nd	SELB
3rd	All ELBs
4th	All ELBs
8th	All ELBs
8th	All ELBs
11th	All ELBs
15th	BELB
16th	SELB
16th	WELB
16th	All ELBs
17th	All ELBs
20th	SEELB
22nd	All ELBs
29th	All ELBs
29TH	All ELBs
29th	BELB
December	
1st	All ELBs
1st	All ELBs
6th	All ELBs
7th	All ELBs
8th	All ELBs
13th	All ELBs
13th	All ELBs
14th	All ELBs
15th	BELB
15th	All ELBs

2012	
Date	Met with
January	
5th	All ELBs
9th	BELB
10th	All ELBs
17th	SELB
17th	All ELBs
18th	All ELBs
19th	All ELBs
19th	All ELBs
24th	All ELBs
27th	All ELBs
31st	BELB
February	
1st	All ELBs
2nd	All ELBs
8th	All ELBs
9th	All ELBs
14th	All ELBs
21st	All ELBs
22nd	All ELBs
23rd	All ELBs
28th	All ELBs
March	
5th	All ELBs
12th	SELB / WELB
13th	All ELBs
16th	NEELB
16th	SELB
21st	SELB / WELB
22nd	All ELBs
26th	SELB / WELB
27th	All ELBs
28th	WELB
28th	All ELBs
29th	All ELBs

2012	
Date	Met with
April	
2nd	NEELB
2nd	SELB
18th	All ELBs
19th	All ELBs
25th	All ELBs
26th	All ELBs

Legislation

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) what legislation his Department has introduced since May 2011; (ii) what proposals for legislation, subject to Executive approval, he has introduced or intends to introduce between May 2011 and March 2015; (iii) the anticipated timescale for the introduction of each Bill; and (iv) the intention of each Bill.

(AQW 10905/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 10653/11-15, tabled by Conal McDevitt and published in the Official Report on 27 April 2012. The Department has not introduced any legislation since May 2011.

Schools: Vending Machines for Healthy Foods

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education how many schools have vending machines for healthy foods, such as fruit.

(AQW 10924/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not hold the details requested for individual schools.

The provision of vending machines in school dining areas is the responsibility of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) in the controlled and maintained sectors and individual voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated schools. Vending machines in all schools, located outside the environs of the school canteen, are entirely a matter for the schools themselves.

I have been informed by the ELBs that only the BELB and SEELB Catering Services provide food or drink to pupils through vending machines.

The SEELB has six machines, none of which contain fruit.

The BELB has indicated that none of the companies who tendered, in 2009, were able to offer a range of healthy snacks in a vending machine. The Board therefore purchased a machine which it fills with sandwiches, salads, fruit salads, milk and other snack items which meet the Department's nutritional standards. The trial period of this machine has shown, however, that it is hard to maintain financially given the perishable nature of the foods and the cost of labour to fill the machine.

Fizzy/Caffeinated Drinks in Pupils' Diets and Negative Behaviour

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education what analysis his Department has carried out on the correlation between fizzy/caffeinated drinks in pupils' diets and negative behaviour.

(AQW 10926/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department has not carried out any analysis on the correlation between fizzy/caffeinated drinks in pupils' diets and negative behaviour.

However, the School Food Trust, which provides advice and support to schools in England, has produced a number of reports on school food and behaviour which are available on their website at:

<http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/research/research-projects>

The Trust's website also includes some case studies for interventions in local schools; a number of these highlight the role of fizzy/sugary drinks in relation to behaviour and two of these can be accessed at:

<http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/schools/case-studies/langford-primary-school>

<http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/school-cooks-caterers/case-studies/the-south-leeds-academy>

In addition, the Food Standards Agency published research, in 2007, which showed a modest association between children eating foods or consuming drinks containing certain artificial food additives and subsequent behavioural problems.

The Department has also provided guidance for schools on water provision as part of the School Food: the Essential Guide resource. This has the dual aims of reducing the consumption of sugary/soft drinks and promoting hydration.

Research shows that the amount of fluid consumed by most young people is below the recommended levels for good health and wellbeing. Where schools have improved water provision and have developed an effective policy for promoting water, pupils consume more water on a regular basis, which can have a range of health and other benefits, including the reduction of tiredness, irritability and distraction from thirst.

By incorporating water in the classroom, pupils are likely to be more attentive, and able to enjoy learning. In schools where water is encouraged throughout the day, there have been reported improvements in concentration levels, academic performance and pupil behaviour.

School Canteens: Choice of Food

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education what action his Department is taking, and intends to take, to improve the diets of school children through the choice of food available in school canteens.

(AQW 10928/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department recognises that a healthy, balanced diet is vital for children's growth and development, and for their long term health and well being. It has been working for some time to improve the quality of food in schools here and compulsory nutritional standards for school lunches are now in place in all our schools. Standards for other food and drinks provided in schools (breakfast clubs, tuck shops, vending machines etc) have also been drawn up and schools are expected to adhere to them. They specify that items such as crisps, sweets and fizzy drinks should not be provided in school.

The revised curriculum also includes a Personal Development and Mutual Understanding strand for primary pupils and a Learning for Life and Work strand for postprimary pupils which allow pupils to explore issues such as the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity, the consequences of poor dietary choices, ways of achieving a healthy diet, the influences on their physical and emotional health and ways of developing their self-esteem.

In addition, it is a requirement of the revised curriculum for all children to undertake Home Economics at Key Stage 3. This provides opportunities for young people to develop their understanding of a healthy diet and the hygienic and healthy use of foods in the preparation of meals.

My Department is currently working with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) to finalise a joint Food in Schools policy which advocates a whole school approach to all food and drinks provided in schools and that all children should develop the knowledge and skills necessary to make healthy food choices now and in later life.

Enrolment Numbers

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 10586/11-15, how many post-primary schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area have exceeded their approved enrolment number in the last three years.

(AQW 10987/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The post-primary schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area which have exceeded their approved enrolment number in the last three years are listed in the table attached. These can be schools which have exceeded their numbers with or without the prior approval of the Department.

Schools must seek prior approval of the Department to exceed their approved numbers by way of a temporary variation. Each year the Department completes an exercise to identify schools that have exceeded their approved numbers without prior approval. This exercise requires verified data from the school census and as such has not yet been completed for the 2011/12 school year. This means that there may be other schools that have exceeded their approved enrolment number in the 2011/12 school year of which the Department is not yet aware. If any such schools are discovered, the Department will investigate and can sanction the schools in question in a number of ways including the zero-rating of pupil(s) for LMS purposes or by reducing the admissions number of school in a subsequent school year.

NEELB Post Primary Schools - Exceeded Enrolment Numbers

2009/10 – 2011/12 School Years

2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Ballyclare High School	Ballyclare High School	Ballyclare High School
Ballyclare Secondary School	Ballyclare Secondary School	Ballyclare Secondary School
Ballymena Academy	Ballymena Academy	Ballymena Academy
Cross & Passion College	Cross & Passion College	Cross & Passion College
Dalriada	Dalriada	Dalriada
Dunclug College	Dunclug College	Dunclug College
Slemish College	Slemish College	Slemish College

2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
St Pius X College	St Pius X College	St Pius X College
St Colm's High School, Draperstown	St Colm's High School, Draperstown	
Magherafelt High School	Magherafelt High School	
St Paul's College, Kilrea		St Paul's College, Kilrea
	Coleraine High School	Coleraine High School
	St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt	St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt
	Dominican College	Dominican College
Rainey Endowed	Cambridge House Grammar School	Carrickfergus Grammar School
		Ulidia Integrated College
		Larne Grammar School

Enrolment Numbers

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 10586/11-15, how many post-primary schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area exceeded their approved enrolment number without following the legally required steps in each of the last three years.

(AQW 10997/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department is aware that the following numbers of post primary schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area exceeded their approved enrolment number without following the legally required steps in each of the last three years.

2009/10		3
2010/11		1
2011/12	The exercise which is used to identify which schools in the current school year have exceeded their approved numbers without the prior approval of the Department is still ongoing. The Department, therefore, cannot confirm the final number of schools at which this may have happened for the 2011/12 school year.	

School Attendance

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 705/11-15, to detail (i) the rate, per thousand, of primary school pupils who have less than 85 percent attendance, broken down by (a) council area; and (b) electoral ward; and (ii) what action is being taken to reduce the levels of absenteeism. [R]

(AQW 11004/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

School Attendance

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education pursuant to AQW 706/11-15, to detail (i) the rate, per thousand, of 15 to 17 year old pupils who have less than 85 percent attendance, broken down by (a) council area; and (b) electoral ward; and (ii) what action is being taken to reduce the levels of absenteeism. [R]

(AQW 11005/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

School Attendance

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 707/11-15, to detail (i) the rate, per thousand, of post-primary school pupils who have less than 85 percent attendance, broken down by (a) council area; and (b) electoral ward; and (ii) what action is being taken to reduce the levels of absenteeism. [R]

(AQW 11006/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Transfer Tests: Preparation of Pupils

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education what action his Department and the Education and Library Boards are taking in response to complaints that schools are concentrating on preparing pupils for transfer tests rather than on teaching the curriculum.

(AQW 11048/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Where the Department receives a complaint alleging that a primary school may be explicitly providing children with preparation for unregulated entrance tests to the detriment of other children not entered for these tests it will write to the school seeking reassurance that the school's Board of Governors (BoG) has had regard for the Department's post-primary transfer policy and that the school is fulfilling its statutory obligations to deliver the primary curriculum, and is not departing from these obligations.

Parental concerns may be raised through the established processes for handling curriculum complaints. If, following informal and formal approaches to a school, a complainant remains dissatisfied with the position adopted by a school's BoG a written complaint may be made to the relevant Education and Library Board (ELB). The ELB will then set up an independent Curriculum Complaints Tribunal to hear the complaint, and when the complaint has been fully investigated and considered the Tribunal will notify all parties of its determination. If it upholds the complaint, the Tribunal can give a notice for steps to be taken to remedy the matter.

Also, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) has advised that should a District Inspector, during the course of an incidental visit to a primary school, encounter a lesson where children are preparing for unregulated entrance tests, they will raise the matter with the teacher and the Principal, and advise the Department. A similar approach will also be taken in the case of formal inspections where these present evidence for it.

Transfer Tests: Preparation of Pupils

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education whether the Education and Library Boards regularly confirm with primary schools that they are teaching the curriculum and not concentrating on preparing pupils for transfer tests.

(AQW 11049/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The statutory duty to deliver the revised curriculum rests with Boards of Governors of individual schools and does not ascribe a monitoring role to Education and Library Boards.

Monitoring that the curriculum is being delivered does however form part of the role of the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). Should a District Inspector, during the course of an incidental visit to a primary school, encounter a lesson where children are preparing for unregulated entrance tests, they will raise the matter with the teacher and the Principal, and advise the Department. A similar approach will also be taken in the case of formal inspections where these present evidence for it.

A primary school's function is to teach children the curriculum, it is not the function of any primary school to set aside the curriculum to teach to the individual entrance criteria of any post primary school.

Primary schools are responsible and will be held to account for the education of all pupils. All teaching and activities should be designed and delivered to and for the needs of all pupils.

Education and Skills Authority: Directors

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education how many senior officers in the Education and Library Boards who received redundancy or severance payments in the last five years were subsequently employed or appointed as directors of the Education and Skills Authority, broken down by (i) posts held; (ii) previous salaries; (iii) redundancy/severance payments; and (iv) annual salaries and allowances in each case.

(AQW 11057/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been advised by the Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team that no senior officers in the Education & Library Boards who received redundancy or severance payments in the last five years were subsequently employed or appointed as Directors (Designate) of the Education and Skills Authority.

GCSEs and A Levels in GB: Proposed Changes

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what discussions he has had with the UK Minister for Education, Michael Gove, regarding proposals to change GCSEs and A Levels in GB, particularly in relation to moving away from a modular system, and the impact that this may have on Northern Ireland students.

(AQW 11116/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I will always seek to ensure that qualifications offered here are portable, comparable and meet the needs of all our young people. It remains vital that all qualifications must be recognised and valued by employers and higher education institutions. Young people here must never be disadvantaged in relation to the qualifications they seek to acquire. I would also add that the standard of GCSEs remains the same, irrespective of whether the assessment route is linear or unitised.

I consulted widely on changes to GCSEs, proposed by Michael Gove in England, and decided that schools are best placed to make crucial decisions in the best interests of their pupils. That is why I decided to continue to support both a unitised and linear route.

In relation to GCE A Levels, the implications are potentially very significant and consequently, I will want to talk to a wide range of relevant stakeholders before deciding on any proposed changes, and their appropriateness here. I will also be meeting with Ministerial counterparts here and in England, Scotland and Wales to discuss all aspects of any proposed changes.

Education is a matter for the locally accountable governments, both here and in Wales, and I will continue to make evidence-based decisions on the nature and pace of change on critical areas of education such as GCSEs and A Levels.

Department for Employment and Learning

Consultation Documents and Official Reports: Cost

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what was the cost to his Department of producing (i) consultation documents; and (ii) official reports in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 10441/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The cost to the Department for Employment and Learning of producing consultation documents and official reports in the 2010/11 financial year is as follows:

Consultation documents	Official reports
£17,600	£24,816.31

Stranmillis University College, Belfast: Meeting with Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 9193/11-15, who initiated the cancellation of the meeting.

(AQW 10452/11-15)

Dr Farry: The meeting was cancelled by mutual consent.

Open University Courses: Lecturers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) the number lecturers that have been brought to Northern Ireland to teach Open University courses, including the number of occasions; (ii) how many hours each lecturer was contracted to work; and (iii) to breakdown the cost in time and expenses in each incidence.

(AQW 10608/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning does not have such information. Apart from 20 Initial Teacher Education (ITE) places, my Department does not provide any funding to the Open University. The Open University receives its funding from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills. You may, therefore, wish to contact the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, or the Open University directly, for this information.

Legislation

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) what proposals for legislation, subject to Executive approval, he has introduced or intends to introduce between April 2012 and March 2015; (ii) the anticipated timescale for the introduction of each Bill; and (iii) the intention of each Bill.

(AQW 10652/11-15)

Dr Farry: Currently, my Department has not provided formal notification of the introduction of any primary legislation between April 2012 and March 2015. However, work is ongoing in a number of areas which may occasion input to the legislative programme. I issued a discussion paper on 1 May that will inform a planned review of employment law. It is likely that policy proposals arising from that review will generate the need for primary legislation during the current mandate. In addition, future primary legislation may be required for policy proposals related to Further Education.

University of Ulster: Staff

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action he is taking to ensure the job security of University of Ulster staff whose employment contracts are due to be outsourced.

(AQW 10684/11-15)

Dr Farry: Any decision on this issue is a matter for the University as an autonomous organisation. However, I understand that the staff affected by the proposed outsourcing of services in the University of Ulster next year will transfer to the new service provider as provided for under the Transfer of Undertakings [Protection of Employment] Regulations 2006.

St Mary's University College, Belfast

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if any guarantees or specific directions were made by his predecessor that secured the status of St Mary's University College, Belfast and ensured that it would not be subject to any merger.

(AQW 10704/11-15)

Dr Farry: I am not aware of any such guarantees or direction in relation to St. Mary's University College.

Bytes Project

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether his Department intends to continue funding the Bytes Project for the duration of 2012.

(AQW 10718/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department, in conjunction with the Department of Education (DE), has been a contributory funder to the BYTES Project since April 2004. DE has transferred responsibility for organisations such as BYTES to the Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNi) in 2010. YCNi provided funding of £220,000 to the project in financial year 2011/2012, which was matched by DEL.

The YCNi has advised that it has provided interim funding for the period April to June 2012 with a decision on further funding for the remainder of the financial year 2012/2013 being made following a review by YCNi of the project's operations.

My Department is also providing interim funding for the period April 2012 to June 2012 of up to a maximum of £55,000. Decisions on funding for the remainder of the financial year will be made following the outcome of the review being undertaken by YCNi.

In addition, the Northern Ireland European Social Fund has committed to provide funding to the BYTES Project of £33,999 with match funding from my Department of £21,249 in the financial year 2012-13.

Agrifood Sector

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, given that the Programme for Government contains a commitment to develop a strategic plan for the agri-food sector, how he plans to ensure that the necessary skills are in place to facilitate any growth of the Agri-food industry; and how his Department will ensure that it is fully involved in any such plan.

(AQW 10724/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have already designated the Agri-food industry as a priority sector due to its contribution to rebalancing the economy.

Last summer, officials from my Department alongside their counterparts in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and Invest NI established an employer-led group to identify skills gaps and shortages across the industry and develop action-focused interventions to address them.

The Group, chaired by Tony O'Neill of Moy Park, consists of employers, representatives from the education sector and officials from DEL, DARD and Invest NI. The Group has produced an Action Plan, which will be published shortly, detailing the actions to be taken to address the skills issues and sector attractiveness and to improve communications in the sector over the next three years.

The Action Plan will contribute to the work of the new Agri-Food Strategy Board.

S.R. 2005 No 151 The Fair Employment Tribunal (Rules of Procedure) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) to outline his Department's policy intention in relation to paragraph 19 of Schedule 1 to S.R. 2005 No 151 The Fair Employment Tribunal (Rules of Procedure) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005; (ii) whether he intends to review this Rule, as such rules in other tribunals are intended to deter vexatious litigants; and (iii) what mechanisms his Department has in place to mitigate a chairman of a Fair Employment Tribunal, sitting alone, applying the Rule in an injudicious manner.

(AQW 10843/11-15)

Dr Farry: Rule 19 of Schedule 1 of S.R. 2005 No. 151 provides a mechanism to deter parties, whether claimants or respondents, from pursuing before the Fair Employment Tribunal a claim which, in the opinion of a chairman, has little prospect of success. Parties wishing to pursue weak cases may be ordered to pay a deposit of up to £500 (incorporating an assessment of the party's ability to pay) as a precondition for the continuance of the tribunal proceedings. The intention is to discourage proceedings that have the potential to waste public money and to increase costs for parties.

My Department's recent comprehensive review of systems for resolving workplace disputes concluded that it was reasonable to consider the appropriateness of the current maximum level of the deposit, £500. I issued an Employment Law discussion paper to all key stakeholders on 1 May 2012 inviting views on this matter, as well as on a range of other proposals relating to the efficiency and effectiveness of the tribunal system.

If asked to do so, the Fair Employment Tribunal may review a decision of a chairman sitting alone, or a decision of a panel that includes a chairman and two lay panel members, on a variety of grounds, where the interests of justice require such a review. In addition, a party who is dissatisfied on a point of law with a decision of the Fair Employment Tribunal has the right to bring an appeal to the Court of Appeal.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Consultation Documents and Official Reports: Cost

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what was the cost to her Department of producing (i) consultation documents; and (ii) official reports in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 10442/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): In the 2010/11 financial year my Department spent £47,694 producing consultation documents and £2,641 producing official reports.

Tourism Projects: North and East Antrim

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much grant funding has been allocated to tourism projects in the (i) North Antrim; and (ii) East Antrim areas in each of the last three years.

(AQW 10444/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In October 2011, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) distributed a copy of the publication Financially Assisted Projects 2008 – 11 to all MLA's. This publication holds details on the allocation of grant funding within the Causeway Coast and Glens Signature Project area (under which both North Antrim and East Antrim fall) during this period.

The tables below provide a summary of all investment in tourism projects by NITB and Invest NI in the North Antrim and East Antrim areas on a constituency basis in each of the last 3 financial years.

North Antrim Constituency Breakdown

Financial year	Number of Offers	Amount Offered
2009-10	7	£278,300.50
2010-11	16	£9,854,855.79
2011-12	4	£432,374.85
Total	27	£10,565,531.14

East Antrim Constituency Breakdown

Financial year	Number of offers	Amount Offered
2009-10	-	-
2010-11	3	£155,652.09
2011-12	2	£45,000.00
Total	5	£200,652.09

Information relating to grant funding available under the NITB Tourism Events Funding Programme for 2011/12 and 2012/13 is published on www.nitb.com/events. This information is not currently available by District Council Area; however plans are in circulation to develop this disaggregation.

Trade and Innovation Programmes

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 10187/11-15, how the annual comparisons are influenced by the schedules for evaluations and monitoring visits and the extent to which the figures quoted in the answer are reliable.

(AQW 10445/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The figures are a reliable indication of the total business value which companies in a particular year have attributed directly to an intervention of support from InterTradeIreland.

The schedule of evaluations and monitoring visits can influence the figures because it is dependent on factors such as:

- different start times for programmes;
- different start dates for companies joining programmes;
- different time spans for the accrual of benefits; and
- scheduling visits to make best use of staff resources when visiting a particular location.

Thus not all the benefits of an intervention in a particular region may be collected in one year.

George Best Belfast City Airport: Job Losses

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the action being taken to help minimise job losses at George Best, Belfast City Airport and the assistance available to employees who are losing their jobs.

(AQW 10462/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The loss of British Midland International (BMI) jobs at George Best Belfast City Airport is very regrettable. However, this is a commercial matter for the International Airlines Group, the new owner of BMI, and is part of a UK wide cost cutting exercise.

I am aware that officials from the Department for Employment and Learning have already made contact with the Human Resources Department of BMI to offer support under the Redundancy Advice Service. This service offers a package of free support tailored to meet the needs of the employer and their employees facing redundancy.

Invest NI: Advertising

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 9786/11-15, to detail (i) the breakdown of the costs under International 2012 Promotion; and (ii) to whom payments were made under this category.

(AQW 10468/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The International Promotion campaign was strongly aligned with a range of regional strategies in the Programme for Government, in particular to attract and support high quality investment, and to increase employment prospects by attracting high quality inward investment.

Advertising was placed in a wide range of highly targeted and relevant publications and across a range of media formats including print, online, radio and television advertising. Amongst the publications were The Economist, The Financial Times, The Wall Street Journal and Bloomberg.com. In the United States there was an element of television advertising on BBC America, supported with advertising on National Public Radio (NPR).

The total spend for the campaign from January - March 2012 was £786,670, inclusive of VAT, media rebates and advertising levies where appropriate.

Below is a breakdown of all costs paid out under this promotional campaign for advertising.

January 2012

www.bbcamerica.com/executive news	£3,643.35
Crain's New York Business Daily News Alert	£4,736.25
Biz Journals Silicon Valley Daily Email Update	£1,947.87
Biz Journals Boston Daily Email Update Newsletter	£5,002.84
www.forbes.com - Business Channel	£10,019.23
www.businessinsider.com	£894.19
www.bloomberg.com	£9,677.42
Marketplace Radio	£193,006.45
Wall Street Journal Eastern Edition	£16,254.97
Wall Street Journal Western Edition	£8,725.94
New York Times	£25,788.39
Boston Business Journal	£6,466.84
Silicon Valley Business Journal	£7,560.00
Bloomberg Business Week - NY Metro Edition	£15,491.61
BBC America	£116,129.03
Google Management Fee	£223.55
MIT Review Daily Newsletter	£2,322.58
MIT Technology Review.Com	£3,096.77
MIT Technology Review	£17,032.26
Siteselection.Com	£2,709.68

Adserving Cost	£576.00
Recharge	£3,300.00
Wind Power Monthly	£2,301.46
Energy Digital	£1,200.00
Energy Digital	£1,709.00
Wind Energy Network	£1,080.00
Energy Global	£900.00
New Energy World	£720.00
World Wind Technology	£3,960.00
Adserving Cost	£306.00
World Wind Technology	£3,960.00
Total	£470,741.00

February 2012

www.crainsnewyork.com	£9,563.57
www.crainschicago.com	£9,563.57
www.bizjournals.com/sanjose	£9,099.27
Adserving Cost	£164.00
Total	£28,390.00

March 2012

The Times	£17,400.00
The Guardian	£10,500.00
Daily Telegraph	£22,500.00
www.huffingtonpost.co.uk	£6,000.00
The Financial Times	£31,560.00
FDI Magazine	£7,062.60
The Economist UK	£17,228.40
New On The Economist (Wwide)	£3,600.00
Financial Times - In Todays FT	£2,625.34
Financial Times - UK Business	£1,860.00
www.fdimagazine.com	£7,560.00
www.economist.com	£50,400.00
www.ft.com	£21,120.00
Adserving Cost	£1,031.40
Outsource Express Newsletter	£2,400.00
www.outsourcemagazine.co.uk	£900.00
Chief Executive Officer	£6,000.00
www.the-chiefexecutive.com	£0.00
Hyperlinked Logo On Monthly CEO Enewsletters	£0.00

Adserving Cost	£324.00
www.silicon.com	£19,800.00
Adserving Cost	£108.00
Financial Times - Information Technology Enewsletter	£600.00
Financial Times - Financial Services Enewsletter	£600.00
Banking Technology	£1,800.00
www.thebanker.co.uk	£7,200.00
www.fstech.co.uk	£840.00
Adserving Cost	£50.40
www.wired.com	£9,108.39
www.wired.com	£9,108.39
www.technologyreview.com	£9,290.32
Fierce Cio Weekly Newsletter	£1,366.45
Fierce Wireless Weekly Newsletter	£3,643.35
Fierce Finance Weekly Newsletter	£1,366.45
www.gigaom.com	£2,322.58
www.cnnmoney.com	£10,262.00
Total	£287,538.00

All media was paid by Invest NI through its appointed advertising agency who were tasked with negotiating the best rates and liaising with the media outlets. Invest NI did not make any payments directly to any media outlets.

Titanic Building and Festival

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 9844/11-15, (i) to list the organisations that have received funding to date; (ii) how much each organisation received; and (iii) for what purpose the funding was used. **(AQW 10470/11-15)**

Mrs Foster: DETI has provided funding to the following organisations for the Titanic Belfast Festival:

(i) Organisation	(ii) Funds Received	(iii) Purpose
Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB)	£402,508	The campaign supporting the ni2012 programme has been developed to create a platform which will reposition Northern Ireland as a positive place to live, work, invest, study and visit. All funding allocated by NITB was for the promotion of the Titanic Festival to both the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland marketplaces to maximise investment efficiencies and impact effectiveness across a range of media channels.
Belfast City Council (via NITB)	£1.4 million	The ni2012 programme features eight international scale Tier 1 events to showcase Northern Ireland on a global platform. As a Tier 1 event Titanic Belfast Festival was allocated funds towards marketing and event costs.

Department of Energy and Climate Change report 'Shale Gas Fracturing: Review & Recommendations for Induced Seismic Mitigation'

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department will adopt all of the recommendations in the Department of Energy and Climate Change report 'Shale Gas Fracturing: Review & Recommendations for Induced Seismic Mitigation'.

(AQW 10517/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Several of the report's recommendations for mitigating seismic risk relate solely to operations in the Bowland Basin. The geological characteristics of the Bowland Basin differ from those of Co Fermanagh, where hydraulic fracturing may in due

course be proposed, but the experience drawn from the Bowland Basin operations will inform the process and specification of regulation of this activity in Northern Ireland.

The report also makes three recommendations for the assessment of potential seismic hazards associated with proposed hydraulic fracturing elsewhere in the UK. These concern baseline monitoring of seismic activity; assessment of faults; and modelling of possible ground motion. These recommendations will be followed and my officials, in conjunction with the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and other regulators in Northern Ireland, are currently considering the technical details of these and other 'best practice' specifications.

Tourist Attractions: County Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list the ten tourist attractions in Co Fermanagh that received the most visitors in the last available year; and how many visitors each attraction received.

(AQW 10577/11-15)

Mrs Foster: This information is sourced from the Northern Ireland Visitor Attraction Survey conducted by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). It is important to note that the Visitor Attraction Survey is a voluntary survey and all data presented in the report is based solely on the visitor numbers provided by attractions choosing to take part in the survey.

Information is only available for four Visitor Attractions in Co Fermanagh in 2011 as listed below. Other Visitor Attractions in Co Fermanagh either did not respond or requested confidentiality.

Visitor Numbers to Co Fermanagh Visitor Attractions, 2011

Rank	Attraction Name	Visitor Numbers
1	Belleek Pottery Visitor Centre, Belleek	165,297
2	Devenish Island Monastic Site	45,000
3	Florence Court House	40,314
4	The Higher Bridges Gallery	3,075

Source: Visitor Attraction Survey 2011 (as published http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/tourism-statistics/visitor_attraction_survey-2.htm)

Invest NI: Assistance to Cúnamh ICT

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assistance InvestNI has given to Cúnamh ICT, and for what purpose and when.

(AQW 10638/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Since August 2008 Invest NI has offered the company financial assistance of £43,040. This assistance was targeted at addressing a range of capability development and technical issues, including Management Structure, Software Development, Marketing, and Financial Consultancy, targeted at facilitating the growth of this bespoke software development business in external and export markets.

Fuel Shortage

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AWQ 7840/11-15, for her assessment of the impact that industrial action by fuel tanker drivers might have on fuel supplies in Northern Ireland; and given the proposal in Britain to train the Army to assist with the supply of fuel in the event of industrial action, what plans she has for a similar initiative.

(AQW 10674/11-15)

Mrs Foster: No strike action has been called by the Unite union and the operations of only one company based in NI, employing a few fuel tanker drivers, may be impacted should a strike occur. More than 15 other companies deliver fuel to NI forecourts.

Cabinet Office is coordinating the strategic UK response and the training and allocation of military drivers continues to be overseen in GB by DECC. They will be used only if requested by fuel distributors. Cabinet Office agrees there is likely to be very little impact locally should strike action proceed, therefore there are no plans to use military tanker drivers in Northern Ireland.

Tourists: County Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of tourists in each of the last ten years; (ii) the total number of tourists to Co Fermanagh in each of the last ten years; and (iii) the percentage of the total number of tourists that visited Fermanagh in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 10676/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The number of visitors to Northern Ireland in each of the last ten years is presented in column (a) in the table below (Table 1). These figures relate to all out of state visitors (Great Britain, other overseas and Republic of Ireland) to Northern Ireland, visiting for any reason (holiday, business, visiting friends and relatives) and staying for at least one night. Added to this are Northern Ireland residents on holiday at home.

Figures are not available for the total number of visitors to County Fermanagh. The total number of visitors to the Fermanagh District Council area in each of the last ten years is presented in column (b) of the table below (Table 1). These figures are based on the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's (NITB) Local Authority tourism estimates which are derived from a range of surveys relating to out of state visitors (for any purpose) and domestic holiday trip-takers staying at least one night in Northern Ireland.

The total number of visitors to the Fermanagh District Council area in each of the last ten years as a percentage of the total number of visitors to Northern Ireland is presented in column (c) of the table below (Table 1).

In 2010 the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) took over responsibility from NITB for the production of tourism performance statistics. NISRA is working on the production of regional tourism performance figures but 2010 and 2011 regional figures are not yet available.

Table 1: NI and Fermanagh District Council Area Tourism Performance Figures*

	(a)	(b)	(c)
Year:	All Out-of-State Visitors and Domestic Holiday Visitors to NI (000)	All Out-of-State Visitors and Domestic Holiday Visitors to the Fermanagh District Council Area (000)	All Out-of-State Visitors and Domestic Holiday Visitors to the Fermanagh District Council Area as a % of Visitors to NI
2009	3,129	177	6%
2008	3,024	174	6%
2007	3,142	185	6%
2006	3,147	201	6%
2005	3,325	194	6%
2004	2,889	154	5%
2003	2,924	147	5%
2002	2,657	180	7%
2001	2,226	173	8%
2000	2,212	210	9.5%

Source: NITB

*Figures relate to overnight visitors only

Hydro Scheme: River Camowen, Omagh

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what funding her Department and its arm's-length bodies have provided to the hydro scheme on the River Camowen, Omagh.

(AQW 10680/11-15)

Mrs Foster: No funding has been provided by my Department or its arm's-length bodies to the Omagh District Council hydro scheme on the River Camowen. However, such a scheme would be eligible under the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation to receive Renewables Obligation Certificates for the electricity generated, subject to meeting the necessary accreditation requirements as set out in the Renewables Obligation Order (Northern Ireland) 2009, as amended.

Credit Unions

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the Financial Services Authority's decision not to extend the Modernisation Fund and the Growth Fund to include Credit Unions in Northern Ireland, what financial support her Department is providing to Credit Unions to help meet the additional costs relating to both the new regulatory regime and the development of new services.

(AQW 10709/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Great Britain (GB) modernisation and expansion fund seeks to increase financial inclusion and reduce poverty through the promotion of mutual financial organisations in GB. It is funded and administered by the Department for Work and Pensions and is unrelated to the regulation of United Kingdom credit unions by the Financial Services Authority (FSA).

Northern Ireland credit unions' ongoing compliance costs associated with their regulation by the FSA relate for the most part, to the maintenance of satisfactory corporate governance and accounting standards. For the majority of credit unions, these costs and requirements will be no greater than they were when DETI was the regulatory authority. I am, however, aware that some credit unions may require some assistance to document their policies and procedures, and I am considering the ways as to how any such assistance can be best delivered.

The development of any new services will be a commercial decision for the board of each credit union.

Credit Unions: Legislation to Allow Group Membership

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has any plans to introduce legislation to allow group membership of Credit Unions, such as community and voluntary sector organisations and social enterprises; and to outline any other proposed legislative changes that will impact on Credit Unions.

(AQW 10710/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department is currently in the process of scoping out new legislative provisions in relation to Northern Ireland Credit Unions with the aim of aligning Northern Ireland Credit Union legislation with that of GB. It is intended that these proposed legislative provisions will provide new opportunities and greater clarity for the Northern Ireland Credit Union sector and group membership will be considered as part of this process.

The new Bill is scheduled for passage through the Assembly in the 2013/2014 legislative session. The draft policy proposals will be subject to the full statutory consultation process.

Investment: Ballyhornan, Co Down

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what investment has been earmarked for Ballyhornan, Co Down to unlock the tourist potential of the area.

(AQW 10719/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Ballyhornan is located within the recently designated Strangford and Lecale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has been working with Down District Council (DDC) and the Councils of Newry & Mourne, Banbridge, Ards, North Down and Belfast, to progress the implementation of the Mourne Coastal Route (MCR). This will be a white on brown tourist driving trail with signs stretching from Newry to Belfast mainly along the A2 coastal road. Ballyhornan is located on the MCR and a Ballyhornan Scenic Loop has been identified for inclusion, signage for this is to be extended off the main MCR.

It is envisaged the MCR will complement the Causeway Coastal Route to provide a total driving trail around Northern Ireland, tying together several Signature Projects and stunning coastal scenery. A funding package for the MCR is currently being finalised and it is anticipated the signage will be in place by March 2013.

Down District Council has also been developing a series of walking routes around Lecale encompassing the rich Christian Heritage product and natural beauty of the area.

NITB Officials have also met with Ballyhornan Community representatives and DDC officers to discuss tourism opportunities within the area.

Invest NI: Business Start-up Programme

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact on the local business sector of InvestNI not providing a business start-up programme during the months it sought to defend the action taken by Enterprise Northern Ireland over the procurement process; and how InvestNI will seek to compensate the local business sector.

(AQW 10747/11-15)

Mrs Foster: It is important to note that, had it so chosen, ENI could have permitted Invest NI to continue to deliver a full business start programme, whilst still taking its legal challenge.

Due to the legal action instigated by ENI, Invest NI was prevented from providing a Business Start programme however Invest NI did provide an interim service and continued to advertise under the wider "Go For It" brand to stimulate public interest in enterprise, entrepreneurship and business start. During the period from 1 October 2011 to 31 March 2012 Invest NI, as part of its core activity, responded directly to 3,627 business start enquiries, held 135 business clinics attended by 940 individuals and met with another 499 individuals, which in turn resulted in 502 completed business plans.

In addition in the same period Invest NI, through the jobs fund, offered 94 business start grants of £1,000 to individuals in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas and 61 business start grants of £1,500 to individuals Not in Employment, Education or Training. To date these businesses have created 24 jobs and 15 jobs respectively.

Invest NI will continue to provide an interim service until there is a further tender process and award of a contract for business start provision.

Directors in the Voluntary and Non-Voluntary Sectors

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what criteria is used to assess the disqualification of directors in the (i) voluntary; and (ii) non-voluntary sectors.

(AQW 10809/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department looks at the conduct of directors of insolvent companies. The same criteria are used in assessing the conduct of directors, regardless of the sector within which a director has operated.

The Directors Disqualification Unit within the Insolvency Service considers any unfit conduct reported to it by the Insolvency Practitioner or the Official Receiver and any other relevant information available.

Examples of unfit conduct are set out in Schedule 1 of The Company Directors Disqualification (N.I.) Order 2002.

If the unit considers that a director is unfit to be concerned in the management of a company, disqualification proceedings will be issued if it appears to be expedient in the public interest.

The concept of the public interest is incapable of precise formulation. It is a question of judgement in any given case and will involve consideration of a number of factors including the purpose of the legislation, (the main purpose being protection of the public), the nature of the allegations at issue, the directors responsibility in respect of such allegations together with any aggravating or mitigating factors and the prospects of success of proceedings should they issue. The Department reviews the position throughout the course of proceedings.

Northern Ireland Events Company: Investigation

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the investigation into the Northern Ireland Events Company.

(AQW 10859/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department appointed inspectors to the Northern Ireland Events Company Limited on 17 November 2008 under Article 452(2) and Article 425(2)(a) of the Companies (NI) Order 1986. The target date for completion of the report is 30 April 2013.

Fracking

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the minimum depth at which fracking is proposed at any of the sites in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 10862/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are currently no firm proposals to carry out high pressure hydraulic fracturing (fracking) at any sites in Northern Ireland.

Fracking

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what account she will take of the research which was published in the journal Marine and Petroleum Geology, when she is determining the award of licences for fracking, especially the findings that (i) contamination of water supplies could occur if they are less than 600 metres above shale gas fracking; and (ii) the fracking process causes fractures running upwards and downwards through the ground of up to 588 metres from their source.

(AQW 10864/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The paper by Davies et al. recently published in the journal Marine and Petroleum Geology is a valuable contribution to the current understanding of the vertical extent of fractures that can be produced during high pressure hydraulic fracturing operations. The value of 588 metres is the maximum documented from any of the shale gas basins in the USA and the vast majority of fracture heights are significantly lower in this and the other four basins studied. In Northern Ireland the risk of hydraulic fracturing operations causing contamination of water supplies by vertical propagation of fractures into underground aquifers, or by other means, would be assessed on a case-by-case basis taking into account factors such as the vertical separation between well perforation level and aquifer; distribution, thickness and permeability of rock layers; distribution and character of faulting; prevailing in-situ stress regime and natural seismicity. The results of such assessments would help determine whether permission for hydraulic fracturing was given, and under what conditions such operations could be carried out.

Visitors: County Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the actual, or estimated, spend of visitors; (ii) the actual, or estimated, spend of visitors to Co Fermanagh; and (iii) the percentage of the actual, or estimated spend, of visitors that was spent in Co Fermanagh, in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 10885/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The estimated spend of visitors in Northern Ireland in each of the last ten years is presented in column (a) in the table below (Table 1). These figures relate to spend by all out of state visitors (Great Britain, other overseas and Republic of

Ireland) to Northern Ireland, visiting for any reason (holiday, business, visiting friends and relatives) and staying for at least one night. Added to this is spend by Northern Ireland residents on holiday at home.

Figures are not available for the estimated spend of visitors in County Fermanagh. The estimated spend of visitors in the Fermanagh District Council area in each of the last ten years is presented in column (b) of the table below (Table 1). These figures are based on the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's (NITB) Local Authority tourism estimates which are derived from a range of surveys relating to out of state visitors (for any purpose) and domestic holiday trip-takers staying at least one night in Northern Ireland.

The estimated spend of visitors in the Fermanagh District Council area in each of the last ten years as a percentage of the total spend in Northern Ireland is presented in column (c) of the table below (Table 1).

In 2010 the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) took over responsibility for the production of tourism performance statistics, including visitor spend, from NITB. NISRA is working on the production of regional tourism performance figures but 2010 and 2011 regional spend figures are not yet available.

Table 1:

Northern Ireland and Fermanagh District Council Area Tourism Performance Figures*

Year:	(a)	(b)	(c)
	Spend by all Out-of-State Visitors and Domestic Holiday Visitors in Northern Ireland (£m)	Spend by all Out-of-State Visitors and Domestic Holiday Visitors in the Fermanagh District Council Area (£m)	Spend by all Out-of-State Visitors and Domestic Holiday Visitors in the Fermanagh District Council Area as a % of Spend in Northern Ireland
2009	507	32	6%
2008	522	33	6%
2007	510	37	7%
2006	487	37	8%
2005	472	33	7%
2004	394	25	6%
2003	382	20	5%
2002	383	23	6%
2001	337	21	6%
2000	315	21	7%

Source: NITB

*Figures relate to spend by overnight visitors only

Tourism Sector: County Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the estimated economic value of the tourism sector; (ii) the estimated economic value of the tourism sector in Co Fermanagh; and (iii) the percentage of the total economic value that is derived from the tourism sector in Co Fermanagh, in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 10887/11-15)

Mrs Foster: (i)The findings of the Tourism Economic Impact Studies conducted in relation to Northern Ireland are as follows:

Year	Tourism contribution to Northern Ireland economy (wider impacts)
2011	Figures not available
2010	Figures not available
2009*	4.9% of total Northern Ireland GDP
2008	Figures not available
2007	Figures not available

Year	Tourism contribution to Northern Ireland economy (wider impacts)
2006	Figures not available
2005**	3.7% of total Northern Ireland GVA
2004**	3.4% of total Northern Ireland GVA
2003**	3.6% of total Northern Ireland GVA
2002	Figures not available

Source:

* The Economic Contribution of the Visitor Economy: United Kingdom and the Nations, June 2010, Deloitte

** Tourism in the Northern Ireland Economy, June 2008, CogentSI.

(ii) Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) does not produce data relating to tourism contribution to Northern Ireland GDP at County or Local Authority level.

(iii) This information is not available.

GDP = Gross Domestic Product, GVA = Gross Value Added.

League Table for Visitor Numbers

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the position of Fermanagh District Council in the league table for visitor numbers to each local council area in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 10891/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) does not keep or circulate a league table of council areas in relation to visitor numbers.

The position of Fermanagh District Council in relation to visitor numbers to each local council area is presented for each of the last ten years in the table below (Table 1).

The position is based on all out of state visitors (Great Britain, other overseas and Republic of Ireland) to Northern Ireland, visiting for any reason (holiday, business, visiting friends and relatives) as well as Northern Ireland residents on holiday at home. These visitor figures relate to overnight visitors only, i.e. exclude day visitors.

NITB's Local Authority Tourism Estimates 2007-2009, which include the number of trips to each local authority area, are available on www.nitb.com

Table 1: Position of Fermanagh District Council's visitor numbers compared with visitors to Northern Ireland's other local council areas

Year	Position of Fermanagh District Council area
2009	4
2008	4
2007	4
2006	4
2005	4
2004	4
2003	5
2002	3
2001	3
2000	2

In 2010 the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) took over responsibility for the production of tourism performance statistics from NITB. NISRA is working on the production of regional tourism performance figures but 2010 and 2011 regional figures are not yet available.

Invest NI: Offices

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 9552/11-15, to detail the geographical location that is covered by each employee or office.

(AQW 10892/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's overseas operation is divided into four territories: (i) Europe and Russia (including Great Britain and Republic of Ireland); (ii) North and South America; (iii) India, Middle East and Africa; and (iv) Asia Pacific. All territories are responsible for both the promotion of foreign direct investment (FDI) and the development of export opportunities for Northern Ireland companies. Other objectives include the development of university linkages and the diaspora community.

In addition, the Northern Ireland-based Trade team is responsible for building capability and presenting opportunities for companies that wish to export goods and services outside Northern Ireland.

In some areas the geographical focus of each location is discrete and easily defined. For example, the Dublin office covers the Republic of Ireland market. In other areas, the geographical focus of each location is less defined. For example, the North American offices will proactively research FDI opportunities across the US and Canada. The decision about which office follows up each possible lead is based partly on proximity to the prospect company and partly on the sectoral focus of staff in the respective offices.

The following table summarises the geographical reach of each location where Invest NI has an ongoing overseas presence:

Territory	Location	Geographical Reach
Europe & Russia	London Dublin Brussels Dusseldorf	FDI and export opportunities in GB, Republic of Ireland, Continental Europe and Russia. In addition, in-market advisors are available, in conjunction with the Northern Ireland based Trade team, to provide advice to companies wishing to investigate export opportunities to the Nordics, Russia, Holland ¹ , Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania and Poland.
North & South America	Boston New York San Jose Chicago Toronto	FDI and export opportunities in the US and Canada. In-market advisor, based in Sao Paulo, provides export-related advice on opportunities in South America in conjunction with the Northern Ireland based Trade team.
India, Middle East and Africa	Mumbai Bangalore Jeddah Dubai Erbil (Kurdistan) ¹	FDI and export opportunities in India, Sri Lanka, the Gulf States and Kurdistan. In-market advisor, based in Johannesburg, supporting companies looking to export to South Africa.
Asia Pacific	Tokyo Shanghai Taipei	FDI and export opportunities in China, Japan and Taiwan.

Note:

- Representation in Erbil and the in-market advisor in Holland have been established since the previous response (AQW 9552/11-15) was provided.

Northern Ireland Air Access Initiative

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why the Port of Larne is not included in the Northern Ireland Air Access Initiative.

(AQW 10918/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department recently invested £1 million to boost Tourism Ireland's co-operative marketing activity with air and sea carriers to drive demand from Great Britain, North America and Mainland Europe in the early part of 2012. This was matched by a further £1 million investment from participating sea and air carriers.

As part of this initiative, Tourism Ireland invested in co-operative marketing activity with P&O Irish Sea to promote routes to the Port of Larne from Troon and Cairnryan. Activity included a ni2012 TV advertising campaign in Scotland, radiotorials on radio stations in Scotland and Northern England, in addition to online advertising and social media activity.

Video Games: 18 Certificates

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department intends to take on the issue of under-age children being able to pre-order video games that have 18 certificates.

(AQW 10975/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI'S Trading Standards Service (TSS) will continue to monitor age-related sales of DVDs and video games and will take swift and robust enforcement action where non-compliance with the criminal provisions of the Video Recordings Act 2012 has been detected and there is sufficient admissible evidence to support such action.

'Our Time, Our Place' Programme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 10472/11-15, to provide the figures that indicate £359,793 worth of media value for Co Fermanagh as part of the NI2012 campaign.

(AQW 11012/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The value of the media campaign to promote Co Fermanagh within the ni2012 campaign is broken down in the table below:

Spring 2012	Rate card cost £
Northern Ireland Press	7,584.52
Republic of Ireland Press	4,180.61
Northern Ireland TV	82,812.50
Republic of Ireland TV	181,514.25
Northern Ireland Outdoor	18,555.50
Republic of Ireland Outdoor	65,145.94
Spring 2012 Total	359,793.32

Fuel Poverty

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much has been invested by wind farm developers on projects to tackle fuel poverty in each of the last three years, broken down by project.

(AQW 11172/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am aware that a range of community benefits have been agreed between wind farm developers and communities, and also bi-laterally with individuals, throughout Northern Ireland. These arrangements have been developed and agreed on a voluntary basis and the information you request is not held by DETI.

Department of the Environment

Edge-of-Town Shopping Complexes

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment whether he intends to (i) review the situation under which the gradual growth of edge-of-town shopping complexes, through numerous planning applications, damages town centres over time with retailers drawn away from the towns and towards the new developments; and (ii) implement a more stringent and balanced approach which involves on-going monitoring of the current net retail floor space for edge and out-of-town retail developments.

(AQW 10436/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I believe there is a strong need to review retail and town centre policy. To inform this I intend to commence a wider debate on the future of city and town centres in the North and all matters relating to their vitality and viability. It is my ambition to bring about a new PPS to cover these issues.

I recognise that we must have up to date robust evidence to inform this process. I can advise that officials are currently considering how this can be best facilitated, including identification of information needs and the role of monitoring.

In addition, ongoing monitoring will be handled through the new 'plan-led' local development plan system. This will require councils to prepare a monitoring report annually as to the extent to which objectives, including town centre and retailing objectives, set out in their local development plans are being achieved. Regular reviews of plans will take account of this monitoring to allow plan policies to be more responsive to ever changing retail needs and demands.

However, retail decisions will still need to be made. I plan to be decisive in this regard.

Dog Attacks on Livestock: Prosecutions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the number of dog owners that have been prosecuted for dog attacks on livestock in the last five years, and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development's comment that this a matter for local councils to enforce (i) what procedures are in place to address this issue; and (ii) what action is being taken to increase the number of prosecutions.

(AQW 10530/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As dog owners are prosecuted under Department of Agriculture and Rural Development legislation, it a matter for the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to monitor and report on the effectiveness of this legislation.

Common Agriculture Policy: Reform Proposals

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will instruct the Planning Service to consider how changes in farming practices as a result of the Common Agriculture Policy proposals might affect current planning laws and conditions.

(AQW 10542/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Common Agricultural Policy reform proposals, which were published on 12 October 2011, are at an early stage in the EU process and are not expected to be finalised until January 2014. Whilst, it is too soon to consider the impact of the proposals at this point, I have instructed Officials to monitor developments as the formal negotiations proceed and as the shape of the reform proposals evolve over the course of the next 12 months. It is important that we stay close to the decision making process and are alert to the potential impact of the CAP reform proposals on rural planning policy in N. Ireland.

Pension Deficit

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what action is being taken by local councils to reduce the levels of pension deficit.

(AQW 10560/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Councils participate in the Local Government Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland). There are currently a total of 202 local employers participating in the Scheme. Contributions from all active members and employers are paid into the common pension fund maintained by the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee. The Local Government Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) currently has a recovery plan in place to grow the pension fund.

A review of the Local Government Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) is underway and it is anticipated that revised pension arrangements may be introduced by April 2014. This review captures the relevant issues around the reform and costs of pensions. The 44,000 members of the Local Government Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) did not pay the pension increases required of other public sector pension members as of April 2012, as the arguments that the ongoing review would address all pension issues and that the Local Government Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) is different from other schemes as it is a fully funded scheme prevailed.

Pension Deficit: Local Councils

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the levels of pension deficit in each local council.

(AQW 10561/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Councils participate in the Local Government Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) (LGPS (NI)). A total of 202 employers participate in the LGPS (NI). Contributions from all active members and employers are paid into the common pension fund maintained by the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC). The total assets and liabilities of this fund are valued every three years. The valuation is conducted by an actuary appointed by NILGOSC (the scheme actuary). It is a snapshot in time of the future liabilities of the LGPS (NI). At the last valuation at 31 March 2010, the fund had assets totalling £3.4bn and liabilities totalling £4.3bn, giving a funding level of 82%. NILGOSC is operating a 20 year plan to return to full funding.

Employers who are members of the Scheme may request the scheme actuary to provide them with the information about pension liabilities required for their individual annual accounts.

The valuations for the purposes of annual accounts and the triennial valuation of the pension fund are carried out using different assumptions. The main difference between the two is that, for the purposes of annual accounts, it is assumed that all assets are invested in bonds. Bonds currently have very low returns. In contrast, the fund valuation reflects the fact that the majority of the investments are in equities.

A table showing the deficits attributed to each council for their annual accounts purposes is given below. However the total liabilities of all 202 employers participating in the Scheme are pooled on a common basis. It is the total pooled liability of the fund that will determine the nature and scale of action taken to address that liability at the next triennial valuation in 2013.

Council	Pension deficit
Antrim	£5.100m

Council	Pension deficit
Ards	£5.932m
Armagh	£6.898m
Ballymena	£6.408m
Ballymoney	£2.423m
Banbridge	£4.125m
Belfast	£71.939m
Carrickfergus	£4.155m
Castlereagh	£5.383m
Coleraine	£8.544m
Cookstown	£3.428m
Craigavon	£8.225m
Derry City	£14.981m
Down	£5.953m
Dungannon & South Tyrone	£4.435m
Fermanagh	£5.293m
Larne	£3.576m
Limavady	£3.419m
Lisburn	£9.400m
Magherafelt	£2.229m
Moyle	£2.213m
Newry & Mourne	£8.453m
Newtownabbey	£8.284m
North Down	£7.568m
Omagh	£4.862m
Strabane	£3.106m

The deficit arises from the downturn in the markets, follows a period when the fund had a positive balance and noting that while the deficit needs to be fully addressed, it is not as serious as other schemes.

Planning: Environment Agency as Statutory Consultee

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to speed up the response time of the Environment Agency as a statutory consultee on planning applications, given that the average response time has increased over recent years.

(AQW 10576/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is an expert advisor to DOE Planning and attaches a high priority to providing timely and authoritative advice and comment on planning applications and other consultations from the Planning Divisions within the Department.

NIEA agreed to revised and challenging targets for response times to individual consultations in 2010/11. Overall 78% of the routine consultations received in that year were responded to within the deadline which exceeded the target of 75%. Significant difficulties were encountered within both the Built and Natural Heritage Directorates during 2011/12 and the overall response rate is expected to be in the region of 65%.

Response times to planning consultations are monitored monthly by the NIEA Board. Its aim is to deliver the highest possible standard of service in terms of both quality and response time. Recent actions taken by NIEA to improve this service include:

- The re appointment of a NIEA/Planning Liaison Officer for pre- application discussions and other strategic projects.

- The issue of standing advice to Planning NI to allow planners to assess certain issues and make decisions without reference to NIEA (for example in relation to single wind turbines).
- A new contract went 'live' in November 2011 to provide professional archaeological support in respect of planning consultations for the Built Heritage Directorate.
- The recruitment of hydrogeologists who will be based in the Land and Resource Management Unit to support the development of responses to applications involving contaminated land.
- Temporary workers have also been deployed to assist in clearing a backlog.

The Agency is confident these actions will allow it to achieve the target for routine responses in the future. Some inadequate Environmental Impact Assessments and Environmental Statements have led to considerable delays to the planning process. NIEA has been working with developers and agents to attempt to improve the quality of these, in particular through increased pre-application discussions.

I have made it clear to the NIEA that in its responses it should provide all information necessary and offer full advice when consulted. It should not be the case - for any consultee - that it fails to provide all advice and information needed as fully as possible as soon as possible.

Moreover, I shall be introducing a 'statutory' timeframe for consultation as part of the Planning Bill which I hope to table in the autumn.

Bridgewater Park, Banbridge: Extension

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the contact between (i) Banbridge District Council; and (ii) individual Banbridge councillors and his Department regarding proposals for the extension of Bridgewater Park, Banbridge, including the erection of the proposed Tesco Extra Superstore.

(AQW 10585/11-15)

Mr Attwood: During the processing of this planning application there was contact between the Department and Banbridge District Council on 7 occasions:

- The Department wrote to the Council on 22 April 2010 to confirm that Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 had been applied to the planning application;
- On 11 June 2010, the Council wrote to the Department stating inter alia that the development would bring 'much needed investment ...into the area' and that a decision on the application should be reached as soon as possible;
- On 5 April 2011, the Department consulted the Council - in accordance with legislative requirements - on the details of the draft Article 40 legal agreement associated with the application;
- The Council, on 19 April 2011, replied to the Department on the matter of the draft Article 40 agreement, stating inter alia that the agreement should include an enhanced level of financial contribution towards environmental improvement works in Banbridge;
- The Department, on 26 October 2011, wrote to the Council asking them to substantiate the level of financial contribution they requested;
- The Council responded on this matter on 17 November 2011 and again on 7 December 2011;
- The Department wrote to the Council on 12 March 2012 to confirm that planning permission had been granted.

During the processing of the application, three Banbridge councillors – Dessie Ward, Seamus Doyle and Jim McElroy – wrote to the Department to express their support for the proposed development.

Councillor Doyle was part of a delegation that attended a meeting in my office on 29 November 2011 regarding the application.

Hydro Scheme: River Camowen, Omagh

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) when planning permission was issued for the hydro scheme on the River Camowen, Omagh; (ii) whether a licence is in place governing the extraction of water and what restrictions apply; and (iii) whether there have been any incidents of an unacceptable drop in the level of the river and, if so, the outcome of any investigations carried out by the Environment Agency.

(AQW 10642/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

- (i) Planning permission for construction of a hydroelectric generation station to provide power for Omagh College and Leisure Complex at Land adjacent to the Camowen River in Stranamullagh recreation area, Omagh was issued on the 14 November 2007. A further application for construction of hydroelectric power generation station, comprising of a screw turbine, pumphouse, intake and outfall together with trenching and cabling from the site to the existing Omagh Leisure Centre at Land adjacent to and including the Camowen River to rear of Omagh Leisure Centre, that replaced the first application was issued on the 11 January 2011.
- (ii) The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) issued Omagh District Council with an Abstraction and Impoundment Licence, under the Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006, for a hydropower scheme on the Camowen River, on 23 June 2011. The licence specifies the maximum amount of water the scheme can

divert, also the amount of water that must remain in the river when the scheme is operating, and the abstraction licence also defines flow periods when the scheme must not operate.

- (iii) NIEA was made aware of a potential breach of the licence conditions on the 16 March 2012. In response to this incident, the Council were told to stop their testing of the hydroelectric scheme, which was immediately acted upon by the Council. A formal written Stop Notice was then issued to Omagh District Council by NIEA on the 21 March 2012 which means that they are not permitted to abstract from the Camowen River until a full investigation has been concluded by NIEA. Omagh District Council have 28 days to formally respond. The Council requested an extension of 14 days to the initial time period for their considered response, and a response is now due by 2 May 2012. As the investigation is still ongoing it would not be appropriate to comment further at this time.

This is the first incident which NIEA have investigated where river flow has been diverted via another man made channel that resulted in a stretch of river being dewatered. NIEA as such have no other case histories for reference.

Metropole Hotel, Portrush: Demolition

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment, following the demolition of the Metropole Hotel in Portrush, to detail (i) how the bricks and other building materials were disposed of; and (ii) who benefited from the disposal.

(AQW 10666/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The demolition of the former Metropole Hotel in Portrush is one element of the £405,000 package which I announced on 12 March 2012 to tackle dereliction in Portrush and Portstewart. I am sure you will agree that the building had become an unsightly eyesore in Portrush.

The contractor McCormack Demolition started demolishing the building at the beginning of April 2012. This company has a valid waste carrier's licence and transported the demolition waste to McKinstry Skip Hire, 81-83 Belfast Road, Crumlin, County Antrim. McKinstry Skip Hire has a waste management licence to operate a materials recovery facility (MRF) and is permitted to accept demolition waste.

Between 2 April and 16 April 2012, 446.32 tonnes of mixed demolition waste was transported to the McKinstry site at Crumlin and waste transfer notes were generated and completed for all movements.

The demolition waste from the former Metropole site has been separated into rubble, timber etc and added to processed waste material already on site. The rubble is still on the site and will be recycled. The timber has been included in a batch which has left the site for reuse.

The removal of the old hotel will benefit tourism, local residents in the area and the natural and built environment. In addition, the demolition waste is being recycled and will help increase recycling levels which is good news for everyone in Northern Ireland.

Bridgewater Park, Banbridge

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the proposed development at Bridgewater Park, Banbridge, including when a decision will be made.

(AQW 10671/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Planning permission for this development was granted by the Department on 12 March 2012.

A legal challenge to the Department's decision has been mounted by Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA). The matter is due to be heard by the High Court on 24 September 2012.

Penalty Points

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the average length of time it has taken the Driver and Vehicle Agency to endorse a driving licence with penalty points in each of the last eight years.

(AQW 10691/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Driver & Vehicle Agency currently has a target of 100% of licences to be endorsed within 20 working days of the receipt of court notifications. In the last financial year 2,141 licences were endorsed within an average of eight working days, surpassing the target.

The information for periods before 2011-12 is not held in a format which would allow average processing times to be calculated accurately.

It should be noted that DVA is responsible only for the endorsement of licences upon notification from a court. Where an endorsement is required as a consequence of a fixed penalty, the licence is endorsed by the Fixed Penalty Office at Laganside Courts, Belfast.

Hydebank Wood Site

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) what protection exists for the buildings at the Hydebank Wood site; and (ii) whether there are any barriers to restoring the walled garden and the water feature on the site.

(AQW 10693/11-15)

Mr Attwood: None of the buildings at the Hydebank Wood site are currently protected through listing. However a tower within the walled garden has been surveyed as part of the systematic Second Survey of the historic buildings of Castlereagh Council area, but not yet evaluated.

In addition, none of the buildings or features at Hydebank are specifically protected under the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. However Hydebank does lie within the designed landscape associated with (the now demolished) Purdysburn House. This is one of the gardens within the Heritage Gardens Inventory. It is also a Supplementary Site within the Register of Historic Parks, Gardens and Demesnes. It is therefore protected under Policy BH 6 of Planning Policy Statement 6 (PPS 6).

In relation to your question about restoring the walled garden and water feature on the site, NIEA:Historic Monuments Unit staff would seek to work with those proposing any such scheme to retain and re-use any original features, rather than providing a barrier to the proposal. They would also be happy to meet on site to provide advice and input at an early stage.

Planning Permission

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 9631/11-15, to detail the (i) number; and (ii) planning application numbers of planning permissions that were granted under special circumstances by the Omagh Planning Office for the Fermanagh area.

(AQW 10824/11-15)

Mr Attwood: No applications have been granted under special circumstances in Fermanagh District Council area in the last three years.

Littering Offences

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) how many people were convicted of littering offences last year; (ii) how much revenue was raised from the resulting fines; and (iii) what further measures he is taking to combat this problem.

(AQW 10838/11-15)

Mr Attwood: District Councils are much more likely to issue on-the-spot fines to litter offenders instead of seeking convictions through the courts. Therefore, figures for convictions are quite low compared to those for on-the-spot fines.

The latest information held by the Department shows that 133 people were convicted by the courts for littering offences in the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011 and a total of £7,707 in fines and £5,935 in court costs were imposed. By contrast, in the same period, district councils issued 3,930 £50 fines for littering offences resulting in a total of £150,268 received. Information for the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 will not be compiled and verified until August 2012.

Litter is still a major problem costing Councils and therefore ratepayers a lot of money to clean up. Despite the ongoing good work to tackle the problem by District Councils and, for example, Tidy Northern Ireland. Voluntary groups and many concerned residents in local communities also seek to tackle the problems through the current series of Big Spring Clean events.

Since becoming Minister of the Environment I have taken part, along with many other concerned and dedicated volunteers, in a number of Big Spring Clean events and in doing so I have become much more aware of the extent of the environmental impact caused by litter and how it can spoil the visible appearance of local beauty spots. I am determined to do all that I can to help to deal with this pernicious problem. Litter in all of its forms e.g. bottles, cans, cigarette butts, chewing gum, if left unchecked, is an eyesore which leads to dirty and unhealthy local environments. Also local beauty spots, including our beaches and countryside, can also be spoiled by litter which can be detrimental to our tourist industry.

There are a number of measures which I am bringing forward to help to deal with the litter problem. These include the development of a Marine Litter Strategy, the introduction of a carrier bag levy and the bringing into operation on 1 April 2012 of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2011. Also Departmental funding to Tidy Northern Ireland has been increased to help with the organisation's work to make Northern Ireland a cleaner and more pleasant place in which to live. Tidy Northern Ireland's work, for example, in relation to the Big Spring Clean, the Eco-schools Programme, the Clean Coast Programme and its ongoing monitoring of local environmental cleanliness makes an important contribution to raising awareness and helping to reduce the overall litter problem.

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 contains significant measures specifically designed to strengthen the law to help district councils to deal more effectively with the scourge of litter. I was pleased to bring the Act into operation on 1 April 2012 and I look forward to positive results in the future in terms of better local environmental cleanliness once the Act begins to have an impact.

This Act introduced bigger on-the-spot fines for litter offenders and a range of other measures. For example, it gives district councils new powers to issue litter clearing notices to require businesses and individuals to clear litter from their land. By utilising the new powers introduced by the Act, district councils will be able to deal more effectively with litter on land in private

ownership and will also be able to enter the land, clear it of litter and impose a reasonable charge on the person who failed to comply with the notice.

Bigger on-the-spot fines for litter offenders together with the stronger anti-litter laws generally should send out a strong message to people who litter to think about the quality of their environments. Bigger fines should act as an effective deterrent against littering in the future. From 1st April 2012 Councils will be able to impose fines of up to £80 on people who litter – this is a significant increase on the previous £50.

There is now a real determination to tackle the litter problem more effectively than before so that we can all look forward to a cleaner Northern Ireland in the future.

Animal Species: Reintroduction

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has considered the reintroduction of animal species that are no longer found in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 10842/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The reintroduction of animal species is resource intensive as it requires the establishment of sustainable habitat and conditions for the reintroduced species and an analysis of the impact on existing biodiversity.

NIEA has given some informal consideration to the reintroduction of some species but these have not been progressed due to resource constraints and the impact this would have on higher priority work. The Agency has however undertaken a number of translocation projects for pearl mussels and pollen.

The Department undertakes a range of activities to conserve biodiversity which can include the reintroduction of animal species that are no longer found in Northern Ireland. A recent example is the reintroduction of the red kite which was undertaken by the RSPB and approved and grant-aided by the NIEA. The Department is not aware of any further proposals for reintroducing animal species but would give any such proposals serious consideration. In all cases the Department requires that any reintroductions are in accordance with International Union of the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) guidelines.

Industrial Estate at Carnbane, Newry: Buffer Zone

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of the Environment what is the development buffer zone distance between residents and the industrial estate at Carnbane, Newry.

(AQW 10927/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Outline planning permission was granted for industrial development on land at Shepherds Way, Carnbane Industrial Estate between Newry River and Cloghanramer Road, Newry on 23 April 2010. Full permission for associated infrastructural works was granted on 26 April 2010.

The permissions include conditions requiring the implementation of the agreed landscape proposals which include a landscaped belt of approximately 40 metres along the eastern site boundary with the Cloghanramer Road.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Peace III: Ex-Prisoners Groups

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the total level of PEACE III funding allocated to ex-prisoners groups. **(AQW 10359/11-15)**

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): To date, £10,319,882 in PEACE III funding has been allocated to projects that include ex-prisoner groups as partners.

Ministerial Special Advisers: Review of Arrangements for Appointment

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the Model Contract for Employment for Special Advisers referred to in paragraph 20 of the Review of Arrangements for the Appointment of Ministers Special Advisers exists, and whether he will place a copy in the Assembly Library.

(AQW 10368/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I have arranged for the Model Contract of Employment for Special Advisers, as amended to take account of increased employee contributions for the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) with effect from 1 April 2012, to be placed in the Assembly library.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the businesses that have benefited from the Small Business Rates Relief Scheme to date, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 10390/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Information on the number of businesses in each constituency that have benefited from the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme is not available as data is collated at District Council and Ward level only. The latest figures available, as at 15th April 2012, indicate that a total of 23,728 non-domestic premises have benefited (received a Small Business Rate Relief after other awards have been taken into account) from the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme. The attached table indicates the number of properties in each District Council Area that have benefited. A list of individual businesses cannot be provided as it may breach the confidentiality of individual ratepayers.

District Council Area	Number of Properties at 15th April 2012 that have Benefited from SBRR
Antrim	623
Ards	1,003
Armagh	835
Ballymena	924
Ballymoney	426
Banbridge	627
Belfast	3,726
Carrickfergus	401
Castlereagh	497
Coleraine	910
Cookstown	564
Craigavon	1,139
Derry	1,242
Down	1,047
Dungannon & South Tyrone	972
Fermanagh	1,162
Larne	441
Limavady	415
Lisburn	1,271
Magherafelt	722
Moyle	355
Newry & Mourne	1,421
Newtownabbey	867
North Down	832
Omagh	781
Strabane	525
NI Total	23,728

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list the small businesses that have benefited from the Small Business Rates Relief Scheme to date.

(AQW 10393/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Information on the number of businesses in each constituency that have benefited from the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme is not available as data is collated at District Council and Ward level only. The latest figures available, as at 15th April 2012, indicate that a total of 23,728 non-domestic premises have benefited (received a Small Business Rate Relief after other awards have been taken into account) from the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme. The attached table indicates the number of properties in each District Council Area that have benefited. A list of individual businesses cannot be provided as it may breach the confidentiality of individual ratepayers.

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NI Total	23,728

Special EU Programmes Body: Peace III Funding

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the organisations based in the East Derry area which applied to the Special EU Programmes Body for PEACE III funding in each of the last five years; (ii) the organisations that were successful and the level of funding awarded in each case.

(AQW 10417/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Table 1 details those organisations based in the East Londonderry area that have applied directly to the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) for PEACE III funding in the last five years, and the outcome of the applications.

Table 1 – PEACE III applications to SEUPB from organisations based in the East Londonderry area in the last five years

Year	Lead Partner	Project Title	Outcome	Amount £
008/09	Coleraine Borough Council	North East Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan	Successful	3,608,589 ¹
2009/10	Training for Women Network (TWN)	Roe Valley Community Association	Successful	62,162 ²
	Coleraine Borough Council	Shared and Safe Space, Town Hall Square / Kerr Street, Portrush	Unsuccessful	
	Coleraine Borough Council	Market Yard Reconnections	Unsuccessful	
2010/11	Coleraine Borough Council	Market Yard Peace and Reconciliation Centre (MYPARC)	Approved - Letter of Offer not yet in place	4,210,910
	Coleraine Borough Council	North East PEACE III Partnership	Successful	4,176,818 ¹
	Coleraine Rural & Urban Network	Community Hub for Coleraine	Unsuccessful	
	P&M Contracts Ltd	Ard Cluain - Re-Generation & Cross Community Living Project	Unsuccessful	
2011/12	Roe Valley	Extending Positive Relations	Successful	82,047 ²

Notes:

- 1 These projects are Phase I and Phase II of the North East PEACE III Partnership Local Peace and Reconciliation Action Plans. The Action Plans were developed at local authority level and approved by SEUPB. While the North East Partnership is led by Coleraine Borough Council, it also comprises Limavady Borough Council, Ballymena Borough Council, Ballymoney Borough Council, Larne Borough Council and Moyle District Council, and the Action Plans benefit all named council areas.
- 2 These projects are sub-projects of wider projects led by Training for Women Network (TWN).

There are fourteen local authority led Peace and Reconciliation Action Plans developed at local authority level and delivered over two phases. These include the North East Action Plans detailed in Table 1. Project applicants can seek funding from within the Action Plan allocations.

Table 2 details those organisations based in the East Londonderry area that have applied for funding under the local Peace and Reconciliation Action Plans in the last five years, and the outcome of those applications.

Table 2 - PEACE III applications to local Peace and Reconciliation Action Plans from organisations based in the East Londonderry area in the last five years

	Lead Partner	Project Title	Outcome	Amount £
2009/10	Coleraine Borough Council	Management Costs/ Technical Assistance	Successful	469,117 ¹
	Coleraine Borough Council	Programme 3b2 - Developing Young Peer Leaders	Successful	53,520 ¹
	Coleraine Borough Council	Programme 3b3 - Schools Based Programme	Successful	93,795 ¹

	Lead Partner	Project Title	Outcome	Amount £
	Coleraine Borough Council	Programme 4b1 - Community Integration Programme (Coleraine, Limavady, Ballymoney & Moyle)	Successful	368,125 1
	Coleraine Borough Council	Programme 4b2 - Community Integration Programme (Ballymena & Larne)	Successful	184,310 1
	Coleraine Borough Council	Programme 4b Interactive Learning Tool	Successful	49,400 1
	Lestas Consulting	Area Development Programme	Unsuccessful	
	Lestas Consulting	Capacity Building Programme	Unsuccessful	
	Lestas Consulting	Design & Delivery of a Cross Border Capacity Building Programme for SW Cluster	Successful	71,596 3
	Macaulay Associates Network Ltd	Faith Communities Programme	Successful	42,500 4
	Magherafelt District Council - Lestas Consulting	Cross Border Survey & Organisation of Cross Border Networking Events for the SW Cluster Peace III Programme	Successful	7,800 3
	Magherafelt District Council - Lestas Consulting	Design & delivery of a Leadership in a Shared Society Development Programme across the SW Cluster	Successful	50,740 3
	PADIVA (Pomeroy and District Innocent Victims Association)	Caravan/ Mobile Home Holiday Facility	Unsuccessful	
	Coleraine Borough Council	Indigenous & Ethnic Minority Sport & Leisure for Peace Building Programme	Successful	130,876 1
2010/11	Coleraine Borough Council	Programme 1c Leadership in a shared society (Elected & Community Representatives)	Successful	58,700 1
	Coleraine Borough Council	Building Brighter Futures	Approved – Letter of Offer not yet in place	334,550 2
2011/12	Coleraine Borough Council	Faith Works	Successful	199,682 2
	Limavady Borough Council	Limavady Area Project	Successful	123,000 2
	Coleraine Borough Council	Coleraine Area Project	Successful	123,000 2
	Coleraine Borough Council	Cultural Fusions	Successful	205,000 2
	Coleraine Borough Council	Phase 2 Management Costs	Successful	500,318 2
	Coleraine Borough Council	Sport for Peace Building Programme	Successful	175,893 2
	Coleraine Borough Council	Partnership Development Project	Successful	30,000 2
	Coleraine Borough Council	Detached Youth Project	Successful	178,980 2
	Coleraine Borough Council	Peer Leadership Project	Successful	118,150 2

	Lead Partner	Project Title	Outcome	Amount £
	Coleraine Borough Council	Schools Based Project	Successful	198,250 2
	Coleraine Borough Council	Community Integration Project	Successful	266,835 2
	Coleraine Borough Council	Community Cohesion & Transformation Project	Successful	260,000 2
	Coleraine Borough Council	Leadership in a Shared Society	Approved – Letter of Offer not yet in place	391,900 2
	Coleraine Borough Council	Communications Project	Under appraisal	
	Coleraine Borough Council	Phase 2 Evaluation Costs	Under appraisal	
	Lestas Consulting	Leadership and Learning Programme	Unsuccessful	

Notes:

- 1 These are sub-projects of the overall North East Phase I Action Plan.
- 2 These are sub-projects of the overall North East Phase II Action Plan.
- 3 These are sub-projects of the South West Cluster Action Plan.
- 4 These are sub-projects of the CAN (Carrickfergus, Antrim and Newtownabbey) Action Plan.

It is important to note that applications to the North East PEACE III Partnership's Action Plans seek funding from within the overall Action Plan allocations presented in Table 1. Therefore, the funding awarded to sub-projects of the North East Phase I and Phase II Action Plans presented in Table 2 is not additional to the Action Plan awards shown in Table 1, but has instead been awarded from within those allocations.

Finally, Table 3 details one organisation based in the East Londonderry area which applied for PEACE III funding under the Programme Theme Acknowledging and Dealing with the Past. This Theme is delivered on behalf of SEUPB by a Consortium comprising the Community Relations Council (CRC) and Pobal.

Table 3 - PEACE III applications to the Consortium from organisations based in the East Londonderry area in the last five years

Year	Lead Partner	Project Title	Outcome
2010/11	University of Ulster	Prisons Memory Archive	Unsuccessful

Rateable Properties: Capital Values

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail any plans his Department has to review capital values on rateable properties.

(AQW 10432/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Executive has currently no plans to carry out a domestic revaluation during the spending review period and lifetime of this Assembly.

Furthermore, carrying one out would be difficult at the moment, as the evidence required to establish the values is not sufficiently reliable, given the low volume of sales and the continued volatility in the housing market.

Research by LPS and other bodies indicate that broadly speaking residential values have now returned to values that existed in January 2005 – the base date for the existing domestic Valuation List.

The Executive and Councils still need the same amount of money out of the system to pay for public services. If a general revaluation of all domestic properties were to take place soon and we found that all values had decreased below the 2005 levels, the tax rate or rate in the pound would simply have to go up.

The important issue in deciding whether to undertake a revaluation, however, is the extent to which some areas of the market have declined over this period relative to others. Revaluation always creates winners and losers; houses that have reduced in value by more than the average since 1 January 2005 would end up paying less rates, those that have reduced by less than the average, or indeed increased, would have an increased rates liability.

LPS will continue to monitor changes and shifts in value and when these relativities get significantly out of line and the housing market is sufficiently stable and active to provide the underlying evidence, the matter can be reconsidered. At present the only calls for a general revaluation are from those who are under the mistaken impression that lower house prices across the board should result in lower rates for all households.

Departmental Guidance: (FD DFP 01/09)

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the guidance issued by his Department on 24 February 2009 (FD DFP 01/09) is still operative; and, if so, how the approval of the A5/A8 roads expenditure complies with paragraphs 13 - 17. **(AQW 10464/11-15)**

Mr Wilson: I can confirm that the guidance issued by my Department on 24th February 2009 (FD DFP 01/09) is still operative.

In my statement to the Assembly on 14th February 2012, I announced the outcome of the Executive's deliberations on how to address the financial consequences of the Irish Government's decision to materially revise its funding commitment to the A5 and A8 road schemes, and I gave details of the consequent funding allocations within the next four years as agreed by the Executive.

This announcement was about funding allocations and it did not imply approval for the Departments concerned to enter into contracts ahead of the appropriate business case approval as set out in the FD (DFP) 01/09.

As FD (DFP) 01/09 and other DFP guidance makes clear, all expenditure decisions require a proportionate economic appraisal, and where expenditure will exceed a Department's delegated limit this economic appraisal requires DFP approval prior to entering into a commitment or contract. This is equally true for each of the projects covered in my announcement on 14th February 2012, and my officials have been working closely with the Departments concerned to that end.

Rates: Businesses Unable to Pay in Derry City

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many businesses in Derry City have been unable to pay their rates bill in the 2011/12 financial year. **(AQW 10488/11-15)**

Mr Wilson: Information on the number of businesses in Londonderry that have been unable to pay their rates bill in the 2011/12 financial year is not available as data is collated at district council and ward level only. Information is available on the number of non-domestic properties in the Derry City Council area for which a rates assessment raised in April 2011 has not been fully paid. From a total of 3,047 rates assessments raised in April 2011 in respect to the non-domestic properties in the Derry City Council area, as at 15th April 2012 some or all of the debt is still outstanding for 469 properties. No payments have been received in respect of 210 of these 469 properties.

Domestic Rates: Prompt Payment Discount

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why the 4 percent discount for the prompt payment of domestic rates does not apply to vacant properties. **(AQW 10499/11-15)**

Mr Wilson: The continued necessity for the long established early payment discount was considered back in 2007 as part of the Executive's Review of the domestic rating system and a decision was taken to make no change. The analysis my Department undertook at that time showed that a higher proportion of ordinary pensioners paid their rates bills early compared to the general population. I wish to maintain this position, notwithstanding that from a public finances point of view it makes less difference than it used to, because we have moved away from a cash basis of accounting.

The application of an early payment discount for empty homes was considered prior to the introduction of the measure in October 2011. As empty properties will, in the main, not be a person's main home but a second home or investment property it was not felt appropriate to extend the discount to empty homes, particularly as the pensioner issue is not a significant factor when it comes to considering policy on empty homes.

Fuel Prices and Duty

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the impact that the current fuel prices and fuel duty are having on the local economy. **(AQW 10501/11-15)**

Mr Wilson: DFP has not carried out any formal assessment of the impact of the current high fuel prices we are experiencing, but clearly these are unwelcome and are impacting negatively on both households and businesses in Northern Ireland.

Fuel prices are determined by a number of factors, and while the rate of duty applied is obviously a key component, it is only one of these. Fuel duty is also a reserved matter for HM Treasury to determine and one over which the Executive has no control.

Civil Servants who Work in Belfast

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of civil servants who work in Belfast, broken down by the constituency in which they live. **(AQW 10502/11-15)**

Mr Wilson: The information requested is set out in the table overleaf.

Home Parliamentary Constituency Locations of NICS staff who Work in Belfast* at 1 April 2011

	Number of Permanent NICS Staff
Belfast East	1,207
Belfast North	829
Belfast South	1,119
Belfast West	982
East Antrim	782
East Londonderry	172
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	104
Foyle	98
Lagan Valley	933
Mid Ulster	356
Newry & Armagh	226
North Antrim	435
North Down	1,213
South Antrim	1,054
South Down	776
Strangford	1,698
Upper Bann	707
West Tyrone	94
Staff who have a work location in Belfast but have missing or incomplete postcode details, from which Parliamentary constituency details are derived.	2,195
Total	14,980

Notes:

Data sourced from HRConnect and additional DOJ data sources at 1st Apr 2011

Figures are for Permanent staff

Staff on Career Break and Uniformed staff in the NI Prison Service are excluded

Figures are staff Headcount

*Belfast has been defined as Belfast City Council area.

Civil Service Pay

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether any staff employed by the Civil Service, or its arm's-length bodies, were paid without tax being deducted over the last five years.

(AQW 10514/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I refer the member to my response to questions AQW 8394/11-15 and AQW 9668/11-15 answered on the 12th April 2012. I can confirm that the position remains, as set out in those answers.

Pleural Plaques: Compensation

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the number of claims for compensation made by people with pleural plaques since 2011.

(AQW 10526/11-15)

Mr Wilson: It is not possible to provide information on the overall number of claims for compensation for pleural plaques since 2011. This is partly because the system for monitoring the volume of court business does not provide for the recording of the precise nature of the claim. It is also partly because some cases may be settled in advance of legal proceedings being issued

and there is no way of tracking those cases. I understand, however, that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is currently dealing with 221 claims relating to pleural plaques.

Consultation Documents and Official Reports: Cost

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what was the cost to his Department of producing (i) consultation documents; and (ii) official reports in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 10536/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There was no cost to my Department to produce consultation documents and my Department spent £31,662.47 on producing official reports in the 2010-11 financial year.

Economically Active and Unemployed

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people aged between 16-74 years old in North Down are (i) economically active and unemployed; and (ii) economically active and long-term unemployed, broken down by electoral ward.

(AQW 10551/11-15)

Mr Wilson: This information will be available from the Northern Ireland Census of Population in winter 2012.

However, the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS) can be used to provide sample based estimates of the economically active population. Due to the LFS sample size, estimates are only available for economic activity at the District Council Area (DCA) level.

For information, the latest economic activity estimates for North Down DCA are included in Table 1 overleaf.

Table 1 – Economic activity in North Down (2010)

Age group	Number	Rate
16+	38,000	59.1%
16-641	37,000	70.0%

Source: LFS, LADB 2010

1 The LADB does not allow analysis by individual year of age and it is therefore not possible to select those aged 65-74.

Information on the number of persons unemployed at a ward level is available from the claimant count measure of unemployment. Table 2 shows the number of people claiming unemployment related benefits and those claiming such benefits over a year (long-term unemployed) in North Down DCA, and this information for the wards within North Down DCA at March 2012.

Table 2– Claimants of unemployment related benefits in North Down

Area	Total Claimants	Rate	Long-term*
North Down DCA	1,877	3.7	420
Wards within North Down			
Ballycrochan	83	2.2	10
Ballyholme	36	2.4	5
Ballymacconnell	33	1.7	5
Ballymagee	56	2.1	10
Bangor Castle	79	5.1	20
Bloomfield	112	4.8	25
Broadway	42	2.5	10
Bryansburn	41	2.7	5
Churchill	54	3.5	10
Clandeboye	160	5.0	40
Conlig	177	4.6	55
Craigavad	35	2.1	5
Crawfordsburn	31	1.9	5

Area	Total Claimants	Rate	Long-term*
Cultra	11	0.7	0
Dufferin	134	8.5	40
Groomsport	43	2.5	10
Harbour (Northdown)	200	9.4	45
Hollywood Demesne	64	3.4	20
Hollywood Priory	33	2.1	5
Loughview	79	2.6	20
Princetown	36	2.4	10
Rathgael	79	4.8	15
Silverstream	116	5.7	25
Spring Hill	40	2.3	5
Whitehill	103	6.7	20

* Long-term data is round to 5 and does not include clerical claimants that make up less than 1% of total

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 9478/11-15, how many small business entities, as opposed to business properties will be excluded from the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme because they occupy four or more properties, broken down by council area.

(AQW 10574/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The estimated number of business entities excluded from the Small Business Rate Relief scheme because they occupy four or more properties is 332.

It is not possible to give a breakdown by council area because an estimated 164 of the 332 businesses occupy properties in several council areas.

Legislation

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) what proposals for legislation, subject to Executive approval, he has introduced or intends to introduce between April 2012 and March 2015; (ii) the anticipated timescale for the introduction of each Bill; and (iii) the intention of each Bill.

(AQW 10634/11-15)

Mr Wilson: From 1 April 2012 I have not introduced any legislative proposals. However, I intend to bring forward the following proposals during the period up to March 2015:

- Air Passenger Duty Bill – to set the rate of APD of direct long haul flights to zero;
- Rate Collection and Recovery Bill – to enable more effective collection of rates;
- Legal Complaints and Regulation Bill – to provide powers for a new legal services Oversight Commissioner and create new complaints handling committees for barristers and solicitors;
- Financial Provisions Bill – to adjust specific statutory limits and handle other routine financial matters;
- Land Law Reform Bill – to give effect to the recommendations of the Northern Ireland Law Commission for the reform of the general land law; and
- Land Registration Bill – to replace the Land Registration Act (NI) 1970.

As the above proposals are subject to Executive agreement I am unable to give any timescales for introduction. Moreover, additional proposals may emerge on foot of ongoing work.

In addition, I intend to introduce the following Budget Bills:

- to give effect to the 2012/13 Main Estimates and annually thereafter; and
- to give effect to 2012/13 Spring Supplementary Estimates and 2013/14 Vote on Account and annually thereafter.

These Bills are normally introduced in June and February each year.

Peace III Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail what assistance Cúnamh ICT, and any of its satellite groups, have received under PEACE III, and in respect of what projects.

(AQW 10641/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Cúnamh ICT has received no assistance under the PEACE III Programme. However, its parent organisation, Cúnamh, was awarded £278,132.60 under PEACE III Theme 1.2, Acknowledging and Dealing with the Past, to deliver a project titled Peace in Mind / Suaimhneas Intinne.

Family Law: Review

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to the review of family law, to detail (i) when public consultation will commence; and (ii) the premise of the public consultation.

(AQW 10657/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The target date for the consultation, which will invite views on the substantive law on child contact and parental responsibility, is June 2012. However, that date is subject to departmental priorities and may fall to be revised.

Family Law: Alternative Dispute Resolution

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution in family law cases.

(AQW 10658/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In the family law context there are different mechanisms for alternative dispute resolution (“ADR”) and, as each of those mechanisms is difficult to track, it is impossible to fully assess the prevalence of ADR. For example, a couple may voluntarily avail of the collaborative law process, but that will necessarily be a private arrangement between the parties and their solicitors. Alternatively, the parties may turn to a family mediation service provider, but that will be a private arrangement between the parties and the service provider and, whilst a court may invite parties to avail of mediation, we do not know how often that invitation is made. Although there is no way of providing comprehensive figures, I understand that, in 2011, Family Mediation NI and Barnardo’s undertook 676 sessions of ADR as part of the early intervention process under the Families Matter Strategy. The number of sessions required for each case will necessarily depend on the complexity of the issues.

Pensions: Public Sector

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether all pensions across the public sector are now consumer price index linked, including the Health Service, Education sector, north/south bodies and those affecting the holders of judicial office.

(AQW 10695/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I can confirm that pensions across the public sector in Northern Ireland are now consumer price index linked.

Civil and Public Servants: Council Areas

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of civil and public servants in each council area, broken down by grade.

(AQW 10712/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The numbers of civil servants, broken down by council area and grade

is set out in the attached table. In view of the large number of grades within the Northern Ireland Civil Service the tables show general service and analogous grades.

It is not possible to provide information on the number of public servants in each council area broken down by grade. However, estimates for the number of employee jobs in the public sector in each district council area are available from the following link to the Business Register and Employment Survey 2010. http://www.detini.gov.uk/bres_2010_dca_by_public_private_split.xls

These estimates are based on the location of the job and do not distinguish between employees of working age and non-working age. Percentages have been calculated using these figures.

Table 1: Northern Ireland Civil Service Permanent Staff in Post at 1st Apr 2011 by Analogous Grade and District Council

	Antrim	Ards	Armagh	Ballymena	Ballymoney	Banbridge	Belfast	Carrickfergus	Castlereagh	Coleraine	Cookstown	Craigavon	Derry
G5+	1	0	1	0	0	0	199	1	2	1	0	0	1
SP/PO	12	11	17	31	0	3	958	14	24	32	3	16	29
DP	27	2	6	48	2	2	1665	47	48	30	7	32	48
SO	88	13	25	91	7	19	2126	33	70	66	18	77	91
EOI/EOII	98	80	106	204	31	34	4497	83	150	214	45	198	536
AO	73	93	109	184	21	30	4506	89	77	351	48	197	733
AA	30	19	36	63	8	10	964	10	39	128	10	48	141
Industrial	43	6	29	21	26	18	65	4	0	105	4	107	27
Total	372	224	329	642	95	116	14980	281	410	927	135	675	1606

	Down	Dungannon	Fermanagh	Larne	Limavady	Lisburn	Magherafelt	Moyle	Newry & Mourne	Newtownabbey	North Down	Omagh	Strabane
G5+	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	27	0	0
SP/PO	8	9	12	8	0	15	2	0	27	0	124	28	0
DP	24	2	12	0	0	60	15	0	12	1	137	61	1
SO	52	22	51	4	8	98	41	1	30	6	136	105	3
EOI/EOII	156	114	131	41	35	194	79	4	147	48	262	245	41
AO	125	78	118	54	28	155	64	2	124	69	249	229	29
AA	47	22	40	15	7	51	18	0	44	13	60	69	12
Industrial	62	28	152	11	14	113	31	4	22	61	3	72	26
Total	474	275	516	133	92	687	250	11	407	198	998	809	112

Notes:

1. Data sourced from HR Connect & Additional DOJ databases 1st Apr 2011.
2. Figures are Staff Headcount.
3. Figures comprise Staff Headcount for staff working in the 13 Northern Ireland Departments and in the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, the Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland, and staff of The Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland/The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints
4. Includes all Permanent NICS staff for whom Work Location information is available
5. Staff on career break and Uniformed staff in the NI Prison Service are excluded

Domestic Rates: Payment by Credit or Debit Card

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 10413/11-15, to where the revenue generated from the two percent transaction fee on the payment of rates bills goes, given that the processing costs to the Land and Property Services (LPS) is only £1.30 and he has stated that the LPS does not make a profit.

(AQW 10754/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The 2% transaction fee is paid directly to the LPS payment service provider at the point of payment. The 2% fee is not paid to LPS.

Account NI: Department Bills and Invoice Payments

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of bills and invoice payments processed on behalf of Departments and their agencies by Account NI between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, within (i) 30 calendar days; and (ii) 10 working days.

(AQW 10785/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, the number of bills/invoice payments processed by Account NI on behalf of Departments and their agencies against prompt payment targets was (i) 180,291 within 30 calendar days; and (ii) 166,251 within 10 working days.

Civil Service: Fair Participation

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, with reference to the 2010 Review of Fair Participation in the Civil Service, to outline the rationale for using economically active population figures, from census information, as a comparator for assessing fair participation in the Civil Service workforce.

(AQO 1831/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The use of the economically active population (ie those in work, unemployed or actively seeking employment) to compile comparators for assessing fair participation is considered to be the most appropriate method and is consistent with advice from the Equality Commission for NI.

Cost of Division

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline what work he will ask his Department to undertake to reduce the cost of division.

(AQO 1832/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The nature of the work progressed by my Department is largely in support of the other government departments and as such does not have direct exposure to the policies that cut across the cost of division.

I expect officials in my Department to explore all opportunities to reduce costs to ensure that we continue to deliver quality, cost effective and efficient public services.

North/South Shared Services

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the work being undertaken by his Department on the development of North-South Shared Services.

(AQO 1833/11-15)

Mr Wilson: At the end of last year, the North South Ministerial Council recommended that the two Finance departments should take forward a feasibility study into the potential for shared services to provide efficiency savings within the North South Implementation Bodies.

This recommendation is currently being considered by both Departments and I understand that an update will be provided for the NSMC Plenary in June 2012.

Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013: Additional Funding

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to explain the rationale behind the allocation of an additional £12.6 million to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to assist with the Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013.

(AQO 1834/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Under the Executive's Programme for Government 2011-15, there is a commitment to provide financial and other support across government to ensure the success of the Derry~Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013.

Derry City Council, through the medium of its Culture Company, will shortly have to enter into contractual commitments with event organisers to secure their events and commissions for the Cultural Programme. The Council therefore requires early confirmation of programme funding from Government. It is important that both business case approvals and funding are in place to ensure we can deliver on the PFG commitment.

This programme funding was considered and approved by the Executive at its meeting on 5th April 2012.

Budget: 2013-14 and 2014-15 Allocations

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the purpose of the review of the 2013-14 and 2014-15 budget allocations.

(AQO 1835/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The key driver behind commissioning this review was the level of reduced requirements surrendered by departments through the 2011-12 in-year monitoring process. When the Budget 2011-15 was agreed in March 2011 the indications were that

it was a very tight settlement and, as such, there was little expectation of material reduced requirements being surrendered. However, the evidence of the 2011-12 monitoring process suggests otherwise. While this may be due to the robust action taken by departments to contain expenditure it also raises the possibility that the original Budget allocations to some departments either over-estimated need or under-estimated the capacity for savings. In light of this, I have asked my officials to undertake an analysis of the current financial position in departments against the original Budget allocations.

I am not proposing that this should be a fundamental review of the Budget 2011-15 but rather a reassessment of original allocations based on departmental performance in 2011-12.

My officials will assess the scale of reduced requirements surrendered by each department and, more importantly, the reasons for these surrenders. This will be followed by an assessment of year-end underspends when this information is available from departments in May. The outcome of this work will determine the overall scope of the review.

Regional Pay

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the Chancellor's proposal to introduce local pay variations for public sector workers.

(AQO 1836/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I am very concerned that the potential introduction of local pay variations for public sector workers and any associated block adjustment made would harm Northern Ireland's economic recovery. Local pay variations would likely lead to reduced public spending and a protracted pay freeze for public sector workers which would reduce economic activity and damage business and consumer confidence in the region.

I also don't accept the argument that national pay agreements make it difficult for the private sector to recruit and retain employees.

I can assure you that I will oppose any proposals that I believe would adversely affect our local economic recovery.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Antrim Area Hospital: Delayed Discharges

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 10151/11-15, why (i) delayed discharges due to patients awaiting tertiary care beds increased from 2.5 percent in 2010/11 to 26.4 percent in 2011/12; and (ii) delayed discharges due to no step-down beds being available increased from 1.3 percent in 2010/11 to 11.9 percent in 2011/12.

(AQW 10372/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The rise in delayed discharges due to patients awaiting tertiary care beds reflects high demand for some regional services

The rise in delayed discharges due to no step-down beds being available is predominantly explained in terms of a change in statistical collection criteria which took effect in November 2010. Prior to this date, patients who were moving to another Trust statutory facility (such as Whiteabbey or Mid Ulster hospitals) were recorded as transfers and not discharges. From that date inter-Trust transfers have been included.

Breaches of Good Practice and Cases of Neglect in each Health and Social Care Trust Area

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail all investigations into breaches of good practice and cases of neglect in each Health and Social Care Trust area in the last year; and when each case is due for completion.

(AQW 10552/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the past year has not been compiled, as yet, and is not therefore available. The table below however details the number of clinical / social care negligence cases open at any stage during 2010/11, including the outcome (open, settled or closed) of these cases at 31 March 2011, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

Table 1: Number of Clinical/Social Care Negligence Cases which were Open, Settled or Closed at 31 March 2011

HSC Trust/ Legacy HSS Board	Outcome of Cases at 31 March 2011						All Cases Open During 2010/11
	Open		Settled		Closed		
Belfast HSC Trust	887	80.6%	20	1.8%	193	17.5%	1,100
Northern HSC Trust	393	81.0%	30	6.2%	62	12.8%	485
South Eastern HSC Trust	379	75.5%	14	2.8%	109	21.7%	502

HSC Trust/ Legacy HSS Board	Outcome of Cases at 31 March 2011						All Cases Open During 2010/11
	Open		Settled		Closed		
Southern HSC Trust	282	81.7%	16	4.6%	47	13.6%	345
Western HSC Trust	414	82.8%	*	-	*	-	500
NIAS	8	72.7%	*	-	*	-	11
Legacy Eastern HSS Board	68	49.3%	8	5.8%	62	44.9%	138
Legacy Northern HSS Board	25	80.6%	*	-	*	-	31
Legacy Southern HSS Board	57	80.3%	4	5.6%	10	14.1%	71
Legacy Western HSS Board	32	61.5%	0	0.0%	20	38.5%	52
Northern Ireland Total	2,545	78.7%	96	3.0%	594	18.4%	3,235

1 In order to prevent personal disclosure, cells with a value of less than 4 have been anonymised with an astrix. In addition, where the anonymised cell can be deduced from the totals, the next smallest cells have also been anonymised.

There were 3,235 clinical / social care negligence cases open at any stage during 2010/11.

Over three quarters (2,545, 78.7%) of these 3,235 clinical/social care negligence cases remained open at the 31 March 2011, 594 (18.4%) were closed and 96 (3.0%) were settled.

It is not possible to determine the length of the time which a clinical / social negligence case will remain open. However, almost half (1,543) of those cases open in 2010/11 had been open for 3 years or more. Table 2 below details the length of time cases had been open at 31 March 2011, by the outcome of the case.

Table 2: Length of Time Cases Were Open by the Outcome (31 March 2011) 1

Length of time open	Outcome of Cases at 31 March 2011			All Cases Open During 2010/11
	Open	Settled	Closed	
Less than 1 year	598	4	28	630
1 year to < 3 years	915	21	126	1,062
3 years to < 5 years	449	17	93	559
5 years to < 10 years	412	40	197	649
10 years to < 15 years	101	10	91	202
15 years to < 20 years	58	4	58	120
20 years or more	*	*	*	*
Unknown	*	*	*	*
Total	2,545	96	594	3,235

1 In order to prevent personal disclosure, cells with a value of less than 4 have been anonymised with an astrix. In addition, where the anonymised cell can be deduced from the totals, the next smallest cells have also been anonymised.

Medical Appointments: Fines for People who Fail to Attend

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has plans to introduce fines for people who fail to attend medical appointments at a hospital or with a GP
(AQW 10617/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are on average 170,000 missed appointments every year in health and social care trusts alone. This represents a substantial cost to the health service and is an unacceptable waste of scarce public resources. I want to ensure that all options that can help to reduce the numbers of missed appointments and ensure better use of taxpayers money are explored. The HSCB is responsible for performance monitoring of Trusts and I will be looking to the HSCB working with the Trusts to address this.

Dental Screening: Primary School Children

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is his Department's policy for dental screening of primary school children, and whether it has changed from the policy of March 2008.

(AQW 10629/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Chief Dental Officer issued a statement on the future policy on dental screening (inspection) in schools to the service on 4 March 2008. In summary, the policy advises that school screening should cease.

This followed on from advice from the National Screening Committee (NSC) which recommended to the UK Chief Dental Officers that there is no evidence to support the continued population screening for dental disease among children aged 6-9 years.

This policy change does not relate to children in special schools who are considered to be a separate group.

The DHSSPS policy on school screening has not changed.

Oasis Dental Care

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether Oasis Dental Care has been awarded a contract, which was not part of a tendering competition, to screen primary school children.

(AQW 10630/11-15)

Mr Poots: Oasis Dental Care has not been awarded a contract to screen Primary School Children. Rather there has been a formal contract variation of the existing Oasis contract.

Oasis Dental Care

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether children who have been screened by Oasis Dental Care and who require dental treatment will be advised to attend their regular dentist, if registered, or be given a list of dentists currently accepting patients.

(AQW 10631/11-15)

Mr Poots: Oasis dental care will not be involved in screening children for dental disease. They will however be involved in the collection of oral health data. The two elements to the Oral Health Data Collection Pilot involve either Oasis's own registered patients (therefore any necessary treatment care will be provided by Oasis dentists themselves) or will use the standard British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry methodology for dental surveys. When the latter approach is used children found to have dental disease are not issued with a letter advising them to attend a dentist.

Intensive Care Vehicles and Patient Care Service Vehicles: Omagh

Mr McElduff asked Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of journeys, excluding local journeys, carried out by the Omagh area Intensive Care vehicles or Patient Care Service vehicles in the last year which were outside the Omagh catchment area.

(AQW 10725/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is assumed that this question refers to the number of intermediate care vehicles deployed outside Omagh Local Government District (LGD) area.

With this in mind, the number of completed journeys whereby Omagh Patient Care Service Vehicles were deployed outside of the Omagh LGD area during 2011/12 is detailed below for each vehicle type:

Vehicle Type	Total
Sitting Case Vehicle	2
Dual Purpose Vehicle	2,383
Intermediate Care Vehicle	409
Total	2,794

Source: NIAS

GP Calls, AS1 Calls and Hospital Transfers

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, excluding all Omagh Accident and Emergency Department and GP calls, to detail the number of (i) GP calls; (ii) AS1 calls; and (iii) hospital transfers in each the last six months which were outside the Omagh catchment area.

(AQW 10727/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is assumed that this question refers to the number of calls that required a response outside Omagh Local Government District (LGD) area.

With this in mind, the number of (i) GP calls, (ii) AS1 calls; and (iii) hospital transfers in each of the last six months which were outside the Omagh LGD is detailed below1:

Month	(i) GP calls	(ii) AS1 calls	(iii) Hospital transfers
March 2012	29	63	5
February 2012	24	88	11
January 2012	30	49	8
December 2011	45	70	2
November 2011	27	53	7
October 2011	33	44	3

Source: NIAS

1. Excludes Omagh GP calls and Tyrone County emergency care department.

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the England and Wales Ambulance Services have an Assistant Medical Director while the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service has two full-time Medical Directors.

(AQW 10730/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) does not employ two full time Medical Directors. NIAS employs a Medical Director and an Assistant Medical Director. The Wales Ambulance Service employs a Medical Director and Unscheduled Care and Clinical Director. The England Ambulance Service relates to 12 individual organisations which have mixtures of Medical Directors, Assistant Medical Directors and other clinical roles at Director and/or Assistant Director levels within each organisation however these may be named differently. Each organisation differs significantly in organisational structure and it is therefore inappropriate to make comparisons.

Residential Social Care

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people in full-time residential social care in 2010/11 funded their placement entirely using their own means.

(AQW 10732/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not collected centrally and is not available in the format requested.

999 Calls that Required Station Officers to Attend Emergency Situations

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of 999 calls that required station officers to attend emergency situations in each of the last three years.

(AQW 10752/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of 999 incidents which required Fire Station Commander attendance in each of the last 3 financial years is shown in the table.

Year	Number of 999 Incidents Requiring Fire Station Commander Attendance
2009/10	3,528
2010/11	3,438
2011/12	3,406
Total	10,372

Pandemrix Swine Flu Vaccine

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of people (a) under the age of 20; and (b) over the age of 20 who have been treated for swine flu with the pandemrix swine flu vaccine; and (ii) the number of suspected or actual cases of narcolepsy which his Department has investigated or treated in each of the last three years.

(AQW 10771/11-15)

Mr Poots: Pandemrix vaccine was one of two vaccines used in the UK to vaccinate 'at risk' groups against the A/H1N1 2009 (swine flu) pandemic. Vaccination offers protection against infection. It is not used to treat those with swine flu. A small amount of Pandemrix was also used during the seasonal flu vaccination programme in 2010/2011.

The number of people who received Pandemrix vaccine is of the order of:

2009/10

6 months to 19 years inclusive	20 years and over
75,000	222,000

In 2009/10 a further 33,000 Health and Social Care staff, including health and social care students, were also vaccinated. It is not possible to provide a breakdown by age of this figure however it is likely that the majority would be aged 20 years and over.

2010/11

6 months to 19 years inclusive	20 years and over
3200	4550

No Pandemrix vaccine was administered during the seasonal flu vaccination programme for 2011/2012.

As narcolepsy is not a notifiable disease the department does not hold information on the number of suspected or actual cases of the condition. Narcolepsy is a rare, naturally occurring illness, with around 10 new cases per million people every year.

Pandemrix Swine Flu Vaccine

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) how many people have been diagnosed with narcolepsy as a result being treated for swine flu with the pandemrix vaccine in each of the last three years; and (ii) any on-going treatments they will need to receive.

(AQW 10775/11-15)

Mr Poots: Narcolepsy is a rare, naturally occurring illness, with around 10 new cases per million people every year. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has advised that they have received two yellow card reports of suspected narcolepsy following vaccination with Pandemrix (swine flu vaccine) from Northern Ireland.

It is important to note that the inclusion of a particular reported reaction in the MHRA database does not necessarily mean it has been caused by the vaccine, only that the reporter had a suspicion that it may have been, or that it had a close temporal relationship to the administration of the vaccine. The fact that symptoms occur after a vaccination is given does not mean that they have been caused by the vaccine itself, as underlying illnesses and other conditions may be responsible.

Although no cure yet exists for narcolepsy, a combination of treatments can help to control narcolepsy symptoms and enable an individual to enjoy many normal activities. The treatment that works best for an individual will vary according to their specific narcolepsy symptoms and they should discuss this with their own GP, but it may include a combination of counselling, medication, and lifestyle changes.

Social Deprivation: Funding

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how funding is targeted at areas of high social deprivation. **(AQW 10777/11-15)**

Mr Poots: My department uses a number of weighted capitation formulae to determine the target shares of health and social care services. The underlying principle of these capitation formulae is one of equal resource for equal need; the distribution of resources is thus based on the relative need for health and social care services of each area. These formula skew resources in response to need; these needs are seen to arise due the age / gender profile of each area and also to the deprivation and socioeconomic circumstances in each area.

Each weighted capitation formula is based upon statistical research, which use proxies for health needs to determine whether each area should receive more or less funding relative to the others. To be clear as there is a finite pot for each service this is a relative distribution of the available resources.

When each of the formulae are being developed they are subjected to many reality checks, these checks include an investigation of the correlation of the calculated needs index with the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). This check for the main capitation formula suite, (which is currently used to allocate £3,121 million of the total health and social care spend, covering hospital and community spend and personal social services) can be seen in the table.

Table 1 Average combined needs index (includes age & deprivation related needs) for the SOAs in each deprivation decile

Deprivation Decile (1 least deprived, 10 most deprived)	Total Combined Needs Index
1	0.74
2	0.83
3	0.85
4	0.93
5	0.94
6	0.97
7	1.05
8	1.08
9	1.16
10	1.34

This average total needs index per person in each area shows the relative need after accounting for the age/gender profile and the relative socioeconomic conditions in each area. This index is used to target shares of the available resources; from the table it can be seen that the formula targets over 80% more resources per head towards the most deprived (index of 1.34) areas compared to the least (index of 0.74), as measured by the Multiple Deprivation Measure.

Social Deprivation: Spending

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total level of spend in areas of high social deprivation in each Health and Social Care Trust area, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 10778/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is not possible to answer this question, as the HSC Trusts do not capture expenditure by areas of high social deprivation.

Social Deprivation: Life Expectancy

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to improve the life expectancy of people living in areas of high social deprivation.

(AQW 10779/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department, through the Public Health Agency, is taking action across the province to improve health and wellbeing, and to reduce inequalities in life expectancy. The PHA is working with the statutory, community and other sectors to take action in the areas of greatest need to address a range of lifestyle issues such as smoking, obesity, home accidents, alcohol and drug misuse, and mental health and suicide.

In addition partnership working is seeking to address the factors that affect life expectancy which go beyond the HSC, such as living conditions - for example fuel poverty, working environment, education, community cohesion, and environmental factors.

Cigarette Packaging

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department would support the introduction of plain packaging for cigarettes.

(AQW 10836/11-15)

Mr Poots: I support the concept of plain packaging, which is why I recently agreed that Northern Ireland should be included in a UK-wide consultation on this issue. The consultation exercise, led by the Department of Health (London) will close on 10 July 2012 and I look forward to receiving a breakdown of the responses from Northern Ireland, in addition to a UK-wide analysis.

Following full consideration of the consultation responses, I will determine whether plain packaging for tobacco products should be introduced in Northern Ireland.

Inter-Ministerial Group on Sexual and Domestic Violence

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 10377/11-15, how many issues relating to the Inter-Ministerial Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence that required Ministerial input have been dealt with by written correspondence since the last meeting of the group on 29 June 2010.

(AQW 10845/11-15)

Mr Poots: There have been two issues relating to the Inter-Ministerial Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence that have required ministerial input and which have been dealt with by written correspondence since the last meeting on the 29 June 2010. The issues relate to the endorsement of the "Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse" Action Plan and the "Tackling Violence at Home" Action Plan for the period 2010 to 2012.

Autism: Support for Children in Schools

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has had with the Minister of Education in the last 12 months in relation to developing support for children with autism in schools.

(AQW 10847/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have met with the Minister for Education on two occasions in the past 12 months to discuss a number of areas where there is potential to improve services and outcomes for vulnerable children including those with Autism.

In addition, officials from all Departments are working closely together to develop a whole life strategy for the provision of services to those with autism. That strategy will include actions to improve services across the education sector.

Dental Decay

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department is putting in place to reduce the problem of dental decay, particularly among young people.

(AQW 10898/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has been very proactive in introducing evidence-based programmes to improve the oral health of children in Northern Ireland.

Since 2004, we have introduced the following measures:

- Fluoride toothpaste schemes for young children in the most deprived areas
- Preventive fissure sealant scheme delivered through the general dental services for young people
- Enhanced capitation payments for dentists providing care to children from deprived areas
- Focussing the work of the Community Dental Service on high priority areas such as providing care for children from socially disadvantaged area and delivering evidence-based oral health improvement programmes.

Since the implementation of these schemes, we have noticed a significant improvement in the oral health of our child population.

We have noted a reduction in extractions under general anaesthetic from 40,000 in 2004 to 26,500 last year. We have also recorded a large reduction in the number of fillings carried out in children under 18 over this period.

In addition, my Department is supporting a large research trial to investigate the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of using fluoride varnish and fluoride toothpaste to prevent decay in young children.

The 2007 Oral Health Strategy stated that the greatest oral health gain is likely to be achieved through community water fluoridation. I am actively considering fluoridation of the water supplies. I intend to will consult with my executive colleagues to seek their views on water fluoridation.

We will continue to use these evidence-based programmes to further improve the oral health of our child population.

Multiple Sclerosis: Gilenya

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the drug Gilenya will be available for people with multiple sclerosis.

(AQW 10900/11-15)

Mr Poots: NICE published Technology Appraisal TA254 - Fingolimod (Gilenya) for the treatment of relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis on Wednesday 25 April 2012. As set out in circular HSC (SQSD) NICE 04/11, my Department is expected to locally review and endorse NICE Technology Appraisals within 4 weeks of the NICE publication date, after which the HSC Board are asked to submit a commissioning plan within 15 weeks of the confirmed receipt of endorsement. Once a commissioning plan is agreed, it will represent the formal Departmental policy position on implementation.

Prior to the guidance being endorsed with an agreed commissioning plan, individual applications for funding can be made to the HSC Board for their consideration.

Bangor Diabetes Clinic: Closure

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact of the closure of the Bangor Diabetes Clinic on the local community.

(AQW 10910/11-15)

Mr Poots: The temporary discontinuation of the Bangor Hospital diabetes clinic is a matter for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. As the change is not permanent, the Trust has not carried out a formal impact assessment.

The Trust has advised that it will be reinstating a diabetic service in Bangor but an exact date for recommencement has not yet been established. In the interim, patients from the Bangor area continue to attend the Ulster and Ards Hospitals for their new and review appointments.

Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the buildings of the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children were constructed.

(AQW 10945/11-15)

Mr Poots: The original Children's Hospital building was constructed in 1929 with a variety of extensions having been added since. The most recent extension, known as the 'White Building', was added in 1999.

Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide an estimate of the cost of a replacement building for the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children; and when he expects the investment for the replacement building to be confirmed.

(AQW 10946/11-15)

Mr Poots: Early indicative cost estimates for this project are £180m, including £30m for essential energy infrastructure required for the project. These costs will, however, be subject to review when the business case is scrutinised.

Investment for a replacement facility cannot be confirmed until all procurement options have been considered and the business case has been approved. The current capital budget does not permit the completion of a Regional Children's Hospital within the current budget period ending in March 2015. However, I have set aside £3m and £9m in 2013/14 and 2014/15 respectively to allow this project to commence and will be pressing the Trust to progress the project as quickly as possible.

Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety where the replacement building for the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children is in terms of his Department's priorities for capital investment.

(AQW 10949/11-15)

Mr Poots: As I have stated previously, I consider this project to be of the utmost priority. However the current capital budget does not permit the completion of a Regional Children's Hospital within the current budget period ending in March 2015. I have been able to set aside £3m and £9m in 2013/14 and 2014/15 respectively to allow this project to commence and will be pressing the Trust to progress the project as quickly as possible.

Fluoridation of the Public Water Supply

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in light of the promotion of better oral health, particularly among younger people, what consideration he has given to the matter of freedom of choice in deciding if fluoridation of the public water supply is an option.

(AQW 10954/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department can only enter any fluoridation arrangements after it has consulted and ascertained public opinion, and secured approval by resolution of the Assembly.

Child Protection Register

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether Social Services, as a matter of course, advise schools if they are working with one of their pupils or if a pupil is being placed on the Child Protection Register.

(AQW 11016/11-15)

Mr Poots: In accordance with existing guidance, Social Services staff will, as a matter of course, advise schools if they are working with a pupil who is a Looked After Child or whose name is on the child protection register as part of their investigative and supportive interventions.

Schools have a designated teacher who has responsibility for sharing information with social services when child protection enquiries are being undertaken. Guidance requires that teaching staff and educational welfare staff, where appropriate, are invited to contribute to and attend Child Protection Case Conferences. In such instances the relevant designated teacher is advised of the inclusion of a pupil's name on the Child Protection Register.

The minutes of Child Protection Case Conferences and contents of Child Protection Plans and Care Plans are also shared with teaching and Educational Welfare staff. Such staff are also consulted in relation to the progress and welfare of pupils whose names are included on the Child Protection Register.

When Social Services are working with a child who is designated to be a 'Child in Need' but not Looked After or on the Child Protection Register, they will ordinarily seek parental consent to share information about their involvement with schools.

Inter-Ministerial Group on Sexual and Domestic Violence

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 10377/11-15, how many issues have been dealt with by correspondence since the group last met.

(AQW 11018/11-15)

Mr Poots: There have been two issues which have been dealt with by correspondence since the group last met. The issues relate to the endorsement of the "Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse" Action Plan and the "Tackling Violence at Home" Action Plan for the period 2010 to 2012.

Inter-Ministerial Group on Sexual and Domestic Violence

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 10377/11-15, how many pieces of written correspondence have been circulated to the whole group since it last met.

(AQW 11019/11-15)

Mr Poots: There has been one piece of written correspondence circulated to the whole group since it last met. This issue related to the endorsement of the "Tackling Violence at Home" Action Plan for the period 2010 to 2012.

MRI Scanner: Paediatric Intensive Care Unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 8481/11-15, to detail (i) the number of (a) adults; and (b) children waiting for an MRI scan; and (ii) the average waiting time for each group, in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 11036/11-15)

Mr Poots: MRI waiting time data are collected in aggregate time bands; 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 number of adults currently waiting for an MRI scan at each HSC Trust, and the median waiting time band, is outlined in the table below:

HSC Trust	No. adults currently waiting for MRI scan ¹	Median waiting time band (weeks)
Belfast	1,117	0-6 weeks
Northern	278	0-6 weeks
South Eastern	438	6-9 weeks
Southern	765	0-6 weeks
Western	660	0-6 weeks
Northern Ireland	3,258	0-6 weeks

Source: HSC Trusts

The number of children currently waiting for an MRI scan at each HSC Trust, and the median waiting time band, is outlined in the table below:

HSC Trust	No. children currently waiting for MRI scan ¹	Median waiting time band (weeks)
Belfast	265	6-9 weeks
Northern	9	0-6 weeks
South Eastern	9	0-6 weeks
Southern	8	0-6 weeks
Western	65	0-6 weeks
Northern Ireland	356	0-6 weeks

Source: HSC Trusts

1 Children are categorised as patients aged between 0 and 16 years of age, with adults categorised as patients over 16 years of age.

Social Workers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what his Department is doing to increase the numbers and skills of social workers to ensure that clients get the best possible care.

(AQO 1842/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of social workers trained in Northern Ireland (NI) each year is closely aligned to DHSSPS Workforce planning and anticipated projected workforce needs. There is currently an annual intake of 260 social work students to meet workforce needs. There are robust arrangements in place for training social workers in NI at qualifying and post-qualifying levels. Indeed QUB has one of the highest rankings in the UK in respect of the Degree in Social Work. All qualified social workers are required to be registered with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) and, to ensure their skills and knowledge remain current and up-to-date, must complete ongoing professional training as a condition of their registration.

Diabetes

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to improve diabetes services.

(AQO 1843/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Clinical Resource Efficiency Support Team (CREST)/Diabetes UK Joint Taskforce Report 2003 set out a framework for diabetes care in Northern Ireland. Since then significant progress has been made in improving services for people with diabetes, with more than £10m invested recurrently. I have asked officials in my Department to instigate a review of the 2003 Report. This review will 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.

The Review will need to take account of the principles of the new model of care set out in "Transforming Your Care" to ensure that services are commissioned and delivered that will secure optimum health outcomes and well-being for people with diabetes.

The Review will also need to consider my Department's Policy Framework, "Living with Long Term Conditions" which I launched on 26 April. The Framework will help drive the modernisation of health and social care services for adults living with long term conditions and their carers including diabetes.

Health and Social Care Centre, Ballymena

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the provision of a new Health and Social Care Centre in Ballymena.

(AQO 1844/11-15)

Mr Poots: The development of a new health and care centre in Ballymena is going ahead and I recently visited Ballymena to view Trust plans for the new facility. Enabling works are underway at the site and I have set aside almost £25m from my Department's capital budget for this scheme.

Construction works on the main scheme are expected to commence on site by January 2013 and the project should be completed by mid 2014.

Chronic Conditions

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to improve outcomes for people with chronic conditions.

(AQO 1845/11-15)

Mr Poots: On 26 April I launched my Department's Policy Framework, "Living with Long Term Conditions". The Framework will help drive the modernisation of health and social care services for adults living with long term conditions and their carers.

The Framework sets out clear principles and good practice for commissioners and providers in the statutory, independent, voluntary and community sectors who are responsible for planning and delivering treatment and care to support people living with long term conditions.

The Policy Framework is relevant across a wide range of conditions and all care settings. It was developed in conjunction with the Long Term Conditions Alliance Northern Ireland, which is an umbrella body for voluntary and not for profit organisations working with and for people with long term conditions in Northern Ireland.

The Framework reflects the new model of care recommended in "Transforming your Care", which includes long term conditions as one of its key areas.

A Regional Implementation Steering Group will be established to take forward the implementation of the Long Term Conditions Policy Framework.

The Policy Framework will support my vision of driving up the quality of care, improving outcomes and enhancing the patient experience.

Counselling and Addiction Services: East Belfast

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there are adequate resources for counselling and addiction services in East Belfast.

(AQO 1846/11-15)

Mr Poots: As I said during the adjournment debate on this issue on 17th April, people living in East Belfast have access to a range of local counselling and addiction services. They also have access to regional counselling services for specific issues. It is for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to ensure that the range and volume of these services are adequate to address the needs of the population in East Belfast.

External Consultants

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much his Department spent on external consultants in the last twelve months.

(AQO 1847/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is estimated that my Department will spend £130,000 on external consultants for the financial year 2011/12.

Whilst the final figure will not be available until the annual accounts have been prepared, this represents a reduction of some 76% compared to the previous financial year and continues the downward trend noted in such expenditure over recent years.

Dementia Care

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he has taken to acknowledge excellence in dementia care.

(AQO 1848/11-15)

Mr Poots: I recently presented the Northern Ireland Dementia Excellence Awards at the 'Dementia 2012' event held at the end of March, which was hosted by the Dementia Services Development Centre.

The awards provided an excellent opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the hard work and dedication shown by both individuals and organisations, across all sectors, who work diligently and selflessly to help those people living with dementia who need their care and support.

Stillbirths

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that the stillbirth rate has not decreased over the past decade, what action his Department intends to take to reduce the number of stillborn babies.

(AQO 1849/11-15)

Mr Poots: The death of a baby is devastating. We owe it to families to do everything we can to prevent such tragedies. Statistics released on 25th April 2012 by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency confirm that 2011 saw the lowest rate ever recorded for stillbirths at 3.6 per 1,000 live and still births. In 2001 the rate was 4.6 per 1,000. Despite this improvement we must not be complacent.

A new UK-wide Maternal and Newborn Clinical Outcome Review Programme has been established to examine maternity outcomes, identify risk factors for maternal and perinatal deaths, including stillbirths and improve how lessons are learnt quickly. My Department contributes to the work of this group and we will be able to benefit from any advice and guidance offered.

In addition my Department has consulted on a draft Maternity Strategy for Northern Ireland. The Strategy considers maternity services at each stage of pregnancy and makes recommendations for improving all clinical outcomes.

Listeria: Causeway Hospital and Antrim Area Hospital

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps have been taken to prevent any recurrence of listeria at the Causeway and Antrim Hospitals.

(AQO 1850/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following the outbreak of listeria in the Northern Trust in April, the Trust carried out a review of food supply and distribution chains with the Food Standards Agency and Environmental Health to ensure that food safety arrangements were being adhered to.

Preliminary results of tests on sandwiches provided to in-patients indicated low levels of listeria present, although these were within the legal limits. As a precautionary measure the Northern Trust decided not to serve sandwiches from a particular supplier until investigations have been completed.

Following discussions with the Northern Trust, the Public Health Agency wrote to the other Trusts recommending a number of precautionary actions, specifically:

- not serving sandwiches from a particular supplier to in-patients;
- assurance of robust implementation of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points and cold chain requirements;

- ensuring that clinical staff are aware of the possibility of listeria infection and diagnosis; and
- promptly reporting new cases of listeria to the PHA Duty Room

The PHA has provided a food safety leaflet and listeria factsheet to all Trusts

In addition, the Public Health Agency has established an Outbreak Control Team which has been meeting regularly and liaising with colleagues in the rest of the UK and in the Republic.

Osteoporosis: Fracture Liaison Services

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the effectiveness of fracture liaison services in assisting patients with osteoporosis.

(AQO 1851/11-15)

Mr Poots: Fracture liaison services provide invaluable help to prevent patients who have already suffered a fracture due to disease such as osteoporosis, coming to further harm.

In total, over the past six months, fracture liaison services have seen or are monitoring 1,216 patients. This includes providing reviews and referrals for bone density scans, bone protection treatment, counselling, or a falls clinic. I am confident the number of patients who will benefit from this excellent preventative work will increase as services become further established.

Department of Justice

HMP Maghaberry, Roe House: Discovery of Semtex

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the circumstances around the recent discovery of Semtex in HMP Maghaberry Roe House and sections of the visitor areas; and for his assessment of the discovery in relation to plans to reduce the necessity for body searches.

(AQW 10339/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): There has been no recent discovery of Semtex in any part of Maghaberry Prison. Recent newspaper reports suggesting that there has been are false.

Kevin Kennedy v Chief Constable of the PSNI

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Justice to detail the costs incurred by each of his Department's arm's-length bodies in relation to the case of Kevin Kennedy versus the Chief Constable of the PSNI.

(AQW 10376/11-15)

Mr Ford: The details of the costs incurred by the Department of Justice's arm's length bodies, including Agencies, in relation to the case of Kevin Kennedy versus the Chief Constable of the PSNI are as follows:

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service - £1,450

Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) - Costs incurred by the PSNI are an operational matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) - In addition to the case against the Chief Constable, Mr Kennedy lodged a Fair Employment Tribunal case against the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB). Costs incurred by the NIPB in respect of legal advice amounted to £2,433 but the tribunal case was subsequently withdrawn following the settlement reached in respect of the case against the Chief Constable.

Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation: Training of Prison Staff

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice what strategy is in place to train staff in prisons in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

(AQW 10408/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since 2004 all uniform staff have received First Aid training as part of their induction into the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS). Cardiopulmonary resuscitation is covered within this training.

In September 2011 NIPS also introduced a one day Emergency First Aid Course. On average three of these initial courses and four refresher courses are delivered each year by approved trainers. This ensures that NIPS exceeds the legislative requirements for numbers of first aid accredited staff.

Primary Healthcare Units within each establishment also provide 24 hour emergency first aid cover.

RUC/PSNI Museum

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether the RUC/PSNI museum will move to the new Police College at Cookstown; and if not, where the museum will be located.

(AQW 10447/11-15)

Mr Ford: No decision has yet been taken on where the new Police Museum will be located. An Outline Business Case is currently being prepared by the RUC George Cross Foundation which, once finalised, will need to be approved by my Department and by the Department of Finance and Personnel. As with all business cases, a number of options will be appraised and a preferred option identified for the location of the new museum.

Sexual Offences Prevention Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many Sexual Offences Prevention Orders were in place in each court division in 2011; and how many of these were breached.

(AQW 10454/11-15)

Mr Ford: Information is not readily available to answer the question in the format sought. However, the table below shows the number of Sexual Offences Prevention Orders made by calendar year which were in place during 2011.

Sexual Offences Prevention Orders in place in 2011

	Crown Court	Magistrates' Court	Total
2005	1	4	5
2006	12	13	25
2007	43	17	60
2008	71	28	99
2009	65	23	88
2010	75	16	91
2011	64	15	79
Total	331	116	447

Notes:

Figures include orders made on appeal if no order was made on the original case.

Figures for 2011 are provisional.

Information on order breaches is available from 2007 when the NI Courts and Tribunals Service IT system became fully operational. Information on breaches prior to this would require an extensive trawl of manual records. During the period 2007 to 2011 there were 160 convictions for order breaches involving 118 defendants.

Magistrates' Court Cases: Forensic Evidence Delays

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 9854/11-15, whether these figures include case number 11/150443 at Dungannon Magistrates' Court and case number 11/128987 at Magherafelt Magistrates' Court.

(AQW 10534/11-15)

Mr Ford: The figures contained in my answer to AQW9854/11-15 did not include case number 11/150443 at Dungannon Magistrates' Court and case number 11/128987 at Magherafelt Magistrates' Court as they are not included in the adjournment monitoring exercise which is currently only operating at Londonderry Magistrates' Court.

Consultation Documents and Official Reports: Cost

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Justice what was the cost to his Department of producing (i) consultation documents; and (ii) official reports in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 10539/11-15)

Mr Ford: External print and design costs incurred by the Department of Justice, excluding Agencies and arms length bodies, to produce (i) consultation documents and (ii) official reports in the 2010/11 financial year are shown in the table below.

Consultation Documents	£4,200
Official Reports	£5,449

This does not include any internal expenditure that may have been incurred. Internal expenditure is not recorded on the Department of Justice finance system in a way that makes this possible.

Lead: Theft from Buildings

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what legislation is relevant to the theft of lead from buildings.
(AQW 10564/11-15)

Mr Ford: I understand that the relevant legislation is the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969. Depending on circumstances, the Theft (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 may apply.

Lead: Regulation of Sale

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what legislation exists on the regulation of the sale of lead.
(AQW 10565/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am not aware of any specific regulations governing the sale of lead. I understand, however, that if lead was bound for a waste management facility it would be controlled waste and subject to the Waste and Contaminated Land (NI) Order 1997.

Contraband Brought to Prisoners

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Justice what measures he has taken to address the issue of contraband items being brought in to prisoners; and what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of those measures.
(AQW 10592/11-15)

Mr Ford: The main measures in place to address the issue of contraband items being brought in to prisoners can be broadly categorised as prevention, education and punishment.

Preventive measures include the searching of all visitors, staff and goods entering the prison. There are also arrangements in place to search prisoners on committal and discharge, and before and following visits. In addition, passive drugs dogs are deployed to screen visitors prior to visits, and Governors ensure that prison cells, residential areas and other areas of the prison are regularly searched.

Visits are supervised and monitored by CCTV. Visitors may be banned if there is evidence that they have passed contraband items during a visit, and Governors may recommend to Prison Service Headquarters that prisoners who have received contraband items on a visit are restricted to 'closed visits' for an appropriate period of time.

Programmes are in place to educate prisoners about the dangers of using illicit substances, both from the point of view of a prisoner's health and in relation to addressing issues relevant to a prisoner's risk of reoffending.

Punitive measures include charging prisoners under Prison Rules and referring more serious cases to PSNI for investigation. Prisoners may also be removed from normal association with other prisoners if their behaviour gives cause for concern that they pose a threat to the good order and discipline of the establishment.

My assessment is that the measures outlined above are appropriate to the aim of taking reasonable steps to address concerns about contraband items entering prisons whilst at the same time not unduly limiting opportunities for prisoners to maintain regular links with family members and friends. Policies are kept under review in light of the information regularly provided to senior managers about, for example, the number and type of drugs finds.

Electricity: Dishonest Use

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many cases of dishonestly using electricity or diverting an electricity supply are presently in the court system.
(AQW 10609/11-15)

Mr Ford: As of 20 April 2012, there were 63 cases before the Magistrates' and Crown Courts, with one County Court Appeal in relation to charges of dishonestly using electricity or diverting an electricity supply.

Pearson Review Team Report

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 9151/11-15, to detail the occupations of the current pool of investigators, and of these, how many are independent of the Prison Service.
(AQW 10610/11-15)

Mr Ford: The current pool of investigators comprises Prison Governors and civil servants from the Northern Ireland Prison Service. On occasion, the Prison Service also utilises the services of the Department of Agriculture Central Investigation Unit which is independent of the Prison Service.

Alleged Sexual Assault Cases

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many cases involving alleged sexual assault are currently with the (i) Magistrates Court; and (ii) Crown Court, broken down by court division.

(AQW 10611/11-15)

Mr Ford: Table 1 below details the number of active cases involving sexual offences in the Magistrates' Court and Crown Court broken down by County Court Division.

Table 1

Division	Magistrates' Court	Crown Court	Total
Antrim	29	31	60
Ards	22	17	39
Armagh and South Down	13	13	26
Belfast	92	77	169
Craigavon	23	21	44
Fermanagh and Tyrone	21	17	38
Londonderry	36	16	52
Total	236	192	428

Table 2 details the number of active cases involving sexual offences that are currently being appealed before the Court of Appeal and County Court.

Table 2

Court of Appeal	18
County Court Division of:	
Armagh & South Down	1
Belfast	3
Fermanagh & Tyrone	1
Total	23

All cases relate to sexual offences which trigger the notification requirements under Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (as amended).

Titanic Quarter: Development

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the development of the Titanic Quarter, what plans there are to extend the PSNI's jurisdiction to cover the Harbour area of Belfast.

(AQW 10620/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Police Service of Northern Ireland already has full constabulary powers throughout Northern Ireland and the adjacent United Kingdom waters. Whilst the day-to-day policing of the Harbour Estate is carried out by Belfast Harbour Police (BHP), this can be enhanced by officers from the PSNI depending on the nature or scale of the problem or incident. A joint PSNI/BHP Neighbourhood Policing Team has been established within the Titanic Quarter area to deal with the particular demands of policing that part of the Harbour Estate.

Small Claims Court

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail the main differences between the Small Claims Court in Northern Ireland and England.
(AQW 10623/11-15)

Mr Ford: In May 2011, following a review of the jurisdictional limits of the County Courts, I increased the financial limit of the Small Claims Court from £2,000 to £3,000. This increase has allowed more users to avail of this efficient and informal arbitration system. There are certain types of cases which the Small Claims Court does not hear in this jurisdiction. These exclusions are provided in the County Court Rules and include personal injury claims and those arising from road traffic accidents.

In England and Wales the Small Claims track processes cases with a value of £5,000 or less, however if it is a personal injury claim or a housing dispute, the value of the claim can be no more than £1,000.

In England and Wales the courts provide a Small Claims Mediation Scheme which offers an alternative method for resolving disputes if both parties agree. Whilst there is no court based mediation scheme in Northern Ireland at this time, it is always open to parties in small claims proceedings to have recourse to third-party mediation where they wish to do so.

Small Claims Court

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice whether any problematic aspects of the Small Claims Court would be diminished if it was brought into line with the Small Claims Court system in England.

(AQW 10625/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am satisfied that the Small Claims Court in Northern Ireland provides an informal, effective and affordable system of arbitration for the resolution of low value disputes in Northern Ireland. Its procedure remains simple and straightforward and gives rise to few difficulties for individual applicants. It has undergone a number of important reforms over recent years which have enhanced the system.

In May 2011, following a review of the jurisdictional limits of the County Courts, the financial limit of the Small Claims Court was increased from £2,000 to £3,000. This increase has allowed more users to avail of this efficient and informal arbitration system.

Small Claims Online allows claimants to make a small claims application using the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service website. This service allows members of the public and businesses to make a small claims application outside normal working hours and to track the progress of the application online.

Some respondents to the earlier consultation paper on the jurisdictional limits of the County Courts commented that consideration should be given to allowing the Small Claims Court to deal with personal injury claims and those arising from road traffic accidents. The County Court Rules presently excludes these types of cases from the Small Claims Court. The County Court Rules Committee was made aware of these comments and I understand intends to consider the matter in the near future.

Small Claims: Guide

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department intends to amend the 'Small Claims Guide: A Guide to the Small Claims Process', to explain clearly how to initiate and conduct an appeal without using a solicitor.

(AQW 10627/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am satisfied that the current Small Claims Guide provides comprehensive and clear instructions on the small claims process including the relevant grounds for appeal, service requirements, time limits and appropriate appeal form. It also advises customers that court staff will assist with the procedure to be followed but notes they cannot provide legal advice and recommends the services of a solicitor or the Citizens Advice Bureau if required.

Given that the most recent version of the Guide was published in July 2011 and included revisions to the appeals section, I have no plans to commission a further review at this time.

Case 11/039234 at Dungannon Magistrates' Court

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to case 11/039234 at Dungannon Magistrates Court, to detail what led to the outcome of this case being wrongly recorded as to be dealt with by caution and it was then reinstated when the caution was not taken up; and (ii) whether the incorrect recording was done by the Public Prosecution Service or the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service.

(AQW 10656/11-15)

Mr Ford: The issues associated with case number 11/039234 are a matter for the Public Prosecution Service (PPS). I have therefore forwarded your question to the PPS who will respond to your question directly.

However, I can confirm that the court records show that the outcome of the original proceedings is correctly recorded as 'Dismissed – On Merits'.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Director General

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Justice how many meetings have been held between the out-going Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the Chairman of the Prison Officer's Association.

(AQW 10659/11-15)

Mr Ford: There have been no formal meetings between the Director General and the Chairman of the Prison Officers' Association. In line with normal practice industrial relations matters are handled by the Director of Human Resources.

The Chairman of the Prison Officers' Association has not requested a meeting with the Director General.

Prison Service: Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice when the 73 Prison Service staff who were approved for the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme, but who were not permitted leave on 31 March 2012 for operational reasons, will receive their redundancy package; and for his assessment of the situation where a further 320 applicants do not know when they will be included in the Scheme. **(AQW 10681/11-15)**

Mr Ford: 544 members of the Northern Ireland Prison Service applied for the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme. 151 staff left on 31 March 2012, and a further 9 will leave on 30 April. The departure of 139 individuals has been delayed for operational reasons. The remaining 245 of the applications received remain under consideration.

I remain committed to allowing as many as possible of those who wish to leave the opportunity of doing so. It will however take time to work through the operational and financial issues and it will be necessary to balance carefully those wishing to leave with the arrival of the new recruits to the Custody Officer grade.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the current Alternative Dispute Resolution. **(AQW 10688/11-15)**

Mr Ford: It is my view that Alternative Dispute Resolution should be seen as one of the first avenues to be considered by parties seeking to resolve their differences. In keeping with this view, in September 2011 my Department supported the publication of a booklet called Alternatives to Court. The initiative, led by the Northern Ireland Ombudsman and Law Centre (NI), was designed to demonstrate the options for dealing with many types of disputes and explains how alternatives to court work in practice and how they can be used. In particular the booklet deals with Alternative Dispute Resolution which includes mediation.

The Access to Justice Review published in September 2011 contains recommendations for a greater use of mediation and other options under Alternative Dispute Resolution. The consultation period to the report ended in January 2012 with 47 responses being received. These responses have been considered and I intend to publish my response to the recommendations in June 2012.

Prison Service: Professional Standards Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) what was the cost of setting up the Prison Service Professional Standards Unit; (ii) how many dedicated staff are assigned to this unit; (iii) where it will be based; and (iv) for an estimate of its annual running costs. **(AQW 10702/11-15)**

Mr Ford: As the setting up of the Professional Standards Unit is still at the development stage, the information sought is not yet available.

Case 11/039234 at Dungannon Magistrates' Court

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for a breakdown of all the costs associated with case 11/039234 at Dungannon Magistrates' Court. **(AQW 10705/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The table below sets out the estimated costs associated with case number 11/039234.

Cost Type	Estimated Cost
PSNI	Not Available ¹
PPS Prosecution	£500
Defence (Legal Aid Costs) ²	£736
Court (Judiciary and Staff Costs)	£467
Facilities (e.g. Courtroom Accommodation)	£85
Total	£1,788

- 1 The Investigating Officer conducted his enquires consistent with his normal duties and would therefore not incur any additional costs over those associated with normal duty time.
- 2 The defence costs relate solely to the fees submitted by Junior Counsel; the solicitor in the case has not yet submitted their claim.

Prison Service: Code of Conduct and Discipline

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to Rule 6 of S.R. 1995/08 The Prison and Young Offenders Centre Rules (Northern Ireland) 1995, when the Secretary of State approved the Prison Service Code of Conduct and Discipline.

(AQW 10706/11-15)

Mr Ford: The current Code of Conduct and Discipline came into effect in 1996, replacing the previous Code of Discipline. NIPS is unable to provide the exact date that the Secretary of State approved the current Code.

Legal Aid for Appealing Convictions and Sentences

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how much has been paid in legal aid for appealing convictions and sentences, which were handed down in Magistrates' Court, at a higher court in each of the last three years, broken down by court division.

(AQW 10757/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below details the legal aid payments made in respect of County Court appeals over the last three years broken down by County Court Division.

County Court Division	Assessed Gross Total 09/10	Assessed Gross Total 10/11	Assessed Gross Total 11/12
Antrim	58,496	81,734	83,597
Ards	47,059	37,027	54,584
Armagh and South Down	56,662	80,951	69,603
Belfast	147,315	224,621	219,944
Craigavon	57,327	96,841	106,232
Fermanagh and Tyrone	89,067	149,650	170,561
Londonderry	30,730	47,144	52,088
Total	486,656	717,968	756,609

Human Trafficking

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to amend legislation in relation to victims of human trafficking, who have been coerced into committing a crime, to ensure that they are either not charged with the crime or that their situation can be used as a defence, particularly in relation to cannabis factories and people caught living in the dwellings which have been converted for cultivation purposes.

(AQW 10761/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have no plans to amend legislation to provide blanket immunity from prosecution for trafficked victims. The Public Prosecution Service will consider each case on its merits having regard to the seriousness of the possible offence committed. Evidence or information to support the fact that the suspect has been trafficked and has committed the alleged offence whilst in a coerced situation will be considered as a strong public interest factor mitigating against prosecution.

Northern Ireland Police Fund

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Justice to detail the funding received by the Northern Police Fund in each of the last five years.

(AQW 10791/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have provided information for the last two years from when the Department of Justice was created.

	2010/11 £	2011/12 £
Police Fund	1,850,000	1,822,000

Northern Ireland Police Fund

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Justice to list (i) the bodies which have received funding from the Northern Ireland Police Fund in each of the last three years; and (ii) the amount of funding received by each body.

(AQW 10793/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested can be found in the table below:

Organisation	2009/10	2010/11 £	2011/12 £
RUC GC Parents' Association	45,000.00	45,800.00	45,000.00
Disabled Police Officers' Association	39,438.00	55,500.00	43,000.00
Retired Police Officers' Association	20,625.00	7,500.00	0
Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust	65,213.90	0	0
RUC Benevolent Fund (including local voluntary welfare groups)	85,001.58	77,004.37	75,000.00
RUC GC Widows' Association	6,450.00	5,000.00	0
Forgotten Families	113.90	0	250.00
Carers' Association	18,000.00	18,000.00	0
Total	279,842.38	208,804.37	163,250.00

Disabled Police Officers' Association

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Justice what funding his Department has allocated to the Disabled Police Officers Association in each year since April 2009; and whether future funding for the Association is ring-fenced.

(AQW 10796/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice does not provide any direct funding to the Disabled Police Officers' Association; funding is provided by the Northern Ireland Police Fund, which is itself funded by the Department.

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Justice how victims are protected prior to, and during, the referral of their cases to Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences.

(AQW 10805/11-15)

Mr Ford: Prior to referral to a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) the referring agency would put some basic protective measures in place that are within their remit and advise the victim of other agencies who could offer immediate assistance.

The MARAC will result in an agreed safety plan which will set out actions to be delivered by all relevant agencies to protect the victim.

Human Trafficking

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice if he will liaise with the UK Border Agency to ensure that victims of human trafficking are not (i) automatically treated as illegal immigrants and are not deported without access to justice, appropriate medical treatment or assistance under human rights legislation; and (ii) subject to unnecessary removal and placement in detention centres.

(AQW 10810/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have regular contact with United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) representatives who are integral members of the Organised Crime Task Force. The Agency is represented on the OCTF Stakeholder Group, the Strategy Group and the Immigration and Human Trafficking sub group.

Suspected victims of human trafficking are managed through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), a multi-agency framework, which operates across the United Kingdom and seeks to identify victims of trafficking and ensure they receive appropriate advice, accommodation and support. If "victim status" is confirmed by the NRM then a recovery and reflection period is granted during which time victims may access a range of support services including legal advice and access to health care.

Where a possible victim is identified as part of the immigration process the UKBA will deal with the referral, for example where trafficking may arise as part of an asylum claim. Trained UKBA staff will assess the case and make a decision on whether an individual is a victim of trafficking. No immigration decision will be served during the recovery and reflection period. When a person has no right to remain in the United Kingdom, voluntary repatriation is the preferred option. Enforced removal by the UKBA is always a last resort.

I have received no specific representations or information to suggest that the UKBA is operating outside the established framework, but would raise any issues with them, and other relevant bodies, if they are drawn to my attention.

I am also open to suggestions for change. In that connection I would note that the UK Government's Strategy on Human Trafficking which was published in July 2011 sets out, in chapter 3, a number of steps to be taken to assist in the improved identification and care of victims.

Barristers: Legal Aid Payments List

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, given that the barrister who is listed as Number 19 on the legal aid payments list for 2010/11, is in receipt of £225,428 of public money and is therefore subject to the same accountability as other recipients of public money, why this barrister is permitted to refrain from identifying himself/herself.

(AQW 10811/11-15)

Mr Ford: When considering the publication of personal information, the Legal Services Commission is bound by the statutory requirements of the Data Protection Act. The Commission is required to notify anyone about whom it is proposing to release personal data and that individual has a right to object to the publication of such data. The Commission is required to consider any objection raised, in every instance, in advance of the publication of personal data. In the case of the individual referred to, this process has not yet been completed.

Benefit Appeal Tribunals

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he has made a decision on permitting legal aid to be granted to people involved in benefit appeal tribunals.

(AQW 10814/11-15)

Mr Ford: Legal aid is currently not available for hearings before the Appeal Tribunal. The Access to Justice Review report, published for public consultation in September 2011, made a number of recommendations concerning the availability of legal aid for Tribunals. This consultation period ended in January 2012 with 47 responses being received. These responses are being considered and I intend to publish my response to the recommendations in June 2012.

Peter Hain and Publisher: Intended Court Action

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice for an estimate of the costs of the Attorney General's intended court action against Peter Hain and his publisher.

(AQW 10818/11-15)

Mr Ford: The court costs associated with the case of the Attorney General v The Right Honourable Peter Hain MP and Biteback Publishing Limited are estimated at £1,525 for the preliminary hearings and an additional £16,780 for four hearing days.

These estimated costs exclude legal fees which are not within my responsibilities.

Outstanding Fines

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Justice to detail, for each of the last five years, the (i) average value; (ii) maximum value; and (iii) minimum value of outstanding fines for which fine defaulters have been subject to a custodial sentence.

(AQW 10873/11-15)

Mr Ford: The average, maximum and minimum values of unpaid fines which have resulted in a period of imprisonment solely for non-payment are provided in the table below.

Fine Amount (£s)	Year				
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Min fine	£5.00	£14.00	£30.00	£10.00	£8.50
Max fine	£3,550.00	£90,607.00	£26,025.00	£10,897	£15,106.00
Ave fine	£287.38	£382.07	£306.49	£281.72	£294.42

Boston College Oral History Project: Government's Request to Subpoena Recordings

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Justice to detail any discussions, in the last 18 months, his Department has had with (i) the US Secretary of State; (ii) the Home Office; (iii) the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland; (iv) the PSNI; and (v) the Minister for Justice and Equality in the Republic of Ireland, regarding the Government's request to subpoena recordings from the Boston College Oral History Project (a) prior to; and (b) subsequent to the request being made.

(AQW 10915/11-15)

Mr Ford: This is not a matter for the Minister of Justice or the Department of Justice. I have had no substantive discussions on this issue but the matter was referred to in passing by the Chief Constable in a meeting on other matters on 27 February 2012.

Category 3 Sex Offenders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) how Category 3 sex offenders are monitored in the community after release; (ii) what agencies are involved; and (iii) who takes the lead in risk management.

(AQW 10932/11-15)

Mr Ford: General information on the risk management procedures adopted under the public protection arrangements (PPANI) is available on the PPANI website. The agencies involved are listed in Article 49 of the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008. The agency with the primary statutory role in dealing with the offender provides a designated risk manager in every case. All agencies are responsible for discharging their own statutory functions in relation to every case.

Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to review the granting of Legal Aid for the automatic appeal of convictions and sentences at Magistrates Courts, particularly as this requires counsel to be to be instructed as well as solicitors.

(AQW 10936/11-15)

Mr Ford: A person convicted by a Magistrates' Court is entitled to appeal, to a County Court, against his sentence regardless of whether or not he pleaded guilty and, if he did not plead guilty, against the conviction as well. In such circumstances a person would be entitled to legal aid to fund the appeal subject to the means and merits tests. This does not mean that there would be an automatic entitlement to counsel.

I have no plans to review the grant of legal aid in County Court appeals.

Rape Convictions

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Justice how many rape convictions have been secured in each of the last three years.

(AQW 11038/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to my response to AQW/5852/11-15 which details the number convicted for the calendar years 2004 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

Prison Service: Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme for the Prison Service.

(AQO 1859/11-15)

Mr Ford: 544 members of the Northern Ireland Prison Service applied for the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme. 151 staff left on 31 March 2012, and a further 9 left on 30 April 2012. The departure of 139 individuals has been delayed for operational reasons. The remaining 245 of the applications received remain under consideration.

Prison Service management remains committed to allowing as many of those who wish to leave the opportunity of doing so. It will however take time to work through the operational and financial issues and will need to balance carefully those wishing to leave with the arrival of the new recruits to the Custody Officer grade.

Maghaberry Prison: Management

Mr Hamilton asked Minister of Justice, in light of the appointment of the Governor of HMP Magheraberry as the temporary Director of Operations for the Prison Service, what assurances can be given that HMP Magheraberry will have the appropriate management for Northern Ireland's Category A prison.

(AQO 1860/11-15)

Mr Ford: In light of the imminent departure of the current Director General, a decision was made to appoint a temporary Director of Operations so that adequate support measures are in place for Governors in Charge as well as continuing to ensure robust performance management of each establishment.

Governor Pat Maguire, the current Governor in Charge of Maghaberry Prison has a wealth of experience in this area and has recently been leading Maghaberry through a period of substantial and significant change. He has also previously held the position of Deputy Director of Operations. I am confident that his appointment to this new role will help to underpin improving performance across the three prison establishments.

Governor Austen Treacy, currently Deputy Governor at Maghaberry since June 2010, will take up the post of Acting Governor in Charge. Both his current role and his previous experience as Governor in Charge of Hydebank Wood make him a good choice to provide consistency in leadership and management through this transitional phase, to drive forward reform and to continue the process of performance improvement at Maghaberry.

Maghaberry Prison: Staff Duties

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Justice to outline the differences in the way that prison staff carry out their duties in relation to separated republican prisoners on protest in Roe House compared to prisoners in Bush House.

(AQO 1861/11-15)

Mr Ford: The prison staff working with separated prisoners in Bush and Roe Houses operate the same standard operating procedures in terms of controlled movement arrangements, visits, searching, catering and association and recreation periods.

However the application of these standard operating procedures may differ according to the level of compliance of the prisoner groups. The 11 loyalist prisoners in Bush House comply with all aspects of the separated compact. Within the republican prisoners in Roe House, 29 of the current 37 prisoners are on protest and do not comply with the separated compact or the 12 August Agreement.

Marian Price McGlinchey: Medical Report

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister of Justice whether a recent medical report on Marian Price McGlinchey recommended that she be moved from Hydebank Women's Prison to an outside facility to receive medical treatment.

(AQO 1862/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is not appropriate for me to discuss in detail a private medical report on any prisoner in a public forum such as this.

Mrs McGlinchey's health will be kept under review by the South Eastern HSC Trust as is the case for all other prisoners. If I receive medical advice relating to my responsibilities with regard to Mrs McGlinchey's individual healthcare needs, I will act upon it immediately.

Prisoners: Illiteracy and Innumeracy

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Justice what plans he has to tackle the high levels of illiteracy and innumeracy among prisoners.

(AQO 1864/11-15)

Mr Ford: During 2011, 48% of prisoners in Northern Ireland were assessed as having literacy skills of Entry Level 3 (9 year old equivalent) or below, with 62% assessed at the same level for numeracy.

That deficits exist should not come as a surprise, indeed they have long been a concern to custodial authorities here and in other jurisdictions.

I am committed to putting in place measures that will provide quality education, skills training and work experience that are relevant both to the needs of prisoners and of the employment market.

In doing so, I plan to build on the examples of excellent and innovative practice mentioned in the report, which have delivered successes within the area of learning and skills provision for example the partnership with the North West Regional College and the high levels of commitment and enthusiasm of learning and skills staff. Work is already in hand which will identify and implement further improvements but I readily accept that more needs to be done both within and beyond the prison environment, including better coordinating initiatives and efforts across and between departments and therefore in collaboration with Ministerial colleagues.

I am pleased that we are already seeing positive results emerging from this approach, with strong links already established between NIPS and DEL, for example:

- prisoner access to DEL's providers of LEMIS – the Local Employment Intermediary Service, which is designed to help unemployed people in the community overcome issues - including low levels of literacy - that may be preventing them from finding and keeping a job; and
- DEL's participation in NIPS' review of its learning and skills service, both the range available and its delivery.

A number of other measures are also already in place within NIPS including:

- the development of a draft Employability Strategy to ensure that NIPS services provide prisoners with a better opportunity to gain employment post-release;
- revised policies which enable prisoners to gain more but better controlled access to education-related IT; and
- enhanced arrangements to fill a number of existing teacher and vocational training instructor vacancies.

Prison Service: Recruitment

Mr Murphy asked the Minister of Justice why he will not disclose the legal advice that he was given in relation to the new recruitment procedures for the Prison Service.

(AQO 1865/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department's legal advice is confidential and attracts legal professional privilege. I wish to maintain privilege in the advice and in the circumstances it would not be appropriate for me to disclose it.

Judicial Appointments

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Justice to outline any discussions he has had with the Lord Chief Justice and the Attorney General regarding their views on the judicial appointments process.

(AQO 1866/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have not discussed the judicial appointments process with either the Lord Chief Justice or the Attorney General.

The Northern Ireland Act 1998 provided a mechanism for review of the operation of appointments and removals arrangements. The Justice Committee led review was the proper opportunity to express views on the system and both the Lord Chief Justice and the Attorney General recently took the opportunity to submit oral and written evidence to the Justice Committee's Inquiry on this matter. My Department also made a written submission. That evidence is a matter for consideration by the Justice Committee. I look forward to considering the Committee's report and to the debate on the issue.

Department for Regional Development

Ministerial Cars and Drivers

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of departmental staff who have availed of ministerial cars and drivers in each of the last three years; (ii) the cost of providing the service; and (iii) whether the benefit derived is subject to income tax.

(AQW 10336/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):

- (i) The number of Departmental staff who have availed of the ministerial car and driver in each of the last 3 financial years is as follows:

2009-2010	0
2010-2011	0
2011-2012	4

- (ii) Most journeys were within normal working hours and so there is only marginal additional cost. In any event, as officials' use of ministerial cars is solely for official purposes, any cost would be offset by the saving in travel expenses claims which might otherwise have been incurred.
- (iii) As officials' use of ministerial cars is solely for official purposes, there is no taxable benefit.

NI Water Tender C071

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 8814/11-15, (i) whether NI Water produced a monthly excel spreadsheet detailing the average jobs per man per day for each individual ICA embedded contractor engaged under the C071 tender; (ii) whether the ICA embedded contractors were informed that this was a league table of performance; (iii) what was the purpose of the monthly report; (iv) who requested that this report be produced; and (v) whether the directors of Williams Steel Industries were made aware of these league tables and if not, to give the reasons for the position on this issue.

(AQW 10358/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it does not recognise the term embedded contractor and that (i) monthly spreadsheets detailing jobs/man/day were produced for relevant NIW staff and ICA contracted technicians engaged under the C071 contract; (ii) it is not possible to ascertain if ICA contracted technicians were advised if this was to be viewed as a league table; (iii) the monthly spreadsheet was used for internal management information purposes; (iv) production of the spreadsheet was requested by NIW's Head of M&E Services; (v) it is believed that Williams Industrial Services were aware of the production of the spreadsheet information, but made no request to NIW for the information relating to its employees.

NI Water Tender C398

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) why NI Water tender C398 has not been awarded; (ii) to detail where this tender was advertised and at what cost; and (iii) for a breakdown of the cost to the public purse of not awarding this tender.

(AQW 10366/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that (i) tender C398 was not awarded owing to a legal challenge to the process; (ii) tender C398 was advertised via NIW's website, eSourcingNI and the Official Journal of the European Union (Tenders Electronic Daily) at no cost to NIW; and (iii) a breakdown of the cost of not awarding tender C398 is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

NI Water Tender C527

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development whether NI Water tender C527 is a revised version of tender C398; and whether the tender contracts are comparable.

(AQW 10367/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that C527 is a revised version of C398 and the two tenders are comparable.

NI Water Tender C527

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the NI Water tender C527 process and the awarding of the tender in respect of UK, Northern Ireland or European statutory employment laws.

(AQW 10373/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the tender process for C527 was conducted in compliance with the Utilities Contracts Regulations 2006 (as amended); and the contract award decision complies with all applicable employment laws.

Belfast International Airport and George Best Belfast City Airport: Cost of Car Parking

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he has taken to monitor and control the cost of car parking at Belfast International Airport and the George Best Belfast City Airport.

(AQW 10375/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Airport parking charges are a commercial matter for each airport operator or the companies which provide the parking facilities and my Department has no statutory role in the regulation of such charges.

Water Supplies: Non-Domestic

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how many non-domestic water supplies are assessed for payment by (i) meter; and (ii) property value.

(AQW 10386/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that in relation to non-domestic water supplies (i) 68,860 are charged on the basis of metered consumption; and (ii) 11,267 are charged on an unmeasured basis using the Net Annual Value (NAV) of the property. The NAV of a property is determined by Land and Property Services.

Water Meters: Non-Domestic Properties

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how many non-domestic properties have had a water meter installed in the last three years; and what assessment has been carried out on how this has affected water bills.

(AQW 10389/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that water meters have been installed at 3,046 non-domestic properties during the past three years. The table below shows the number of meters installed in each of the three years.

	2009 /10	2010 / 11	2011 / 12
Number of meters installed at non-domestic properties	933	1,111	1,002

No assessment has been undertaken of how bills may have been affected by changing from unmeasured billing to measured billing because the number of variables involved would make any comparison unduly complex and would require a case by case scrutiny.

Translink

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development when the issue of the Translink monopoly was last reviewed.

(AQW 10411/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 provides that most public transport services will continue to be provided by the subsidiaries of the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company. During public consultation and the development of the Bill the issue of Translink's role was considered and there was strong support for retaining a regulated public transport system and for Translink to remain the lead supplier of public passenger transport services in Northern Ireland.

Translink: Funding

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development how much funding Translink receives on an annual basis from (i) his Department; (ii) the Department of Education; and (iii) any other Department or non-government agencies.

(AQW 10414/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink funding varies on an annual basis. However to give you an indication Table (i) below sets out what the Group received in terms of annual funding of both a capital and revenue nature from my Department as taken from the Translink Annual Report and Accounts for the 2 years from 2009/10 to 2010/11. The 2011/12 Accounts are not yet available but estimates are provided.

The Education and Library Boards reimburse Translink for operating the Home to School bus services for school children. This is a contract arrangement. However, it is included as the size of the contract is deemed relevant to your question. The Department of Education also contributes a subvention due to the abolition of '3 for 2' and standing passengers on school services. Table (ii) below sets out the relevant information and includes 2011/12 figures as reported by Translink to me. Translink have also advised me that there is no other material annual funding from other Departments or non-government agencies.

Table (i)

Translink Public Transport Funding from 2008-2009 to 2010/11

	2009/10 £m	2010/11 £m	2011/12 £m
Public Service Obligation (Rail)	23	21.7	23.3
Concessionary Fares	31.6	33.1	35.4
Other (Including Fuel Duty Rebate & Pensions)	15.5	14.1	17.7
Total Revenue	70.1	68.9	76.4
Bus Capital	14.2	8.1	16.6
Rail Capital	36.4	53.4	92.1
Total Capital	50.6	61.5	108.7
Total Funding DRD	120.7	130.4	185.1

Source:

Translink Annual Report and Accounts and Departmental records for 2011/12 – Note: Figures do not include some contractual elements of funding and need to be adjusted for accounting period differences)

Table (ii)

Education and Library Boards/ Dept of Education Contract Payments 2009/10 to 2011/12

	2009/10 £m	2010/11 £m	2011/12 £m
ELBs Bus	36.3	36.6	35.6
ELBs Rail	0.7	0.7	0.8
Dept Education	2.1	2.2	2.3
Total Funding DRD	39.0	39.5	38.6

Road Gritters: Replacements

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Regional Development where the thirteen replacement road gritters that were recently announced will be located; and how these allocations will be determined.

(AQW 10443/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the locations of the thirteen replacement road gritters, that were recently announced, are detailed in the table below:

Locations of the Replacement Gritters

Number	Location	Council Area
2	Armagh Depot	Armagh City and District Council

Number	Location	Council Area
1	Arvalee Depot	Omagh District Council
2	Balloo Depot	North Down Borough Council
2	Ballykeel Depot	Ballymena Borough Council
1	Carn Depot	Craigavon Borough Council
1	Moygashel Depot	Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
1	Northbrook Depot	Coleraine Borough Council
1	Rathmore Depot	Antrim Borough Council
1	Strabane Depot	Strabane District Council
1	Woodburn Depot	Derry City Council

These allocations are based on a combination of vehicle age and condition as assessed by Roads Service fleet engineers.

I am also advised that during the planning of next season's winter service, some additional vehicle movements may be required to ensure the most efficient use of available resources.

Ballymena Railway Station

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development what has been the impact on the Saturday revenue take at Ballymena Railway Station this year since the reduction in staffing levels introduced by Translink.

(AQW 10446/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that staff duties at Ballymena station were changed to exclude Saturday opening of the Ticket Office from early March 2012. In the subsequent 5-week period, revenue collected for all Saturday journeys to and from Ballymena Station was broadly similar to that lifted during the same period in 2011.

All passengers continue to be sold tickets and have tickets checked by Ballymena Station platform staff on Saturdays.

Ballysallagh Upper and Lower Reservoirs, Craigantlet

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development whether NI Water plans to carry out any inspections or maintenance work in the current financial year at the Ballysallagh Upper and Lower Reservoirs, Craigantlet; and to outline the nature of this work.

(AQW 10448/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that in order to maintain the safety and structural integrity of all of its reservoirs, it carries out regular routine inspections and undertakes any necessary remedial work identified. An inspection of the Ballysallagh reservoirs is planned for the current financial year.

Ballysallagh Upper and Lower Reservoirs, Craigantlet

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development whether NI Water plans to temporarily, or permanently, lower water levels at Ballysallagh Upper and Lower Reservoirs, Craigantlet.

(AQW 10449/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it plans to carry out maintenance work at Ballysallagh Upper and Lower Reservoirs which will require the water levels to be lowered temporarily. It is not envisaged that the work will be undertaken within this financial year.

The levels in the reservoirs will, of course, rise and fall as a result of seasonal variations in rainfall within the catchment areas.

Ballysallagh Upper and Lower Reservoirs, Craigantlet

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development whether NI Water plans to dispose of Ballysallagh Upper and Lower Reservoirs, Craigantlet; and if so, to outline the method to be used and the envisaged timeframe for disposal.

(AQW 10450/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the Ballysallagh Reservoirs have been declared surplus to requirements and are being considered for disposal.

Disposal of the reservoirs will be carried out in accordance with NIW's disposal strategy which requires properties to be placed on the open market in order to obtain the best price and achieve value for money. However, it is unlikely that NIW will dispose of the reservoirs prior to the 2013/14 financial year.

Banks that Hold Bonds from Developers

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Regional Development whether banks that hold bonds from developers can be made to complete works in the relevant developments.

(AQW 10480/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that bond providers, including banks which have guaranteed the completion of a street by providing a bond for a developer, can be required to pay for the completion of such streets, if the developer does not complete the necessary works.

Cash Bonds

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the value of the cash bonds currently held by his Department.

(AQW 10481/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it currently holds cash bonds to the value of £1,691,089.

A8 Road Project: Inspector's Report

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the Inspector's Report on the A8 road project, (i) when was the report received; (ii) to whom it has been circulated; (iii) whether and when ARUP received a copy and the reasons why this was the case; and (iv) when the affected residents and landowners will learn of the report's full contents.

(AQW 10549/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Inspector's Report on the A8 road project was received on 12 September 2011. The report has since been circulated to me, my Department's officials, and my Department's Engineering and Environmental consultants, ARUP.

ARUP received a copy of the Inspector's Report in September 2011 to enable them to advise Roads Service on the possible implications of incorporating the recommendations contained within the report.

As the Member will be aware, I announced my decision to proceed with this scheme on 1 May 2012. In the current economic climate, the commencement of this dual carriageway should be welcome news for the construction industry and when completed, will contribute to the overall economic development of Northern Ireland. In addition, the provision of a new all-purpose dual carriageway will benefit road users by helping to reduce journey times, improve road safety along the A8, and help the development of the Port of Larne, the second largest Port in Northern Ireland.

The Inspector's Report, and my Department's Statement on the way forward, was made available to view on 1 May 2012 at the following locations:

- Roads Service - Headquarters, Room 2-01, Clarence Court, 10-18 Adelaide Street, Belfast BT2 8GB;
- Roads Service - Northern Division, County Hall, Castlerock Road, Coleraine BT52 3HS;
- Roads Service - Eastern Division, Hydebank, 4 Hospital Road, BT8 8JL;
- Newtownabbey Borough Council, Mossley Mill, Newtownabbey, BT36 5QA;
- Larne Borough Council, Smiley Buildings, Victoria Road, Larne, BT40 1RU.

Alternatively, the reports can be downloaded from the A8 Belfast to Larne Dualling website at http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/roadimprovements/schemes/a8_belfast_to_larne_dualling.htm.

Lurgan Railway Station

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans Translink has to provide a pedestrian footbridge or walkway at Lurgan Railway Station.

(AQW 10566/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that it has recently undertaken some refurbishment of the footbridge that already exists at the station. There are no plans at present to provide a new pedestrian footbridge or walkway at Lurgan Railway Station.

Quay Lane South Car Park, Enniskillen

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the income generated in parking charges; and (ii) the number of tickets purchased from the Quay Lane South car park, Enniskillen from (a) September 2010 to March 2011; and (b) September 2011 to March 2012.

(AQW 10568/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that details of the income generated and ticket sales for the Quay Lane South car-park in Enniskillen, for the periods September 2010 to March 2011 and September 2011 and March 2012 respectively, are set out in the table:

	Sept 2010 – Mar 2011	Sept 2011- Mar 2012
Pay & Display Tickets Purchased	27,167	18,618
Income	£18,400	£15,400

NI Water: Planning Applications

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking to speed up the response time of NI Water as a statutory consultee on planning applications, given that the average response time has increased over recent years. **(AQW 10569/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: Northern Ireland Water (NIW) is consulted by Planning Service on planning applications and provides advisory responses. It is committed to meeting response times agreed with Planning Service on planning consultations.

I have been advised by NIW that its response time has been affected by the introduction of a new ePIC system by Planning Service during 2010. The new system has proven to be substantially more time consuming for NIW than the previous system.

NIW has taken steps to allocate additional staff resources to this area and has significantly reduced the number of outstanding planning consultations during the past month. NIW continues to work towards meeting the agreed response times and I will seek updates on progress through current monitoring arrangements to ensure that previous performance is restored.

Planning: Roads Service as a Statutory Consultee

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking to speed up the response time of Roads Service as a statutory consultee on planning applications, given that the average response time has increased over recent years. **(AQW 10570/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: I should firstly point out that while my Department's Roads Service is a key consultee on planning applications where roads matters are involved, it is not a statutory consultee under current planning legislation.

However, Roads Service and the Department of the Environment's Planning Division have a Service Level Agreement which includes a requirement for Roads Service to respond to 70% of planning application consultations within 15 working days of receipt. Officials have advised that, in each of the last 3 years, Roads Service has exceeded this target, and specific details are provided in the table below:

Year	Responses within 15 Working Days (%)
April 2009 – March 2010	77%
April 2010 – March 2011	81%
April 2011 – March 2012	80%

In order to further speed up response times, Roads Service has been working closely with DOE Planning Division on a range of initiatives including: the provision of road engineering staff for the Strategic Projects Team; the introduction of fast-tracking procedures for straightforward planning application consultations; and the adoption of on-line working via the Electronic Planning Information for Citizens (ePIC) system.

My Department remains committed to working with DOE Planning Division to seek further improvements to consultation response times, where possible.

NI Water

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how much of the NI Water budget was returned to his Department; and (ii) how much profit NI Water made from its other incomes, in each of the last three years. **(AQW 10573/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy:

- (i) The table below shows the DEL (Departmental Expenditure Limit) budget returned by NI Water through the monitoring rounds to my Department in each of the last three years:

NI Water Reduced Requirements surrendered through in year monitoring rounds

	2009/10 £'000	2010/11 £'000	2011/12 £'000	Total budget surrendered over three years £'000
Resource	0	600	24,500	25,100
Capital	0	42,300	600	42,900
Resource – non cash	0	14,900	10,100	25,000
Total	0	57,800	35,200	93,000

(ii) I have been advised by NI Water that it made the following estimated profits from its other incomes in each of the past three years:

NIW Estimated net profit from other incomes

	2009/10 £'000	2010/11 £'000	2011/12 £'000
Estimated Net Profit	971	712	Not yet available

Notes:

- i) Net profit is taken after deduction of tax and dividend.
- ii) The figures have been extracted directly from NI Water's audited regulatory accounts.
- iii) Non-appointed businesses refer mainly to septic tank emptying, vehicle maintenance services carried out on behalf of others and income associated with aerial masts erected on NI Water property. A reasonable proportion of operating and other costs have been apportioned to these activities based on turnover and assumptions on the costs incurred. This explains why the profit figures are described as "estimated".
- iv) NI Water's 2011/12 regulatory accounts are in the process of being prepared and are therefore not yet available.

Bonds

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 10029/11-15, what is the value of the bonds held by each bank.

(AQW 10578/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would advise the Member that this information is not readily available. As it is not held centrally, it could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

A5 Dualling Project: Public Inquiry

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the public inquiry into the proposed A5 dualling project.
(AQW 10594/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Public Inquiry into the proposed A5 Western Transport Corridor dual carriageway ended on 1 July 2011. The Inspector carried out follow-up site visits and considered all the evidence submitted during the Inquiry to assist with the completion of his Report. Roads Service received the Inspector's Report on the A5 Western Transport Corridor Public Inquiry on 24 February 2012 and officials are now reviewing the issues arising out of this significant body of work.

I anticipate publishing the Departmental Statement, which is the Department's response to the Inspector's Report, along with the Inspector's Report in early summer. The Inspector's Report will also be made available to the public at that time.

Consultation Documents and Official Reports: Cost

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Regional Development what was the cost to his Department of producing (i) consultation documents; and (ii) official reports in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 10599/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The costs to my Department of producing consultation documents and official reports in 2010/11 are set out below.

Financial Year	Consultation Costs	Official Reports Costs
2010/11	£51,366	£2,338

Legislation

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) what proposals for legislation, subject to Executive approval, he has introduced or intends to introduce between April 2012 and March 2015; (ii) the anticipated timescale for the introduction of each Bill; and (iii) the intention of each Bill.

(AQW 10639/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have set out below the items of legislation that I propose to introduce between the period April 2012 to March 2015. Details of the intention of each Bill have also been provided. I am not in a position to provide dates for the Introduction of any Bills as these will be subject to Executive agreement.

Other requirements for primary legislation relating to my responsibilities may arise in this mandate.

What proposals for legislation, subject to Executive approval, he has introduced or intends to introduce between April 2012 and March 2015	The intention of each Bill
Harbours Bill	To provide the NI Harbours with wider commercial powers.
Roads (Functions of District Councils) Bill	To provide district councils with certain roads-related powers

Roads Service: Disciplinary Procedures

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to detail the disciplinary procedures for Roads Service personnel who do not deal with complaints received; and (ii) to outline their relationship with property developers and architects.

(AQW 10647/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am advised by my officials that the disciplinary procedures contained in the NI Civil Service Human Resources Handbook apply throughout all Departments. Should an official fail to deal appropriately with a complaint from, for example, a member of the public, there is scope under these procedures to take informal or formal disciplinary action. The specific action taken is determined by the seriousness of the offence and the particular circumstances surrounding the matter.

For minor disciplinary offences, informal action may result in an oral warning and/or written informal warning. Alternatively, or in tandem, a minor issue may be dealt with under the performance management system and may result in any identified learning or development needs of the official being addressed through the provision of advice, guidance or formal training .

For more serious cases such as those which constitute a breach of employment or a breach of official instructions, formal disciplinary action may be taken. This would involve a preliminary investigation and, if there was a case to answer, would lead to a formal disciplinary charge.

If a formal charge is upheld, the official's employing Department may, depending on the seriousness of the matter, impose a disciplinary penalty or penalties. These range from a written reprimand to dismissal. There is, however, no rigid code which assigns specific penalties to particular offences.

A wide range of Roads Service personnel may come into contact with property developers and architects in the course of their duties. In particular, staff involved in development control, private streets and maintenance activities are likely to have such contact.

Roads Service officials regularly liaise with developers and architects on roads-related issues in connection with their development proposals and works. Typically, issues may include pre-application enquiries and planning applications, technical matters relating to access and design standards, road safety, traffic progression, Transport Assessments, Private Streets Determinations, construction details, and transportation requirements.

Unfinished Housing Developments

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of contractors who are currently acting on behalf of his Department and are completing works in unfinished housing developments where the bond has been forfeited; (ii) the number of works requiring completion; and (iii) the estimated completion time for each of the works.

(AQW 10673/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it currently has 14 contractors completing works in unfinished housing developments where the bond will be used to cover the costs of works undertaken. Where a developer does not finish roads in a development within a reasonable time, the Department can take enforcement action under Article 11 of the Private Streets Order 1980 and then use the bond to fund the works required to bring the roads up to adoption standards.

I am further advised that there are currently 83 sites with outstanding works requiring completion. The 14 contractors, acting on behalf of the Department, are currently working on 23 of these sites.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to provide a detailed estimate of the completion time for each of these sites, as the extent of the works does vary and work may also need to be undertaken by other statutory bodies, which Roads Service has no control over. However, it is anticipated that a substantial number of these sites will be completed in this financial year.

Port of Belfast Harbour Police: Public Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what level of public funding is allocated to the Port of Belfast for the Harbour Police.

(AQW 10689/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department for Regional Development does not allocate any public funding to the Port of Belfast for the Harbour Police.

Gritting Footpaths

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development under what conditions are Roads Service staff permitted to grit footpaths.

(AQW 10690/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Staff from my Department's Roads Service are permitted to grit busy town and city centre footpaths during prolonged periods of snow and ice, provided that the resources are available to undertake this largely manual task. However, as Roads Service resources are normally fully utilised on keeping busy roads clear during such conditions, my Department has been establishing partnerships with Councils, which are prepared to assist with this work.

Travelling Community: Housing Executive Properties

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 10173/11-15, to detail which legislation relates to an excess number of vehicles on public highways, such as in instances where members of the travelling community park caravans and other vehicles around their homes which cause an obstruction to other road users; and what action he is taking to ensure that all communities comply with this legislation and that safety and access for all road users is not compromised.

(AQW 10703/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that travelling community encampments on public roads are controlled through the provisions of the Unauthorised Encampments (NI) Order 2005. It is the responsibility of the PSNI, following a request by Roads Service, to consider eviction of illegal encampments from public roads and car parks.

Parking Tickets

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) how many parking tickets in each council area were issued in 2010/11; (ii) how many were appealed; and (iii) how many of the appeals were (a) successful; (b) unsuccessful; (iii) remain outstanding.

(AQW 10707/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCN) issued in 2010/11 by Council area are shown in the table below:

Antrim	1061
Ards	4067
Armagh	2687
Ballymena	4592
Ballymoney	1166

Banbridge	1078
Belfast & Castlereagh	36873
Carrickfergus	1345
Coleraine	3884
Cookstown	1988
Craigavon	3668
Derry	10892
Down	2756
Dungannon	2139
Fermanagh	7153
Larne	709
Limavady	1057
Lisburn	10318
Magherafelt	2329
Moyle	349
Newry And Mourne	5636
Newtownabbey	622
North Down	5021
Omagh	4597
Strabane	2582

Figures relating to PCN Challenges are not compiled on a Council basis. However, officials from my Department's Roads Service Parking Enforcement Unit have advised that approximately 13% of PCNs issued are challenged and approximately 59% of these are successful. All Challenges are processed within 15 days of receipt.

Parking Tickets

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the offences for which parking tickets were issued in 2010/11, broken down by (i) parking on double yellow lines; (ii) parking in a disabled bay; (iii) parking in a loading bay; (iii) excess time.

(AQW 10708/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that in 2010/11, the number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCN's) issued in respect of vehicles illegally parked in restricted streets, i.e. on yellow lines, was 32,042.

During the same period, 6264 PCNs were issued for vehicles parked in disabled parking spaces, without clearly displaying a valid Blue Badge. This figure includes on-street and off-street contraventions.

4449 PCNs were issued in respect of vehicles parked in loading spaces during restricted hours and 15,771 PCNs were issued for vehicles parked on-street for longer than permitted.

The Member should note that the figure of 15,771 referred to above, does not include contraventions relating to Pay and Display parking.

Sewage Treatment Works: Ballyhornan, Co Down

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline any plans for an upgrade of the sewage treatment works at Ballyhornan, Co Down, including a timeframe of the implementation of the plans.

(AQW 10716/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it plans to improve the sewerage system at Ballyhornan by undertaking some network alterations, provision of fine screening facilities and remedial work to the sewer outfall. In the longer term, NIW proposes to intercept the screened flows and to pump the sewage to an upgraded Ardglass Wastewater Treatment Works.

Unfortunately, progress on the upgrade work at Ballyhornan has not been completed as quickly as NIW would have wished owing to difficulties encountered with land acquisition and a right of way agreement. Agreement has now been reached on the purchase

of land for the screening facility and the pump transfer station site but negotiations are still ongoing in relation to a right of way which will provide access to the new screen works.

NIW has assured me of its continuing commitment to maintaining the existing sewerage system in the area until the outstanding issues are resolved.

Small and Medium Sized Enterprises: Logistics Solutions

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development what work his Department has carried out on improving logistics solutions for small and medium sized enterprises.

(AQW 10722/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that, in addition to investing in the strategic road network, my Department's Road Service undertakes an annual programme of minor local road improvements and road safety schemes.

Over the past decade, transport investment by my Department has increased substantially, initially through proposals in the Regional Transportation Strategy and subsequently through the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland. My Department's Roads Service has advised that recent improvements to the strategic road network include a 20 km dual carriageway between Dungannon and Ballygawley and the final 12 km link of dualling, around Newry, on the Eastern Seaboard Corridor between Belfast and Dublin. In addition, dual carriageways on the A26 at Ballymena and the A2 from Londonderry to the City of Derry Airport were completed during the 2010/11 financial year. A single carriageway bypass of the village of Carland, north of Dungannon, was also completed.

Roads Service officials further advise that, over the next three years, it is envisaged that in the region of £500 million of investment will be taken forward on the Strategic Road Network. This will include significant elements of the A5 dual carriageway project, between Londonderry 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. These measures will benefit the local economy by enhancing access to our ports, airports and cross-border links and facilitate easier movement of goods and people throughout Northern Ireland.

Officials also report that development work is continuing on a range of other major projects, including the A26 Glarryford, the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson, the A6 Londonderry to Dungiven, the York Street Interchange and the A24 Ballynahinch Bypass. Delivery of these projects will be determined by the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-21 and subsequent Budget settlements.

The Roads Service programme of minor local road improvements embraces a range of categories including carriageway widening schemes, Bridge Strengthening, Local Transport and Safety Measures and large minor works on local roads. All of these schemes comprise a dominant safety theme. The large minor and carriageway widening schemes, which are mainly on the strategic road network, provide safe overtaking opportunities. Bridge strengthening works are targeted at those bridges which require improvements to meet the required standard.

Officials have advised that the local transport and safety measures programme is, in itself, a wide ranging programme of predominately small schemes incorporating collision remedial measures, traffic calming, traffic management, safer routes to school, and improved facilities for pedestrians and cyclists.

Funding targeted at these commitments in 2010/2011 by Roads Service achieved 19 collision remedial schemes; Traffic calming measures on 22 projects; 22 school safety zones and safety projects; 18.8km of new cycle lanes; 15.5km of new footway; 23 controlled pedestrian crossings; £1.45m spent on travel information schemes and the use of Intelligent Transport Systems to provide traffic control and travel information to road users; and £11.2m spent on, mainly rural, network development schemes.

Recycling of Disused Railway Carriages

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the contractual arrangements in place for the recycling of disused railway carriages.

(AQW 10772/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that it recently conducted a tender exercise and the first tranche of vehicles was sold for scrapping to the highest bidder.

Translink: Cost of Desk and Pocket Diaries

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost to Translink of acquiring and distributing complimentary desk and pocket diaries in each of the last five years.

(AQW 10774/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that in each of the last five years the following annual costs have been incurred on the acquisition and distribution of complementary desk and pocket diaries to a range of key stakeholders including political contacts/passengers/business contacts (and up until 2012 Translink employees).

2008	£32,448
2009	£30,173

2010	£30,553
2011	£30,502
2012	£18,811

Roads Service Section Offices: Budgets

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development why Roads Service Section Offices have not yet been allocated budgets for the 2012/13 financial year; and when the budgets will be allocated.

(AQW 10808/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the maintenance allocations for 2012/13 were approved by the Roads Service Board on 26 April 2012. Details of the confirmed allocations have been forwarded to Divisions and will be communicated to Section Offices shortly.

However, the annual maintenance allocation process begins in the autumn of the preceding year, with the aim of making confirmed allocations as close to the beginning of the financial year as possible. As part of the allocation process for 2012/13, Roads Service Divisions were given indicative budget figures in December 2011. These indicative budget figures did not change significantly between December 2011 and March 2012. Therefore, Divisions were afforded a good indication of 2012/13 budgets allocations.

NI Water: Classification by Office of National Statistics

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development what are the financial implications of the classification by the the Office of National Statistics of NI Water as a non-departmental public body.

(AQW 10826/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The financial implications of the classification by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) of NI Water as a non-departmental public body (rather than a public corporation as had previously been the case) are that the majority of its expenditure forms part of the DRD budget. This has been the case since the 2008/09 financial year. Prior to the reclassification, it was only the cash transactions (subsidy, loan draw downs, interest and dividend) between DRD and NI Water that formed part of the DRD budget.

The ONS decision was a direct consequence of NI Water continuing to receive the majority of its revenue through subsidy from the Executive in lieu of domestic charging. This has meant that the company has not been able to act as intended when it was established – as a regulated utility with an independent income stream from charging operating at arm's length from Government.

Defibrillators

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking to increase the number of defibrillators in buildings used by his Department or its arm's-length bodies.

(AQW 10894/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department currently meets its legislative requirements for the provision of first aid (including Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)) in all buildings under its control. There is no legislative requirement to have defibrillators in buildings at present and there are no immediate plans to introduce them.

Similarly I am also advised by Northern Ireland Water that defibrillators are not available at any of its premises and that there are no plans to introduce them. Translink, however, provides defibrillators at a number of key transport locations across Northern Ireland.

Department-Owned Public Space in Portadown Town Plaza

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development whether planning permission was granted to erect an obelisk on his Department-owned public space in Portadown town plaza; and if so, what consultation was carried out, including an Equality Impact Assessment.

(AQW 10986/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service is a key consultee in respect of planning applications/planning appeals and, as such, it provides an opinion to DOE Planning on traffic management and road safety issues.

Roads Service had no objections on road safety grounds to the proposal to erect the obelisk under Planning Application N/2012/0032/F, which was approved by DOE Planning on 21 March 2012.

Informative 2 on the Planning Approval, recommended by Roads Service, requires the applicant to seek a permit under Article 78 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993 from Roads Service prior to commencement of work.

I would further advise the Member that Roads Service is not required to undertake an Equality Impact Assessment when assessing planning applications.

Department for Social Development

Benefits: Eligibility Criteria

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Social Development what steps have been taken to ensure that the eligibility criteria for benefits are applied consistently so that claimants who are blind or partially sighted do not lose benefits.

(AQW 10362/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The eligibility criteria for Social Security Benefits are prescribed in legislation. Detailed procedural advice, guidance and instructions are provided to decision makers on how to apply Social Security law in a consistent manner and this is reviewed and updated when changes to the benefit rules occur. Staff within my Department undergo a comprehensive training and lengthy consolidation programme in the specific benefit they administer based on the appropriate guidance and instructions and ongoing support to staff is available from dedicated specialist teams of benefit experts in the Department. A rigorous checking regime is also in place across the range of different benefits to ensure staff apply their training properly and comply with the rules when making decisions on benefit claims. This continuous checking programme and monitoring of standards is validated on an annual basis by an Independent Standards Committee and the Northern Ireland Audit Office. The overall approach and the specific measures in place are designed to ensure that the eligibility rules are applied consistently across all customers including those who are blind or partially sighted, to ensure that everyone receives their proper benefit entitlement.

Social Housing Development in Ballymena

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development how much land is held by his Department for social housing development in Ballymena; and how much would be required to meet the current demand for social housing in that area.

(AQW 10370/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are currently eight sites located within the Ballymena District area on the Housing Executive Undeveloped Land Schedule and the details of these sites are attached below. Of these eight sites, there is only need at this time for future development at Tobar Court, Cullybackey and Brooke Park, Ballymena.

Site Location	Site Size (HA)
Garvaghy Avenue, Portglenone	1.45
Ballee Drive, Ballymena	1.92
Sandown Park, Doury Road, Ballymena	0.87
Tobar Court, Cullybackey	1.45
Coronation Crescent, Clough	0.41
Brooke Park, Ballymena	0.07
Wyncroft, Antrim Road, Ballymena	0.10
Ballee Drive, Ballymena	0.24

Equality Impact Assessments

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development, from May 2011 to date, to detail (i) the number of staff involved in the (a) screening out; and (b) screening in of policies for Equality Impact Assessments; (ii) the number of policies his Department and its arm's-length bodies have (a) screened out as having no equality impact; and (b) screened in as having an equality impact; and (iii) the cost of the screening process.

(AQW 10395/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Since May 2011, my Department and its arm's-length bodies have

- (a) screened out 73 policies as having no equality impact; and
- (b) screened in 2 policies as having an equality impact.

As equality screening is an integral part of the policy development process it is not possible to provide details of the numbers of staff involved in, or the cost of, the screening process.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development when the Boiler Replacement Scheme will be introduced; and what changes will be made to the qualifying criteria.

(AQW 10420/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme has been very successful. Almost 1700 households have had inefficient boilers replaced under the scheme. I am now examining the evaluation of the pilot and I expect to make an announcement about the criteria for a new Boiler Replacement Scheme in the near future.

Housing Stock

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 8115/11-15, what is the (i) total asset value of the 6,000 Housing Executive properties that require multi-element improvements; and (ii) estimated total cost of carrying out the improvements. **(AQW 10423/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: The total asset value of the Housing Executive properties that require multi-element improvements is not currently available, however, this will be assessed as part of the economic appraisal which will be completed for each scheme. The estimated cost of improvements to these properties is approximately £228 million.

Universal Credit

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development what provision is in place to facilitate the Housing Executive under the new plans for Universal Credit, given that the proposal is to pay Housing Benefit straight to the tenant. **(AQW 10507/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: It is currently planned to introduce Universal Credit from October 2013 to replace a range of existing in and out of work benefits, including Housing Benefit. The new Universal Credit will include a contribution towards eligible housing costs. I am currently giving active consideration to the best means of making the payments of the housing costs elements and have discussed this matter with Executive colleagues who are members of the Welfare Reform Executive Sub Committee. In parallel, I have asked my officials to explore different payment approaches that might be possible, as I recognise that the introduction of Universal Credit will present challenges for some benefit customers. I am committed to putting measures in place to ensure that the Universal Credit payment system does not disadvantage customers or place them in undue hardship.

The planned migration of existing benefit claims to Universal Credit will mean that Housing Benefit for working age customers will be phased out by 2017. This will impact the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, which currently has responsibility for the administration of Housing Benefit. My Department is working with those parts of the public sector directly affected by the introduction of Universal Credit, including the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, to understand the implications for these organisations.

Regional Infrastructure Programme

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the organisations funded under the Regional Infrastructure Programme; and (ii) the level of funding allocated to each organisation in the (a) 2009/10; (b) 2010/11; and (c) 2011/12 financial years. **(AQW 10528/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: The Department for Social Development has provided Regional Infrastructure Programme funding for the (a) 2009/10; (b) 2010/11; and (c) 2011/12 financial years as detailed below.

Level of funding

Organisations funded	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Advice Northern Ireland	£274,607.47	£246,381.47	£241,453.84
Advice Services Alliance	£1667.00	£11,800.00	£0.00
Citizens Advice Bureau	£652,853.00	£669,806.00	£649,898.41
Churches' Community Work Alliance	£102,820.63	£104,673.36	£104,096.56.56
Community Evaluation Northern Ireland.	£105,095.46	£107,879.91	£97,337.00
CO3 - Chief Officers 3rd Sector	£114,403.71	£100,475.90	£94,748.15
Community Change	£209,225.19	£213,544.51	£198,680.81
Groundwork Northern Ireland	£62,609.92	£0.00	£0.00
Law Centre	£669,171.34	£680,210.00	£663,283.00
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action	£650,000.00	£650,000.00	£611,000.00
Volunteer Now	£289,066.82	£249,384.64	£234,422.88
Women's Centres Regional Partnership	£362,257.31	£346,238.84	£325,464.49

Organisations funded	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Total	£3,493,777.85	£3,380,394.63	£3,220,385.14

Housing Stress: Dunmurry Area

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people (i) on the housing waiting list; and (ii) in Housing Stress in the Dunmurry area.

(AQW 10557/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There is no specific waiting list for Dunmurry, it is contained within a Common Landlord Area (CLA) called Upper Dunmurry Lane/Areema and Beattie Park, as well as a separate waiting list for Seymour Hill/Conway. The latest information that is available is for 30 April 2012 and is detailed in the table below. The information is based on applicants only and their 1st preference of choice. It should be noted that in terms of gauging demand for any new development in Dunmurry, applicants appearing on wider lists may be interested and may therefore change their preferences as necessary.

Area	Applicants on Waiting List	Applicants in Housing Stress
Upper Dunmurry Lane/Areema	77	55
Beattie Park	12	8
Seymour Hill/Conway	137	76

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: Waiting List in Dunmurry

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people on the housing waiting list in the Dunmurry area who are aged over 55, broken down by the housing type requested.

(AQW 10558/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not hold figures on the number of applicants aged 55 years and above. However, in the Upper Dunmurry Lane/Areema, Beattie Park and Seymour Hill/Conway areas there are a total of 31 applicants on the waiting list which have a member of the household aged at least 60 years old.

Pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 9742/11-15, when the findings of the evaluation of the pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme will be published.

(AQW 10583/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme has been very successful. Almost 1700 households have had inefficient boilers replaced under the scheme. I am now examining the evaluation of the pilot and I expect to make an announcement about a new Boiler Replacement Scheme in the near future.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Social Development how many heating systems were installed under the Warm Homes Scheme in 2011/12; and the total cost of this work.

(AQW 10612/11-15)

Mr McCausland: During the 2011/2012 financial year, 978 heating systems were installed through the Warm Homes Scheme. The total cost of these installations was £4.4m.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Social Development how much it cost to deliver the Warm Homes Scheme in the 2011/12 financial year.

(AQW 10613/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive is still processing accrued invoices but they anticipate that the total spend on Warm Homes in 2011/2012 will be in the region of £13.9m.

Antisocial Behaviour and Neighbourhood Disputes

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive tenants have been evicted as a result of anti-social behaviour or neighbourhood disputes in each of the last three years.

(AQW 10618/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The number of Housing Executive houses repossessed as a result of anti social behaviour is detailed in the table below:

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Possession following NSP/NOP	4	10	5
Possession following court	15	10	7
Possession EJO	6	5	5
Possession without NSP/NOP	29	37	34
Total Possession	54	62	51

Key:

NSP – Notice Seeking Possession

NOP – Notice of Proceedings

EJO – Enforcement of Judgements Office

The number of tenants evicted in the last three years are those where the Housing Executive had to resort to the Enforcement of Judgements Office in order to gain possession of the property. "Evicted", however, is generally used for cases where the Housing Executive repossessed a property, even if the repossession happened at an earlier point in the process without the need for enforcement action. For that reason those cases are also shown as part of the totals above.

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Antisocial Behaviour and Neighbourhood Disputes

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Association tenants have been evicted as a result of anti-social behaviour or neighbourhood disputes in each of the last three years.

(AQW 10619/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The number of tenants evicted by Housing Associations as a result of anti-social behaviour or neighbourhood disputes in each of the last three years was as follows:

2009/10	6
2010/11	7
2011/12	1

Housing Associations: Antisocial Behaviour Policies

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any plans to standardise the neighbourhood dispute or anti-social behaviour policies across the Housing Associations.

(AQW 10621/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Housing legislation in Northern Ireland provides all social housing landlords, including registered housing associations, with a common set of statutory tools for tackling anti-social behaviour affecting or caused by their tenants or others residing with or visiting their tenants.

The Department's Housing Association Guide sets out the standards expected of all registered housing associations. The Guide places a requirement on all registered housing associations to have published policy and procedures for dealing with anti-social behaviour and provides a model statement of policy and procedures by way of guidance.

Within the Department's inspection process, the Inspection Team reviews the anti-social behaviour policies and practices in place within registered housing associations to ensure that they comply with the Department's guidance and that they are being applied effectively and consistently.

Legislation

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) what proposals for legislation, subject to Executive approval, he has introduced or intends to introduce between April 2012 and March 2015; (ii) the anticipated timescale for the first reading of each Bill; and (iii) the intention of each Bill.

(AQW 10640/11-15)

Mr McCausland: From 1 April 2012 I have not introduced any legislative proposals. However, I have identified the following legislative proposals that may need to be introduced during the period up to March 2015:

- Welfare Reform Bill – to introduce a wide range of reforms to the social security system.
- Licensing of Pavement Cafés Bill – to enable district councils to regulate pavement cafes.
- Reform of Liquor Licensing Bill – to help address the concerns surrounding alcohol consumption
- Gambling Bill – to update the gambling legislation within Northern Ireland.
- Charities Bill – to amend the “public benefit” test of the Charities Act 2008.
- Business improvement District Bill – to allow the establishment of statutory Business Improvement Districts in Northern Ireland.
- Regeneration and Housing Bill – to transfer a number of functions and powers to new councils.
- Housing Reform Bill – to give effect to the outcomes of the review of the Housing Executive.

As the above proposals are subject to Executive agreement I am unable to give any timescales for introduction. Moreover, further proposals may emerge on foot of ongoing work.

Customer First: Implementation

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development whether a decision has been made on the timetable for the implementation of Customer First.

(AQW 10663/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have not yet made a final decision on the timetable for the implementation of Customer First. I am currently considering the Social Security Agency's proposals in relation to the future roll-out of Customer First across the Social Security Agency's Working Age Network and will make a final decision once I have fully considered all of the available information.

Customer First: Location of Contact Centres and Processing Centres

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development whether a decision has been made on the number and location of contact centres and processing centres for Customer First,

(AQW 10664/11-15)

Mr McCausland: No final decisions have been made as yet on the number and location of Benefit Processing Centres for Customer First as I am currently considering proposals on how best to rollout the Customer First service delivery model to the remaining Social Security offices.

Central to my consideration is the need to ensure our customers continue to have access to the necessary advice and support channels and I am committed to maintaining a network of front line offices throughout Northern Ireland.

Jobs and Benefits Offices

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has plans to close any Jobs and Benefits Offices.

(AQW 10665/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am committed to maintaining a network of front line offices throughout Northern Ireland that meets the needs of customers and have no plans to close any Jobs & Benefit offices.

Customer First: Implementation

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the implementation of Customer First, whether front-line services will remain at all Jobs and Benefits Offices.

(AQW 10669/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Under Customer First, all Jobs and Benefits offices will continue to deliver front-line services as they do now.

Loch Cuan Facility, Newtownards: Redevelopment

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) when work on the redevelopment of the Loch Cuan facility in the West Winds, Newtownards, will commence; and (ii) to outline the details of the scheme and the amount of investment it represents.

(AQW 10701/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Apex Housing has been nominated to deliver this new facility on the site of the former Loch Cuan residential home.

The Loch Cuan site will accommodate two long-term supported housing schemes comprising a total of 34 units of accommodation. Although the two schemes will share the site they will be distinct services and will provide separate housing accommodation.

Loch Cuan will consist of 24 units of accommodation for frail elderly/dementia clients. The 24 units will be:

- 10 X 2 person 2 bed apartments (wheelchair) and
- 14 X 1 person 1 bed apartments (wheelchair)

Ward House will consist of 10 units of accommodation for learning disability clients. The 10 units will be

- 2 X 2 person 2 bedroom apartments (wheelchair)
- 8 X 2 person 2 bedroom apartments (Lifetime Homes)

The total value of Housing Association Grant payable for the schemes (34 units) is £3.5 million (capital). Additionally, Supporting People funding for the schemes amounts to

- Loch Cuan (24 units) - £280k (out of a total revenue requirement of £609k)
- Ward House (10 units) – £178k.

I understand that construction work is now underway and is expected to complete in September 2013.

Housing Executive Maintenance Contracts

Mr I McCrear asked the Minister for Social Development what process is followed to determine indicative quantities for Housing Executive maintenance contracts.

(AQW 10713/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The size of Housing Executive response maintenance contracts is based on the existing geographical Housing Executive districts, housing stock, and the indicative value of these contracts is derived from historical spend within each district office area.

With regard to Housing Executive planned maintenance contracts the indicative quantities used in the procurement of contracts to form a pricing model are based upon an anticipated programme of work over a set period of time. The methodology used to determine the indicative quantities is dependant upon the contract type.

Cases 102/06 FET and 164/08 FET

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the costs incurred by his Department in relation to cases (i) 102/06 FET; and (ii) 164/08 FET.

(AQW 10753/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Please note the following summary information regarding the above cases.

Case Reference	Costs Incurred
FET 102/06	Legal Expenses Totalling £2350.00
FET 164/08	No Legal Expenses Incurred

Employment and Support Allowance: Appeal Hearings

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the average cost to his Department of an Employment and Support Allowance appeal hearing, including room hire, payment of Board members, administration costs and an appearance by a General Practitioner; and how many ESA appeal hearings were held in 2011.

(AQW 10802/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Appeals Service does not distinguish administration costs between individual benefits, so it is not possible to provide the average cost of Employment Support Allowance (ESA) appeal hearings. However the provisional annual expenditure of the Appeals Service for the financial year 2011/12 including room hire, payment of Board members, administration costs etc. was approximately £5.97m.

The total number of hearings held in 2011/12 was 17,467 of which 8,417 were for ESA appeals (note appeal hearings held may not equate to the number of applications received in the same period).

An ESA tribunal panel consists of a legally qualified chairperson and a registered medical practitioner who may be a general practitioner. The fee for a medical member is £155 per session (each session has three ESA appeal hearings). This fee increases to £185.50 per session when the member has attended over 40 sessions in the year. The fee for a legally qualified chairperson is £218.

The provisional expenditure for room hire in 2011/12 for all appeal hearings was £125,908.

Fort George: Decontamination Contract

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 10588/11-15, why the decontamination contract for Fort George was not awarded by the end of 2011.

(AQW 10916/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Tenders were received for the Design element of the Fort George decontamination project at the end of 2011. The assessment and award process took place in line with the necessary public sector procurement guidelines and continued into January and February 2012, with the contract being awarded in February 2012.

Housing Selection Scheme

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of whether the current points-based Housing Selection Scheme has played a part in bringing about the number of Housing Executive tenants who are not in work and are benefit dependent.

(AQW 10981/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is important that social housing does not create unintended disincentives to work. As part of my Housing Strategy, which I will outline in the coming months, I will be seeking to examine social housing allocation policy and ensure that the current ways of accessing the social housing waiting list and allocating social housing make the most effective use of scarce public resources in identifying and meeting housing need in the context of Government's policy priorities, including economic development, job creation and socio-economic regeneration.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 11 May 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Ulster Covenant: 100th Anniversary

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in keeping with the precedent of the 50th anniversary of the Ulster Covenant, whether any discussions have been held about marking the 100th anniversary with a public holiday.

(AQW 8411/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): At its meeting on 11 March, the Executive agreed its approach to commemorative anniversaries. A framework within which to consider these occasions was agreed and the Ministers for Culture, Arts and Leisure and Enterprise, Trade and Investment will take the lead in organising events around them.

No discussions have taken place about marking the 100th anniversary of the Ulster Covenant with a public holiday.

Youth Unemployment

Mr D McIlveen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what funding their Department has allocated to address youth unemployment to ensure that it does not have a destabilising effect on the political situation.

(AQW 9320/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive is considering a Northern Ireland specific approach to tackling youth unemployment. The package proposed by the Minister for Employment and Learning seeks to link economic and social policy in a way that will help to rebuild and rebalance the local economy while continuing to address the social consequences of unemployment among our young people.

OFMDFM has not specifically allocated funding to address youth unemployment. However, addressing the range of issues that can lead to the disengagement of our young people will be a key component of the CSI strategy as it develops, and the finalised strategy will inform any additional actions required in respect of the allocation of resources and funding.

Freedom of Information Requests

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will give a commitment that Freedom of Information requests will remain accessible and free to all as under existing guidelines.

(AQO 1779/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We will abide by the fees regulations made under the Freedom of Information Act, which presently state that requests should be processed without any charge unless the cost involved exceeds £600.

Community Groups: Funding Renewal Process

Mr Hilditch asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the funding renewal process for community groups; and the length of time it takes to reach a final decision on each funding application.

(AQW 10835/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Due process is followed for all applications to funding schemes operated by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to ensure that all funding decisions are subject to robust scrutiny in line with guidance on public expenditure.

We acknowledge that this can impact on the duration of the decision-making process and in recognition of this, are currently considering proposals for a funding scheme which will support projects with a practical impact on departmental priorities particularly in relation to equality of opportunity and good relations.

Social Investment Fund

Mr D McIlveen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Social Investment Fund will become operational.
(AQO 1788/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Following the consultation on the proposed operation of the Social Investment Fund, we published a report, on 16 March, which outlines the key issues raised by respondents.

The findings from the report have been extremely useful in helping to inform our consideration of the final operation of the Fund, something which we must get right if the Programme is to have the desired and much needed impact in communities here. We are intending to bring an Executive paper on final policy proposals to colleagues shortly.

We have been continuing to work on the necessary business case and procedural requirements while making preparations for the establishment of delivery mechanisms.

Immigration

Mr McKay asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will make representations to the British Government in relation to the Border Agency's refusal to respond to the concerns of MLAs on matters relating to immigration.
(AQW 11001/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Home Office reviewed its policy on correspondence from Members of the Devolved Legislations in 2010. We wrote at that time to stress the ongoing concerns and difficulties faced by MLAs and their constituents and to ask that the review considered alternative ways that MLAs could make representations on behalf of individual constituents. However, the policy was not amended.

We will continue to make representations to the UK Border Agency and the Home Office regarding the inappropriateness of the current policy and to register our concerns about the negative impact that this policy has on vulnerable sections of our minority ethnic communities.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Agricultural Output

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department plans to address the need for greater volumes of agricultural output to meet the increasing demand.
(AQW 10720/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Agricultural output of commodities such as milk and poultry has increased significantly in the north of Ireland over recent decades. I would hope that market conditions, such as increased demand for food associated with a rising world population, will favour a continuation of these trends in the years ahead. The local industry should position itself to make the most of the opportunities that arise from this increased demand.

The DETI Minister and I have recently established the Agri-Food Strategy Board which has been tasked with developing a longer term strategy for the sector. It is my view that any strategy moving forward is likely to include export led growth as one of its key drivers and it is important that we have the raw materials to support such growth.

Of course, it is for the sector to set its own growth targets within the strategy but government can play a supporting role by funding appropriate education, training, R&D and investment programmes. We will want to consider with the new Agri-Food Strategy Board how to ensure current and future support available to the industry is effective and properly targeted.

Agri-food Industry

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she plans to improve the value added to the economy by the Agri-Food industry.
(AQW 10723/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Improving the value added by the agri-food sector to the economy will no doubt be one of the issues considered by the new Agri-Food Strategy Board (AFSB) in developing a longer term strategy for the sector. The DETI Minister and I are in the process of appointing members to the AFSB under the chairmanship of Tony O'Neill, and I expect the Board to be up and running in the very near future.

It should also be remembered that my Department already provides significant support to assist the competitiveness and profitability of the sector.

For example, since 2008, my Department has committed £12.5million to 50 projects under the Processing & Marketing Grant Scheme (PMG) which helps the sector invest in improvements to factory premises and in the purchase of new plant and equipment.

Through our Research Challenge Fund, we have secured total investment to date of some £1m in industry-led, collaborative R&D projects and hope to announce further successful projects later this year. We also fund a range of research at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute to support and improve efficiency, profitability and long term sustainability in farm and food businesses.

My Department's college, CAFRE, seeks to ensure those entering and those currently employed in the agri-food industry have the appropriate competences and skills. It achieves this by delivering a programme of full-time higher and further education to people planning to enter the industry and a programme of part-time education, training, knowledge and technology transfer and benchmarking programmes to those currently employed in the industry.

We will consider with the new Agri-Food Strategy Board how to ensure current and future government support programmes are effective and properly targeted to assist the industry in achieving its growth targets.

Homeopathic and Herbal Medicines to Treat Animals

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's position on the use of homeopathic and herbal medicines to treat animals in the agricultural industry as an alternative to antibiotics; and to list any funding her Department has provided for the research of these treatments in the last three years.

(AQW 10737/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has no regulatory role in the authorisation of veterinary medicines in the north, nor in the provision of research into the efficacy of such treatments.

Under the provisions of European Commission (EC) and Britain and the north of Ireland legislation, no veterinary medicinal product may be marketed without a Marketing Authorisation. Such authorisations are granted only after a detailed scientific assessment of the data relating to safety, quality and efficacy of the product. In addition, inspection of manufacturing premises is required to ensure that quality of the final product is assured.

Thus any homeopathic and herbal medicines which claim to have similar medicinal benefits to antibiotics in the treatment of animals will require marketing authorisation.

The Veterinary Medicines Directorate provides this function in the Britain and the north of Ireland.

Cattle Herd Number: Process for Obtaining

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she is considering a simplification of the process by which farmers obtain a cattle herd number; and whether she has considered the approach used by the Scottish Government.

(AQW 10742/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: European Commission regulations require DARD to record cattle keepers on its database and also to maintain a record of the identity of anyone who submits an application to receive EU funding.

In order to comply with this DARD registers cattle herd keepers on the Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS) and allocates Business and Customer IDs to link each business with their cattle herd keeper registrations. This integrated process protects payments, increases overall compliance and reduces the potential for fraud.

One of the benefits of the introduction of the DARD Direct Offices is that a person wishing to keep cattle can apply to be registered as a cattle herd keeper and also apply to be allocated a Business / Customer ID in the same office and at the same time, and will be helped through the process by the DARD Direct staff.

I am aware that in Scotland a person wishing to keep cattle must register their holding with the local Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspectorate Division (SGRPID) office. Once they have passed the necessary checks they will be issued with a County Parish Holding (CPH) number. Then they must apply to the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) for a cattle herd mark. Subject to passing further checks they will be issued with a unique cattle herd mark which allows them to purchase cattle ear tags.

While it is important that DARD staff deal with applications efficiently and register new cattle herd keepers as quickly as possible, it is not possible to further simplify the process. To do so would remove some of the checks involved and would increase the potential for fraud or non-compliance, or result in monies not being paid to the correct claimant or not at all.

My Department has no plans to review the process by which a farmer is registered as a cattle herd keeper but if a review is undertaken in the future my officials will consult with the other Devolved Administrations, including Scotland, and with the south of Ireland to ensure that the burden on keepers is kept to a minimum.

Farming Community

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she will work with the Tourist Board to establish an incentive for the farming community to permit walkers to access their land; and if she is aware of the position in the Republic of Ireland in relation to this issue.

(AQW 10743/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A network of Waymarked walking routes has been created here in the north. However, the issues of access to land and walking routes cut across the responsibilities of several Departments, Agencies and organisations, and their input would be essential in developing any incentive for farmers.

A 'Walks Scheme', aimed at farmers and private landowners, has existed in the South of Ireland since 2008, and is operated by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. It provides assistance for farmers to develop and maintain National Waymarked Ways, Looped Walking Routes, and Heritage Routes.

Should there be sufficient demand from farmers here, my Department will consider with other agencies and interested parties what mechanisms may be available to support such a scheme.

Poultry Litter Fuelled Gasification Plants

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to list any examples of successful and viable poultry litter fuelled gasification plants.

(AQW 10748/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In the poultry sector there is one known on-farm gasification plant on a large broiler chicken farm (800thousand birds/year) in West Virginia, USA. A key justification for the plant was that it could utilise the heat from the gasification process for heating the broiler houses, especially in the winter. This plant has been in place for over 2 years but initial operational problems were reported.

The most successful examples of the use of gasification at a commercial scale are a number of recently opened gasification plants used to treat municipal solid waste in Northern Europe, with gasification plants in Krsko and Celje in Slovenia, Sisak in Croatia and Sarpsborg in Norway. These are close to buildings and can link to district heating systems and so have a high heat recovery potential.

The technical review of poultry litter management and disposal options carried out by my Department and the AgriFood & Biosciences Institute recommend that consideration should be given by the industry to developing a proto-type poultry litter fuelled gasification plant.

Poultry Litter Management and Disposal: Technical Review

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the respective costings of the two options in the technical review of poultry litter management and disposal which was carried out by her Department and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute.

(AQW 10749/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The technical review of poultry litter management and disposal recommended that consideration should be given by the industry to the development of a proto-type poultry litter fuelled gasification plant and that options to reduce the transport cost of poultry litter for export, should be further investigated.

The review examined the potential of a range of alternative technologies as a means of processing poultry litter. Costs of the alternative technologies were not considered as part of this technical review.

In addition to the technologies examined, the review also identified that exporting poultry litter to Britain for land spreading as an organic fertiliser offers some potential. However, this option would incur significant and ongoing costs due to high transport costs and the low financial value of poultry litter as a fertiliser.

Estimated annual costs for this option are between £4 and £6 million, based on export of 200kt of poultry litter per annum. Consequently, the review recommended that options to reduce the transport cost of poultry litter for export, for example use of baling, and the logistics of shipping poultry litter for export should be further investigated.

Pigs: Mistreatment at High Animal Welfare Facilities in Swaffham and Thetford

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the mistreatment of pigs at high animal welfare facilities in Swaffham and Thetford, what assurances can she give that such activity is not replicated by farmers and livestock owners in Northern Ireland; and how her Department monitors the humane destruction of sick or unsuitable market-destined livestock.

(AQW 10755/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am appalled by the reports from the animal welfare group, Animal Equality, of animal mistreatment at East Anglian Pig Company Units. Here, in the north, my Veterinary Service carries out a significant number of inspections every year under cross compliance and also follow-up visits to any animal welfare complaints. Thankfully my officers have not found any evidence to suggest such mistreatment is practiced here.

Farmers and livestock owners are permitted to kill animals in their care under certain circumstances, including for emergency reasons relating to the welfare of the animals. However, when carrying out these procedures they must ensure animals are spared any avoidable excitement, pain or suffering.

The responsibility for the welfare of any farmed animal is the owner's and unfortunately, it is a fact of life that there will always be tragic animal welfare cases, such as cases where animals are mistreated or incidents where owners neglect or abandon animals in their keep. I assure you that my officers will respond to any report of poor farm animal welfare and will deal with each situation robustly.

Farm Modernisation Programme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 8939/11-15 and AQW 9801/11-15, whether applicants who were unsuccessful in previous tranches of the Farm Modernisation Programme will receive an additional 10 or 20 points.

(AQW 10877/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As indicated in the recent EQIA consultation on the Farm Modernisation Programme Tranche 3, the marks awarded for this new criterion will be 10 marks.

Farm Modernisation Programme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the final scoring criteria and scoring limits for the next Farm Modernisation Programme.

(AQW 10878/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Selection Criteria scoring for Tranche 3 will be as follows:

Degree of Modernisation:	Top Band	-	60 marks
	Middle Band	-	45 marks
	Lower Band	-	30 marks
Succession Opportunity Young Farmer		-	35 marks
E Communication		-	10 marks
Not successful in previous tranches		-	10 marks
Maximum			115 marks

In response to the views expressed in the consultation, about affording greater prioritisation to those not successful in previous tranches, the tie breaker order will now be: Not successful in previous tranches, Succession Opportunity, Degree of modernisation and finally e-communication.

Greenmount College, Antrim: Staffing

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) grade of staff at Greenmount College, Antrim who have been on long-term sick leave in the last two years.

(AQW 10882/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Based on the NICS Staff Handbook definition of long term sickness as being an absence lasting 20 working days or more the number and grade of staff at Greenmount College on long term sick leave in 2010 and 2011 are set out in the tables below:

Table 1 – Number of staff

Number of staff	2010	2011	Sick leave overlapping 2010 and 2011
Non industrial	14	11	4
Industrial	6*	1	1
Total	20	12	5

* number includes individuals who had more than one period of long term absence in the same year.

Table 2 – Grade of staff

Grade of staff *	2010	2011	Absences overlapping 2010 and 2011
AA and analogous grades	3	2	0
AO and analogous grades	1	0	0
EOII and analogous grades	0	0	0
EOI and analogous grades	3	2	1
Staff Officer and analogous grades	5	3	2
DP and analogous grades	2	4	1

Grade of staff *	2010	2011	Absences overlapping 2010 and 2011
Grade 7 and analogous grades	0	0	0
Industrial	6	1	1
Total	20	12	5

* to prevent the identification of specific individuals at particular grades general service and analogous grades have been amalgamated.

Bovine TB: European Funding

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why her Department did not to take the necessary steps to draw down European funding to tackle bovine TB prior to 2009.

(AQW 10921/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD previously applied for co-funding from the EU TB Veterinary Fund in 2004, when some 2 million Euros were secured. DARD was the only administration within Britain and the north of Ireland at that time to apply for this funding.

DARD did not apply for co-funding in the years 2005 until 2009 inclusive; because the EU Commission had made it clear that a funding application would not be successful until applicants complied fully with the requirement of European Commission Directive 64/432 that animals that give an inconclusive result to two consecutive TB tests should be removed as reactors. The policy here and in England, Wales and Scotland at that time was to remove as reactors those animals that gave an inconclusive result to three consecutive tests.

In 2009 a joint application was made to the EU Commission for co-funding from the TB Veterinary Fund in respect of the TB Eradication Plans for 2010 for England, Wales and the north of Ireland. The new policy on the removal as reactors of animals that give an inconclusive result to a second consecutive test was introduced on 1 January 2010. The funding application for 2010, 2011 and 2012 has been successful, which allows DARD to benefit by some 5 million Euros in respect of each of these years.

Single Farm Payment

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, for each of the last five years, to detail (i) how many farmers have been in receipt of a Single Farm Payment; and (ii) how many farmers are still to receive this year's payment, in the North Down constituency.

(AQW 10971/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

(i) My Department received the following numbers of claims to the Single Farm Payment (SFP) Scheme for each of the last five years:

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Number of Claims	39,003	38,807	38,627	38,423	38,152

(ii) 222 claims to the 2011 SFP Scheme were received from farmers in the North Down constituency. Of these, 6 have yet to be finalised. Not all of the remaining claims may be due a payment because of ineligibility or the application of penalties under scheme rules.

EU Veterinary Fund

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the successful applications to the EU Veterinary Fund in each of the last three years.

(AQW 10988/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Successful applications to the EU Veterinary Fund have been made for the 2010, 2011 and 2012 Brucellosis, Tuberculosis, TSE and Avian Influenza Programmes.

Bovine TB: Compensation

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the cost of compensation payments for bovine tuberculosis infections in the 2011/12 financial year.

(AQW 10989/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: £12.9 million was the total compensation payment for animals removed for the control of bovine tuberculosis infection in the 2011/12 financial year.

Red Meat Strategic Forum

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the Red Meat Strategic Forum, including when it will publish updated cost of production figures for local producers.

(AQW 11000/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In answering this question, I want to clarify that the Red Meat Strategic Forum (referred to hereafter as 'the Forum') is an industry-led group which is chaired by the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC).

The Forum continues to meet regularly to consider issues of strategic importance to the red meat industry with a particular focus on industry sustainability and profitability.

One of the issues the Forum has been considering is the modelling of costs of beef and sheep meat production. At its meeting in June 2011 the Forum agreed that cost of production data was of interest and benefit to the industry and that continued efforts should be made to provide these figures on an ongoing basis.

With this in mind, it was agreed that further research was necessary which would allow a re-baselining of these figures and the development of a more robust and sustainable method of calculating costs of production.

The issue was discussed most recently at the Forum meeting in February this year and the LMC continues to work with DARD to calculate costs of production using Farm Business Survey accounts as the basis. This is a complex exercise but one which should ultimately result in cost of production figures which can be updated on an annual basis using a robust methodology.

The exercise is being led by the Forum and, as it requires input from a range of parties, unfortunately it is not possible at this stage to give a definite timescale on when the next cost of production figures will be published.

Down Rural Area Partnership

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why priority is being given to the funding of strategic projects over the issuing of calls for standard projects within the Down Rural Area Partnership.

(AQW 11037/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Priority is not being given to the funding of strategic projects over the issuing of calls for standard projects within the Down Rural Area Partnership. My priority in all seven clusters involved in the delivery of Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) is that all monies are spent and no funds are returned to Brussels.

To this end, I have announced a re-focus for Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme driven by the low project spend to date and the high administration costs. DRAP has been allocated funding of £13,498,066 for the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programme. To date the cluster has spent £1,909,271 on projects and £975,009 on administration. On current trends the cluster would not spend its full project allocation. I have asked for all areas to urgently examine their progress to date and to re-focus by re-allocating funds to higher investing measures and to larger strategic projects.

An open call for Strategic Projects will be announced shortly and DRAP are making provision to take forward 5 strategic Projects in addition to calls for standard projects but not as a substitute for standard Projects.

Rural White Paper Action Plan

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the introduction of the final Rural White Paper Action Plan.

(AQW 11181/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Work on the development of the Rural White Paper Action Plan has now been completed and it is intended that it will be submitted to the Executive for approval during May 2012. The final Rural White Paper Action Plan will be published following Executive approval.

EU School Milk Subsidy Scheme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of children who (i) are entitled to; and (ii) have benefited from the EU School Milk Subsidy Scheme in each of the last five years.

(AQW 11184/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The number of children who are entitled to and have benefited from the EU School Milk Subsidy Scheme in each of the last school years is as follows:-

School Year	Number of children entitled to school milk ¹	Number of children taking milk ²
2006/07	178,794	56,600
2007/08	177,105	57,000
2008/09	323,264 ³	54,600

School Year	Number of children entitled to school milk ¹	Number of children taking milk ²
2009/10	321,830 ³	52,700
2010/11	321,717 ³	52,100

Notes: ¹ Source NI School Census 2006/07 – 2010/11

² The number of children taking milk has been calculated by converting the total quantity of milk on which subsidy was claimed during the term to one-third pints and then dividing this by the number of days in the term. An average is then taken of participation in each of the three terms.

³ Includes secondary schools. From the start of the 2008/09 school year the EU rules were revised to extend the coverage of the Scheme, from children attending nursery and primary schools, to include children attending secondary schools.

EU School Milk Subsidy Scheme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the success of the EU School Milk Subsidy Scheme; and whether her Department is achieving the stated aims of the Scheme.

(AQW 11186/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The EU School Milk Scheme aims to encourage the consumption of dairy products by children. It also has an educational dimension in that it encourages a healthy way of living and sound eating habits at an early age. I support fully this objective and would encourage every school and every parent of a child at school in the north of Ireland to avail of the benefits of this Scheme.

Under EU law we are required to offer this Scheme to school children. However, in view of the positive health benefits of consuming milk at an early age, in addition to the EU subsidy, we also provide a “top-up” subsidy from the Executive’s budget to help reduce the cost for participating children.

In the north I believe that we are achieving the aims of the Scheme and I am pleased to say that all of our Education and Library Boards participate in delivery of the Scheme. I can advise that during the 2010/11 school year 73% of our nursery, primary and special schools participated under the Scheme.

While there is always room for improvement, I believe that the Scheme is meeting its objectives within the current budget available. Also, I am hopeful that the current promotional activities of the Dairy Council for NI, which has received significant funding from both the EU and my Department, will result in a higher level of uptake in our schools.

EU School Milk Subsidy Scheme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for a breakdown of the amount, and the sources of funding for the EU School Milk Subsidy Scheme in each of the last five years.

(AQW 11187/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: EU and local top-up subsidy paid under the EU School Milk Scheme in each of the last five school years was as follows:-

School Year	EU subsidy £	Local top-up subsidy £	Total £
2006/07	265,086	81,668	346,754
2007/08	270,854	79,732	350,586
2008/09	315,263	76,393	391,656
2009/10	304,107	73,724	377,831
2010/11	286,976	71,631	358,607

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Sandy Row and Donegall Road and Village Areas of South Belfast: Organisations or Projects

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department and its arm's-length bodies have given to organisations or projects in the (i) Sandy Row; and (ii) Donegall Road and Village areas of South Belfast in each of the last ten years; and from which funding streams was each allocation made.

(AQW 10815/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The Department did not directly fund any organisation or project in the Sandy Row, Donegall Road and Village areas of South Belfast in the last ten financial years.

Details of funding allocated by the Department's arm's-length bodies in the same period are listed in the table below.

Funding was also provided by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland to organisations or projects in the South Belfast constituency in the last ten years but the body does not retain funding information at the level of detail specified in this question.

Year	Funding (£)	Funding Stream	Organisation
2002/03	0		
2003/04	4,500 *	NI Screen - Made in Northern Ireland Lottery Production	Bandigital Ltd
2004/05	0		
2005/06	25,279	Ulster Scots Agency Financial Assistance Scheme	South Belfast Cultural Society
	40,756	Community Sport Programme	Greater Village Regeneration Trust
2006/07	37,716	Community Sport Programme	Greater Village Regeneration Trust
2007/08	22,831	Ulster Scots Agency Financial Assistance Scheme	South Belfast Cultural Society Southcity Highland Dance Committee Village Maids Southcity Resource & Development Centre
	38,458	Community Sport Programme	Greater Village Regeneration Trust
2008/09	1,294	Ulster Scots Agency Financial Assistance Scheme	Donegall Pass Community Centre
	34,868	Sport in Our Community	Greater Village Regeneration Trust
2009/10	9,885 *	NI Screen – Made in Northern Ireland Lottery Production	15 Second Film Festival Ltd
	2,475	Ulster Scots Agency Financial Assistance Scheme	Village Maids
	9,068	Awards for Sport	Blythefield Sports Complex
	30,442	Sport in Our Community	Greater Village Regeneration Trust
2010/11	650,000 **	NI Screen - Screen Fund Production	Market Films Limited

Year	Funding (£)	Funding Stream	Organisation
2010/11	19,500 *	NI Screen - Made in Northern Ireland Lottery Production Production Award	15 Second Film Festival Ltd Generator Entertainment Ltd
	29,526	Sport Matters Capital and Equipment Programme	Totally Trim
2011/12	450,000 **	NI Screen - Screen Fund Production	Zest Films Limited
	2,993	Ulster Scots Agency Financial Assistance Scheme	Sandy Row Cultural Society Greater Village Regeneration Trust
	3,881	Awards for Sport	Greater Village Regeneration Trust

* Funding provided to arm's length body by National Lottery

** Funding provided to arm's length body by Invest NI

Amateur Boxing Clubs: Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department and its arm's-length bodies have provided to amateur boxing clubs in each of the last five years; and how much each club was awarded.

(AQW 11017/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is responsible for the distribution of funding for sport in the north of Ireland. Responsibility for the promotion of boxing rests, in the first instance with the governing body for the sport, the Ulster Provincial Boxing Council (UPBC).

Over the last five financial years, Sport NI has allocated £310,241 of Exchequer funding to amateur boxing clubs as detailed in the table below. The UPBC was also awarded £82,600 of Exchequer funding over the period 2007-12 through the Investing in Performance Sport and Governing Body Plans programmes. In addition, boxing benefited from £212,006 of Exchequer funding over the same period through the Athlete Support/Athlete Investment Programme.

Club	2009	2010	2011	Total
All Saints Amateur Boxing Club		£8,000		£8,000
Banbridge Amateur Boxing Club	£7,394	£1,964		£9,358
Cairn Lodge Amateur Boxing Club	£2,374			£2,374
Canal Amateur Boxing Academy		£21,366	£2,299	£23,665
Castlereagh Amateur Boxing Club		£19,926		£19,926
Derrylin Boxing Club		£8,959	£6,000	£14,959
Eastside ABC			£30,000	£30,000
Gleann Amateur Boxing Club		£16,722		£16,722
Holy Family Boxing Club		£24,344		£24,344
Holy Trinity Youth Club		£24,322		£24,322
Immaculata Amateur Boxing Club		£29,395		£29,395
Ligoniel Amateur Boxing Club	£3,000	£28,826		£31,826
Lurgan Amateur Boxing Club	£7,727	£1,760		£9,487
Monkstown Community Sports Facility	£10,000			£10,000
Oak Leaf Amateur Boxing Club			£0	£0
Poleglass Amateur Boxing Club		£4,245		£4,245
Saints Amateur Boxing Club			£4,980	£4,980

Club	2009	2010	2011	Total
Silverbridge Boxing Club		£1,700		£1,700
St Brigid's Cross Community Boxing Club			£2,024	£2,024
St John Bosco Amateur Boxing Club			£3,800	£3,800
St Paul's Amateur Boxing Club	£9,540	£29,574		£39,114
Total	£40,035	£221,103	£49,103	£310,241

Note: There was no funding to boxing clubs in the two years previous to those reported (2007-08 and 2008-09).

Football Clubs: Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the process and criteria by which football clubs with non-designated grounds can apply for capital funding.

(AQW 11065/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Football clubs responsible for grounds that are not designated under the Safety of Sports Grounds (NI) Order 2006 can apply to Sport NI's capital funding programmes provided they meet the eligibility criteria of the individual programmes available. At present, Sport NI has no funding programmes open to which such football clubs can apply.

Football Clubs: Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the timescale for the allocation of funding to football clubs with non-designated grounds.

(AQW 11066/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is responsible for the distribution of funding for sport in the north of Ireland. At present, Sport NI has no funding programmes open to which football clubs, either designated or not designated under the Safety of Sports Grounds (NI) Order 2006, can apply.

Football Clubs: Ground Assessments

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what opportunities exist for football clubs to have their grounds reassessed to qualify for designated status.

(AQW 11069/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The criteria used to determine which football grounds should be considered for designation is prescribed under legislation, namely the Safety of Sports Grounds (NI) Order 2006. Article 4(1) of the Order enables my Department, by order, to designate as requiring a safety certificate, any sports ground which, in DCAL's opinion, has accommodation for more than 5,000 spectators. Any football ground not currently designated under this legislation, but which has accommodation of more than 5,000 spectators may, therefore, be considered by my Department for designation.

Belfast Metropolitan Arts Centre

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding was allocated by the Arts Council, under its Annual Funding Programme, to meet the running costs of the Belfast Metropolitan Arts Centre.

(AQW 11150/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Belfast Metropolitan Arts Centre was awarded £1m through the Annual Funding Programme for the 2012/13 financial year.

Arts Council: Annual Funding Programme

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding has been allocated by the Arts Council, under its Annual Funding Programme, to encourage creativity and arts programmes in the Greater Shankill area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 11152/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Using the Neighbourhood Renewal area definition of the Greater Shankill Area as Lower Shankill, Mid Shankill/Woodvale, Upper Shankill, Ainsworth, Glencairn and Ballygomartin Road, the Beat Initiative and the Greater Shankill Partnership would fall within this area.

Arts Council funding to the Beat Initiative over the past 3 years is as follows:

Finance Year	Programme	Project Title	Grant Amount	Fund
2012-2013	Annual Funding Programme	AFP 12/13	£160,000.00	Exchequer
2011-2012	ASOP	ASOP 11/12	£110,000.00	Exchequer
2010-2011	ASOP	ASOP 10/11	£110,000.00	Exchequer

The Arts Council has also provided annual funding to the Greater Shankill Partnership over the period at £100k per annum in 2010/11 and 2011/12 through a ring-fenced sum provided by DCAL.

Sport: South Down

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding is available through her Department or its arm's-length bodies to assist sporting clubs and organisations in the South Down constituency.

(AQO 1916/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is responsible for the distribution of funding for sport in the north of Ireland. Sport NI has advised that it currently has no funding programmes open to which sporting clubs and organisations in the South Down constituency could apply. However, over the last five financial years, Sport NI has provided a total of £7,495,238 Exchequer and Lottery funding to sports clubs and organisations based in the south Down area. Furthermore, Sport NI has a number of pending applications to its Stadia Safety and Community Capital Programmes which will be considered as and when future funding becomes available.

Arm's-Length Bodies

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on advice given to her Department's arm's-length bodies concerning external communications.

(AQO 1918/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department is in discussion with ALBs in relation to finalising the Communications Protocol.

Health Promotion

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what measures she is taking, in conjunction with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, to improve and increase health promotion.

(AQO 1924/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) has lead responsibility for improving and increasing health promotion. Nevertheless, I recognise that quality culture, arts and leisure provision can contribute significantly to improved health, both physical and mental, and health promotion. With that in mind, I, along with other Ministers, am supporting DHSSPS in developing a new, cross-cutting Public Health Framework which I understand DHSSPS hopes to complete by the end of this year.

Furthermore, following recent discussions with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I have also identified a number of areas where I believe DCAL can contribute to its main suicide prevention strategy, Protect Life. These have been submitted to DHSSPS for consideration within the final version of the refreshed Protect Life Action Plan. In addition, my Department, with the support of DHSSPS, is currently working with a range of culture, arts and leisure bodies, related interest groups and private individuals to help promote various health improvement issues including suicide prevention, organ donation and physical activity.

Líofa 2015

Mr Chris Hazzard asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the Líofa campaign, including the next steps.

(AQO 1920/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: More than 1820 people have signed up to the Líofa initiative demonstrating the interest people have in wanting to learn Irish or improve their ability to use it. The initial target of 1000 has been increased to 2015 by 2015 to take account of the high level of interest in the campaign.

A full-time Líofa development officer has been appointed to drive the initiative forward and to support those people who have made the commitment to become fluent in Irish by 2015.

A long term plan is also being drafted and includes meetings with key stakeholders, further Líofa launches and development of a dedicated website.

Northern Visions: Funding

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what her Department is doing to address the funding gap for community-based Northern Visions Media Centre which is threatening its future survival.

(AQO 1922/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department does not fund organisations directly. DCAL funding in support of arts and cultural activities is disbursed through its Arms Length Bodies.

Representatives from my Department, the Arts Council, Belfast City Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund met with Northern Visions on 20 April to discuss the current funding difficulties and to investigate possibilities to help the organisation.

Discussions between my Department, Northern Visions and various funding bodies are also ongoing.

NI Screen: Funding

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the changes to NI Screen funding criteria made in February 2011.

(AQO 1923/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: NI Screen's funding criteria did not change in February 2011.

However in February 2011 NI Screen prepared a Savings Delivery Plan to implement a budget reduction from DCAL and to address the loss of funding from the UK Film Council. NI Screen had previously received £240k per annum from the UK Film Council which was reduced to 160k in 10-11 and to zero from 11-12.

As a result of these reductions NI Screen needed to find savings of £318,500 over the 4 years of the Budget period of which £193,500 had to be found in year one.

NI Screen took the view that applying the cuts evenly across its funded bodies could undermine each organisation. Instead, it chose to prioritise the activities which it funds and cease to fund some activities.

The decision as to which organisations would have their funding reduced was taken with reference to the following agreed criteria:

- Impact on education
- Impact on strengthening the economy
- Number of people impacted
- Geographic spread of people impacted

Sports Stadia: Social Outcomes

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of achieving beneficial social outcomes in the work on the new sports stadia, including the development of Casement Park.

(AQO 1925/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is critical that my Department's major capital spend on the new sports stadia is used to maximise wider socio-economic outcomes and returns. Social clauses, and strategies for maximum social returns, will be firmly embedded throughout the procurement and delivery process for all three sports stadia. Relevant clauses and measures will be included on both contracts for professional services and construction works and will contain provision for delivering sustainable economic, social, environmental and equality improvements. My Department has stand-alone statutory and public policy requirements as a public authority in its own right which impose specific obligations, such as the general duty and specific procedural duties attached to Section 75 of the NI Act 1998. I intend that my Department will develop and deliver its obligations to the full.

I am pleased that all of the sporting bodies intend to implement my Department's requirements on social clauses and maximum social returns. I am currently considering the detail of how community participation can be maximised, equality impacts measured and monitored, and significant social returns delivered to the most deprived parts of this society.

The Executive is firmly committed to the use of public money for maximum improvements to the lives of those areas and communities suffering greatest socio-economic inequalities. It is worth noting the words of the now First Minister, when he launched the Executive's guidance on integrating social and equality requirements into public procurement as Finance and Personnel Minister in May 2008. Mr Robinson said: "...opportunities exist within the procurement process for policy makers and procurement professionals to work together with suppliers to promote equality of opportunity and sustainable development in the delivery of our public services". The Executive's May 2008 guidance is the minimum bottom-line guidance to assist Departments on how those opportunities can be maximised. I am requiring that each of the three sporting bodies fully integrates the need for social clauses and socio-economic returns as a "golden thread" within the entire lifetime of each of the stadiums.

Rugby Avenue Stadium, Coleraine

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department will support the proposed development of a new football stadium and sports facility at Rugby Avenue in Coleraine.

(AQO 1926/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware of Coleraine Borough Council's intention to create a master plan for the 'Rugby Avenue' site in Coleraine that could possibly include a new football stadium and the relocation of the swimming pool and leisure centre from the town centre. Such a development appears to fit within the scope of sustainable, community accessible multi sport facilities proposed within my Department's strategy for sport and physical recreation, Sport Matters. In this regard I welcome the proposed development which should, if it proceeds, contribute significantly to the development of community sport both in the Coleraine area and the north more generally.

Department of Education

Co-ordinated Support Plans: Annual Review

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the review of special education proposals for the Annual Review of Co-ordinated Support Plans, whether the rights of children with Special Educational Needs in special schools will be protected through an optional review process that takes into account the views of the school and parents, regardless of the stage a child is at in their education.

(AQW 10422/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): I am currently finalising a policy paper in regard to the SEN review. Once my deliberations are complete I will be in a better position to answer this question.

Nursery School Places

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education how he ensures that there is an equitable supply of nursery school places across the education sectors.

(AQW 10731/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: While my Department retains policy and budgetary responsibility for the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme, the planning and implementation at local level is the responsibility of the Pre-School Education Advisory Groups (PEAGs) within each Education and Library Board.

These Groups undertake an annual review of provision at local level taking into account factors such as demographic changes and the relocation/closure of settings, in order to ensure that the allocation of places to voluntary/private sector providers continues to meet the needs of each area. I also consider requests for new statutory pre-school provision under the Development Proposal process.

I have made available significant additional funding for new places in voluntary/private settings and have approved the creation of new statutory nursery provision in areas of shortfall in order to meet the growing demand for funded pre-school places across the north of Ireland.

Officials from my Department will continue to work closely with colleagues in the ELBs to make available sufficient funded pre-school places to meet the Programme for Government commitment of ensuring that at least one year of pre-school education is available to every family that wants it.

Preschool and Nursery Places

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many children did not obtain a nursery or pre-school place in the first round of applications in 2012.

(AQW 10758/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information sought is in relation to the Pre-School Admissions Process for the 2012/13 academic year. This is a 2 stage process which will not complete until 1 June 2012 and therefore final figures in relation to the number of children in their final pre-school year offered a place during the process will not be available until after that date. However, as I indicated in the Assembly on 23 April, at the end of Stage 1 of the Process 94% of those who had made application had been offered a place. The parents/guardians of the 1,429 children who were unplaced were invited to submit further preferences for the 1,742 places which remained available.

Preschool and Nursery Places

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many pre-school and nursery places were available following the first round of applications in 2012.

(AQW 10764/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information sought is in relation to the Pre-School Admissions Process for the 2012/13 academic year. This is a 2 stage process which will not complete until 1 June 2012 and therefore final figures in relation to the number of children in their final pre-school year offered a place during the process will not be available until after that date. However, as I indicated in the Assembly on 23 April, at the end of Stage 1 of the Process 94% of those who had made application had been offered a place. The parents/guardians of the 1,429 children who were unplaced were invited to submit further preferences for the 1,742 places which remained available.

Nursery and Preschool Places

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what action his Department is taking to ensure that the allocation of nursery and pre-school places more closely meets the areas of demand.

(AQW 10765/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: While my Department retains policy and budgetary responsibility for the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme, the planning and implementation at local level is the responsibility of the Pre-School Education Advisory Groups (PEAGs) within each Education and Library Board.

These Groups undertake an annual review of provision at local level taking into account factors such as demographic changes and the relocation/closure of settings, in order to ensure that the allocation of places to voluntary/private sector providers continues to meet the needs of each area. I also consider requests for new statutory pre-school provision under the Development Proposal process.

I have made available significant additional funding for new places in voluntary/private settings and have approved the creation of new statutory nursery provision in areas of shortfall in order to meet the growing demand for funded pre-school places across the north of Ireland.

Officials from my Department will continue to work closely with colleagues in the ELBs to make available sufficient funded pre-school places to meet the Programme for Government commitment of ensuring that at least one year of pre-school education is available to every family that wants it.

Preschool Places

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage of children who have secured a place at their preferred pre-school provider for September 2012.

(AQW 10827/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information sought is in relation to the Pre-School Admissions Process for the 2012/13 academic year. This is a 2 stage process which will not complete until 1 June 2012 and therefore final figures in relation to the number of children in their final pre-school year offered a place at a places stated as a preference during the process will not be available until after that date. However, as I indicated in the Assembly on 23 April, at the end of Stage 1 of the Process 94% of those who had made application had been offered a place at a setting stated as a preference on their application form.

Irish-Medium Sector: Preschool Provision

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education (i) to list the pre-school provision in the Irish-medium sector; and (ii) which units are (a) statutory; and (b) voluntary/private.

(AQW 10828/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed below:-

Statutory nursery units at Irish-medium primary schools

- Gaelscoil na Bhfal, Belfast
- Bunscoil Phobal Feirste, Belfast
- Scoil an Droichid, Belfast
- Bunscoil an Tsleibhe Dhuibh, Belfast
- Gaelscoil Cholmcille, Derry
- Gaelscoil Eadain Mhoir, Derry
- Gaelscoil na gCrann, Omagh
- Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh, Strabane
- Christian Brothers Primary School (Naíscóil Ard Mhacha), Armagh

Gaelscoil Uí Neill, Dungannon Irish-medium voluntary pre-school providers in receipt of funded places in the 2011/12 academic year

Naíscóil an Chaistil, Ballycastle

- Naíscóil an Chreagáin, Silverbridge
- Naíscóil an Iúir, Newry

- Naíscoil an Lonnáin, Belfast
- Naíscoil An Traonaigh, Lisnaskea
- Naíscoil an tSeanchaí, Magherafelt
- Naíscoil Aodha Rua, Dungannon
- Naíscoil Ard Eoin, Belfast
- Naíscoil Bheann Mhadagain, Belfast
- Naíscoil Chamlocha, Camlough
- Naíscoil Charn Tóchair, Maghera
- Naíscoil Chill Locha, Killough
- Naíscoil Chois Locha, Lurgan
- Naíscoil Colmcille An Charraig Mhor, Carrickmore
- Naíscoil Dhun Padraig, Downpatrick
- Naíscoil Éanna, Newtownabbey
- Naíscoil Eoghain, Cookstown
- Naíscoil Ghleann Darach, Crumlin
- Naíscoil Leim an Mhadaidh, Limavady
- Naíscoil Mhachaire Ratha, Maghera
- Naíscoil Mhaol Íosa, Derry
- Naíscoil Mhic Reachtain, Belfast
- Naíscoil na Banna, Portadown
- Naíscoil na Deirge, Castlederg
- Naíscoil Na Fuisseoige, Belfast
- Naíscoil na mBeann, Kilkeel
- Naíscoil na Móna, Belfast
- Naíscoil na Speríní, Draperstown
- Naíscoil Neachtain, Dungiven
- Naíscoil Shliabh gCuilinn, Jonesborough
- Naíscoil Uachtar Tire, Castlewellan

Preschool Admissions Review

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education how his Department is progressing the Pre-School Admissions Review recommendations.

(AQW 10829/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Pre-School Admissions Review recommendations will introduce changes to improve the Admissions process for children and parents and will impact on policy and practice. When I announced the outcomes of the Review in January, I was clear that the Report should be regarded as a framework for action rather than a list of agreed actions to be implemented immediately.

Work is progressing and, as indicated in my speech to the Assembly on 23 April 2012, I will have the legislation that is necessary to remove the July /August criterion with the Assembly before the summer recess. It my intention that the removal of these criterion will be in effect in time for the 2013/14 Pre-School Admissions Process which will commence in the Autumn.

Further aspects of the review outcomes will also be considered as part of the Early Years Strategy which I announced would be brought to the Assembly before the summer recess.

Some of the actions identified will require further investigation, detailed costings, and possible additional consultation or legislation. Implementation of these recommendations will also be taken into account in considering the steps necessary to deliver the Programme for Government commitment of ensuring that at least one year of pre-school education is available to every family that wants it.

I am committed to ensuring that these important changes will be implemented as quickly and effectively as possible to improve the outcomes for all.

Preschool Applications: July/August Criterion

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education if, and when, the July/August criterion for pre-school applications will be removed. (AQW 10830/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As indicated in my speech to the Assembly on 23 April 2012, I will have the legislation that is necessary to remove the July /August criterion with the Assembly before the summer recess. It my intention that the removal of these criterion will be in effect in time for the 2013/14 Pre-School Admissions Process which will commence in the Autumn.

South Eastern Education and Library Board: Chief Executive

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the appointment of the Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board, to detail (i) when the interviews were held; (ii) when the Commissioners decided who should be appointed; (iii) who was present when the final decision was made; (iv) whether the Staff Commission representative recorded any concerns; and (v) when his Department ratified the appointment.

(AQW 10865/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: (i) The interviewing panel for appointment to the Chief Executive Post met on Monday 20 February 2012.

- (ii) The decision was made by the Commissioners on Thursday 23 February 2012.
- (iii) All Commissioners participated in the final decision on the appointment on 23 February 2012; the representative of the Dept of Education and the representative of the Staff Commission were also present when this decision was reached and also throughout the meeting of the interviewing panel on 20 February 2012. The Chair of the Commissioners participated by way of a conference call as he was unable to be physically present due to illness.
- (iv) The representative from the Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards confirmed in a letter to the Department of Education dated 1 March 2012 that he was satisfied that all procedures were observed. No concerns were expressed.
- (v) The Department of Education approved the appointment in a letter to the South Eastern Education and Library Board dated 7 March 2012.

Defibrillators

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what action his Department is taking to increase the number of defibrillators in buildings used by his Department or its arm's-length bodies, including schools.

(AQW 11024/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A number of schools have purchased defibrillators following a recommendation from a Health Trust or Paediatric Cardiac Specialist when deemed desirable for specific children. In addition, the General Teaching Council has a defibrillator on their premises. My Department has no plans for increased provision at present, but will continue to keep this policy area under review in conjunction with other Departments.

Transfer Tests: Preparation of Pupils

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact that primary school teachers who concentrate on preparing pupils for transfer tests rather than on teaching the curriculum might have on pupils achieving adequate numeracy and literacy levels.

(AQW 11039/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Primary schools are centres of education in their own right. A primary school's function is to teach children the curriculum, it is not the function of any primary school to set aside the curriculum to teach to the individual entrance criteria of any post primary school.

Primary schools are responsible and will be held to account for the education of all pupils. All teaching and activities should be designed and delivered to and for the needs of all pupils.

Any departure from a school's statutory duties in delivering the curriculum risks having an adverse effect on standards of literacy and numeracy.

Preschool Places

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Education how many children in the South Antrim area aged (i) two; (ii) three; and (iii) four currently have a pre-school place.

(AQW 11072/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Information on the numbers of children aged 2 and aged 3 at 1 July 2011 in funded pre-school education located in the South Antrim constituency is detailed in the table below. Children aged 4 at 1 July 2011 are not included because these children will have attained compulsory school starting age.

Age of children in funded preschool provision in the South Antrim constituency 2011/12

School type	Aged 2	Aged 3	Total
Total	6	1,219	1,225

Source: School census

Note:

- 1 Figures relate to children in funded places in voluntary and private pre-school centres, nursery schools, nursery units and in reception classes in primary schools located in the South Antrim constituency.
- 2 Age is at 1 July 2011.
- 3 Individual pupil age data are not collected for voluntary and private pre-school settings. Figures included in the total above relate to those children in funded places, who are assumed to be three years old as at 1 July.

School to Home Bus Service

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education whether his Department intends to fund the voluntary redundancy packages for employees of the Western Education and Library Board who operate the School to Home bus service.

(AQW 11112/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Voluntary Severance Programme, for which I have set aside resources across the budget period, is intended to support the delivery of key areas of the Savings Delivery Plan and the Resource Allocation Plans.

ALBs have been invited to bring forward proposals which would reduce costs and deliver savings in a number of areas, in particular within Management & Administration and Professional Support Services. The proposals are then assessed against strict criteria and will only be considered where it is clearly demonstrated that there is no diminution, either directly or indirectly, in service delivery and, in particular, in support to children and young people.

To date, no proposal has been received from the Western Education and Library Board relating to employees who operate the School to Home bus service however, if submitted, it will be subject to the same strict criteria that all proposals are in order to secure the necessary funding.

School to Home Bus Service

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education how many Western Education and Library Board employees who operate the School to Home bus service have had their contracted hours reduced in the past 6 months.

(AQW 11115/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been advised by the Western Education and Library Board that it has not reduced the contracted hours of any employees who operate the Home to School Transport service within the past 6 months.

NEETs Strategy

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education, given that the NEETs Strategy is included in the Programme for Government, whether he intends to ensure that (i) the Bytes Project will retain its current level of funding from his Department; (ii) the project receives transitional support, at the current financial rate, if alternative funding streams are developed for the project; and (iii) the project is provided with the certainty and stability of funding in the interest of a more planned, strategic service.

(AQW 11130/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not fund the Bytes Project directly; it is one of a number of youth service organisations which receives funding from the Youth Council. It is, therefore, for the Youth Council to determine the level of funding for the organisation in line with DE priorities, its published funding scheme and the available budget.

The Youth Council has advised that it has allocated interim funding of £52,250 to Bytes for the financial year 2012/13. Decisions on further funding will be made following completion of a review by the Youth Council of the operation of Bytes. For future years, Bytes can apply to the Youth Council and/or Education and Library Boards for youth service funding in the same way as all other youth organisations.

Middletown Centre for Autism

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many professionals from (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) the Republic of Ireland have been trained in each of the last three years at the Middletown Centre for Autism.

(AQW 11137/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of professionals in the north and south trained by the Middletown Centre for Autism in the last three years is shown in the table.

Year	North of Ireland	Republic of Ireland
2011-2012	3,171	2,180
2010-2011	1,356	598
2009-2010	1,452	497

Middletown Centre for Autism

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many children from (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) the Republic of Ireland have been supported by the Middletown Centre for Autism in each of the last three years.

(AQW 11138/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Middletown Centre staff have provided direct interventions to 11 children on a rolling basis through an outreach service to children in the north which offers trans-disciplinary assessment by advice and guidance teams, and have supported some 269 children with outreach support and a further 418 children by helping whole schools develop an ASD competent environment.

No children received support from the centre in the south in the last three years.

Middletown Centre for Autism

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many parents from (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) the Republic of Ireland trained at the Middletown Centre for Autism in each of the last three years.

(AQW 11191/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The following numbers of parents availed of training provided by the Middletown Centre for Autism in the last 3 years.

Year	North of Ireland	Republic of Ireland
2011-2012	710	1,854
2010-2011	706	1,416
2009-2010	12	41

Schools: Shared Management

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how, under present legislation, a shared management school of schools between sectors could be established.

(AQW 11194/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A school under shared management could be established by means of a development proposal under Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986. The management type of the school would be 'voluntary'. At present there are voluntary schools within a number of sectors, including Catholic schools, Irish-medium schools, and a small number of schools owned by the Church of Ireland.

A new school could be jointly owned by the churches and other persons or bodies. The school would be managed by a board of governors that would include persons nominated by the school owners.

Education Other Than At School

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils attending Education Other Than At School projects who achieved five GCSEs at grades C or above, in each of the last three years; and how this compares with the rest of the school population.

(AQW 11224/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is not currently available. As part of the 2010/11 School Leaver data collection the Department is piloting the receipt of a variable which indicates whether pupils enrolled at grant aided post primary schools are in Education Other Than at School. It is intended that this will become part of the School Leavers Survey data collection exercise in the future.

Department for Employment and Learning

Senior Lecturers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many senior lecturers in each university derive a second income; and of these, how many have declared this to their universities.

(AQW 10812/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): As the Department for Employment and Learning does not hold such information, my officials contacted Queen's University and the University of Ulster for a response. Queen's has stated that it does not hold information on Senior Lecturers who earn additional income through non-University related activities.

The University of Ulster has stated that academic staff at the University are permitted to carry out a limited amount of paid consultancy work. In the most recent year for which complete data is available, the 2009/10 academic year, 26 full-time senior lecturers carried out such work, with the net income being shared with the University.

Shared Future Proofing

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what are the cost implications of his intended introduction of 'shared future proofing' of all major departmental policy decisions; and how this proofing will be conducted and against what criteria or benchmarks.

(AQW 10866/11-15)

Dr Farry: Shared Future Proofing complements the existing suite of tools employed throughout the NI Civil Service to analyse policy proposals, such as equality impact assessment. It is integrated into the existing policy development processes within existing budgets.

Shared Future Proofing is carried out early in the process of developing policy proposals or business cases. The purpose of this process is to determine whether such proposals contribute positively to a shared society or inadvertently reinforce divisions, in which case mitigating measures would be considered. The process provides for officials to consider four key issues: whether the proposed policy promotes individuals from different religious, political, racial or other section 75(1) backgrounds sharing or engaging together; whether the proposed policy would inadvertently create a situation where people categorised in different groups under Section 75(1) backgrounds would be accessing services or facilities on a segregated or separate basis; whether the proposed policy would remove or address any barriers to people sharing; and whether the proposed policy would inadvertently erect any barriers to people sharing?

In relation to each of these questions, officials consider and set out any qualitative or quantitative evidence available, and explore any possible mitigating measures. The cost of the process is negligible as it is an integral part of policy development.

The outworkings of the shared future proofing should lead to reductions in costs.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when the consultation on the future of the Education Maintenance Allowance will commence.

(AQW 10925/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department and the Department of Education are currently considering a range of options for the future of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme in order to address the current weaknesses of the scheme as identified in the Review and to target the allowance at those in most need.

Once finalised, these options will be presented to the Executive. Subject to securing Executive approval, it is intended that a public consultation will follow early in the summer.

Jobseekers Attending Interviews in the Republic of Ireland

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether assistance is offered to jobseekers who are attending interviews in the Republic of Ireland; and whether his Department has any plans to create travel allowances for the jobseekers.

(AQW 10956/11-15)

Dr Farry: Assistance for unemployed jobseekers to attend interviews is available from my Department under the Travel to Interview Scheme. Following a recent review of its geographical scope the scheme was extended to include job interviews in the Republic of Ireland.

Employment Opportunities for People with a Disability

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department is taking to increase employment opportunities for people with a disability.

(AQW 10980/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has a range of pre-employment and employment programmes and services to prepare and support people with disabilities to avail of the employment opportunities that are available.

Specialist provision offered by the Disability Employment Service (DES) includes:

- an Occupational Psychology Service which carries out employment assessments for individual clients seeking employment, as well as retention assessments for existing employees at their workplace;
- the Workable programme which helps people with a disability move into employment and then provides medium to long term in-work support, such as a specialist Job Coach. It can also include disability training and education for employers;
- the Access to Work programme which provides a variety of practical supports such as assistance with travel to work, interpreter support and funding for specialist equipment;
- the Condition Management Programme, delivered by Health professionals to help people with health conditions and disabilities manage and overcome their health related barriers to employment so that they are more ready to make a return to the workplace;
- the Return to Work Credit, a weekly grant of £40 per week, paid to eligible benefit recipients earning less than £15k per annum for their first year back in employment. This financial support is helping people with a disability to make the transition from benefits into employment;
- Supported Permitted Work, disability specialist staff support people in receipt of defined benefits to be able to work for up to 16 hours a week. Often this support will help the disabled employee progress to unsupported employment and enable them to extend their working hours;
- the Job Introduction Scheme, a short job trial of 13 weeks for someone with a disability trying to enter the labour market;
- the Department is about to conclude tendering for delivery of new provision, Work Connect. This programme is aimed at clients on health related benefits and will include a range of flexible pre-employment supports to help clients progress towards and move into work and, if successful, in sustaining this employment.

The Department's provision is delivered on a pan-disability basis by staff, healthcare professionals and specialist providers with the range of expertise required to meet the needs of disabled people looking to progress towards employment or to find and keep a job.

All provision can be accessed through specialist Employment Advisers based in Jobs and Benefits Offices/Jobcentres. Specialist staff from DES provides support and guidance to the Employment Advisers.

In addition, the Department continues to work with the Equality Commission, Employers for Disability Northern Ireland (EFDNI) and Disability organisations to promote people with disabilities to employers and to advocate on behalf of this client group.

Apprenticeships: Creative Industries

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what support his Department has provided for apprenticeship places in the Creative Industries.

(AQW 10985/11-15)

Dr Farry: In order to address specific skills gaps and needs within the Creative Industries sector, my Department has introduced a pilot apprenticeship programme in the sector in conjunction with Belfast Metropolitan College and Creative and Cultural Skills. The pilot commenced in March 2011 and is due to complete on 30 September 2012. To date, all five apprentices are on target to complete their Level 3 Apprentice framework, after which the pilot will be fully evaluated.

Apprenticeships: Electricians

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many apprenticeships for electricians have been created in each of the last five years; and how many he estimates will be created next year, given the current economic climate.

(AQW 10992/11-15)

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 data at Annex A details the number of apprentices who started on ApprenticeshipsNI and Jobskills programmes, in the electrical and building/construction sectors over the previous five financial years. The electrical figures for ApprenticeshipsNI are inclusive of two Jobskills Modern Apprenticeship participants, one of whom started during 2007-2008 and the other the following year.

While the Jobskills programme was replaced in September 2007 for new starts, existing Jobskills participants continued to progress within Jobskills until their training entitlement was complete.

It should be noted that my Department holds validated ApprenticeshipsNI data at sector level based on the Register of Regulated Qualifications classification system. The figures for the building and constructions sectors are therefore inclusive of joinery, plastering, machine operating, tiling and bricklaying occupations.

The number of ApprenticeshipsNI starts next year will again be determined by employers based on the needs of their industry. There are currently 11,342 participants availing of ApprenticeshipsNI training, of which 699 are following construction related frameworks.

Annex A**ApprenticeshipsNI Starts**

Start Period	Electrical	Building and Construction
1 Apr 2007 31 Mar 2008	397	1014
1 Apr 2008 31 Mar 2009	201	737
1 Apr 2009 31 Mar 2010	126	708
1 Apr 2010 31 Mar 2011	81	546
1 Apr 2011 31 Mar 2012	86	394

Jobskills Starts

Start Period	Wood Occupations, Plastering, Tiling	Brick Occupations - Paving, Stone
1 Apr 2007 31 Mar 2008	537	130
1 Apr 2008 31 Mar 2009	98	21
1 Apr 2009 31 Mar 2010	10	1
1 Apr 2010 31 Mar 2011	1	0
1 Apr 2011 31 Mar 2012	0	0

Apprenticeships: Joiners

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many apprenticeships for joiners have been created in each of the last five years; and how many he estimates will be created next year, given the current economic climate.

(AQW 10993/11-15)

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 data at Annex A details the number of apprentices who started on ApprenticeshipsNI and Jobskills programmes, in the electrical and building/construction sectors over the previous five financial years. The electrical figures for ApprenticeshipsNI are inclusive of two Jobskills Modern Apprenticeship participants, one of whom started during 2007-2008 and the other the following year.

While the Jobskills programme was replaced in September 2007 for new starts, existing Jobskills participants continued to progress within Jobskills until their training entitlement was complete.

It should be noted that my Department holds validated ApprenticeshipsNI data at sector level based on the Register of Regulated Qualifications classification system. The figures for the building and constructions sectors are therefore inclusive of joinery, plastering, machine operating, tiling and bricklaying occupations.

The number of ApprenticeshipsNI starts next year will again be determined by employers based on the needs of their industry. There are currently 11,342 participants availing of ApprenticeshipsNI training, of which 699 are following construction related frameworks.

Annex A**ApprenticeshipsNI Starts**

Start Period	Electrical	Building and Construction
1 Apr 2007 31 Mar 2008	397	1014
1 Apr 2008 31 Mar 2009	201	737
1 Apr 2009 31 Mar 2010	126	708
1 Apr 2010 31 Mar 2011	81	546
1 Apr 2011 31 Mar 2012	86	394

Jobskills Starts

Start Period	Wood Occupations, Plastering, Tiling	Brick Occupations - Paving, Stone
1 Apr 2007 31 Mar 2008	537	130
1 Apr 2008 31 Mar 2009	98	21
1 Apr 2009 31 Mar 2010	10	1
1 Apr 2010 31 Mar 2011	1	0
1 Apr 2011 31 Mar 2012	0	0

Apprenticeships: Plasterers

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many apprenticeships for plasterers have been created in each of the last five years; and how many he estimates will be created next year, given the current economic climate.

(AQW 10994/11-15)

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 data at Annex A details the number of apprentices who started on ApprenticeshipsNI and Jobskills programmes, in the electrical and building/construction sectors over the previous five financial years. The electrical figures for ApprenticeshipsNI are inclusive of two Jobskills Modern Apprenticeship participants, one of whom started during 2007-2008 and the other the following year.

While the Jobskills programme was replaced in September 2007 for new starts, existing Jobskills participants continued to progress within Jobskills until their training entitlement was complete.

It should be noted that my Department holds validated ApprenticeshipsNI data at sector level based on the Register of Regulated Qualifications classification system. The figures for the building and constructions sectors are therefore inclusive of joinery, plastering, machine operating, tiling and bricklaying occupations.

The number of ApprenticeshipsNI starts next year will again be determined by employers based on the needs of their industry. There are currently 11,342 participants availing of ApprenticeshipsNI training, of which 699 are following construction related frameworks.

Annex A**ApprenticeshipsNI Starts**

Start Period	Electrical	Building and Construction
1 Apr 2007 31 Mar 2008	397	1014
1 Apr 2008 31 Mar 2009	201	737
1 Apr 2009 31 Mar 2010	126	708
1 Apr 2010 31 Mar 2011	81	546
1 Apr 2011 31 Mar 2012	86	394

Jobskills Starts

Start Period	Wood Occupations, Plastering, Tiling	Brick Occupations - Paving, Stone
1 Apr 2007 31 Mar 2008	537	130
1 Apr 2008 31 Mar 2009	98	21
1 Apr 2009 31 Mar 2010	10	1
1 Apr 2010 31 Mar 2011	1	0
1 Apr 2011 31 Mar 2012	0	0

Apprenticeships: Machine Operators

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many apprenticeships for machine operators in the construction industry have been created in each of the last five years; and how many he estimates will be created next year, given the current economic climate.

(AQW 10995/11-15)

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 data at Annex A details the number of apprentices who started on ApprenticeshipsNI and Jobskills programmes, in the electrical and building/construction sectors over the previous five financial years. The electrical figures for ApprenticeshipsNI are inclusive of two Jobskills Modern Apprenticeship participants, one of whom started during 2007-2008 and the other the following year.

While the Jobskills programme was replaced in September 2007 for new starts, existing Jobskills participants continued to progress within Jobskills until their training entitlement was complete.

It should be noted that my Department holds validated ApprenticeshipsNI data at sector level based on the Register of Regulated Qualifications classification system. The figures for the building and constructions sectors are therefore inclusive of joinery, plastering, machine operating, tiling and bricklaying occupations.

The number of ApprenticeshipsNI starts next year will again be determined by employers based on the needs of their industry. There are currently 11,342 participants availing of ApprenticeshipsNI training, of which 699 are following construction related frameworks.

Annex A**ApprenticeshipsNI Starts**

Start Period	Electrical	Building and Construction
1 Apr 2007 31 Mar 2008	397	1014
1 Apr 2008 31 Mar 2009	201	737
1 Apr 2009 31 Mar 2010	126	708
1 Apr 2010 31 Mar 2011	81	546
1 Apr 2011 31 Mar 2012	86	394

Jobskills Starts

Start Period	Wood Occupations, Plastering, Tiling	Brick Occupations - Paving, Stone
1 Apr 2007 31 Mar 2008	537	130
1 Apr 2008 31 Mar 2009	98	21
1 Apr 2009 31 Mar 2010	10	1
1 Apr 2010 31 Mar 2011	1	0
1 Apr 2011 31 Mar 2012	0	0

Defibrillators

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department is taking to increase the number of defibrillators in buildings used by his Department or its arm's-length bodies, including colleges.

(AQW 11028/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning has no plans to increase the number of defibrillators in Departmental buildings or those used by arm's-length bodies and colleges. Weighing risk against cost the provision of defibrillators would not represent value for money.

Apprenticeships: Construction Industry

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many apprenticeships in the construction industry have been created in each of the last five years; and how many he estimates will be created next year, given the current economic climate.
(AQW 11087/11-15)

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 data at Annex A details the number of apprentices who started on ApprenticeshipsNI and Jobskills programmes in the construction industry over the previous five financial years. While the Jobskills Programme was replaced in September 2007 for new starts, existing Jobskills participants continued to progress within Jobskills until their training entitlement was complete.

The number of ApprenticeshipsNI starts in the construction industry next year will again be determined by employers based on their business needs.

However, it is encouraging to note that of the current 11,342 ApprenticeshipsNI participants, 699 are following construction related frameworks.

Annex A**ApprenticeshipsNI Starts**

Start Period	Building and Construction
1 Apr 2007 31 Mar 2008	1014
1 Apr 2008 31 Mar 2009	737
1 Apr 2009 31 Mar 2010	708
1 Apr 2010 31 Mar 2011	546
1 Apr 2011 31 Mar 2012	394

Jobskills Starts

Start Period	Construction
1 Apr 2007 31 Mar 2008	992
1 Apr 2008 31 Mar 2009	171
1 Apr 2009 31 Mar 2010	15
1 Apr 2010 31 Mar 2011	1
1 Apr 2011 31 Mar 2012	0

Apprenticeships: Roof Tilers

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many apprenticeships for roof tilers have been created in each of the last five years; and how many he estimates will be created next year, given the current economic climate.

(AQW 11088/11-15)

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 data at Annex A details the number of apprentices who started on ApprenticeshipsNI and Jobskills programmes, in the electrical and building/construction sectors over the previous five financial years. The electrical figures for ApprenticeshipsNI are inclusive of two Jobskills Modern Apprenticeship participants, one of whom started during 2007-2008 and the other the following year.

While the Jobskills programme was replaced in September 2007 for new starts, existing Jobskills participants continued to progress within Jobskills until their training entitlement was complete.

It should be noted that my Department holds validated ApprenticeshipsNI data at sector level based on the Register of Regulated Qualifications classification system. The figures for the building and constructions sectors are therefore inclusive of joinery, plastering, machine operating, tiling and bricklaying occupations.

The number of ApprenticeshipsNI starts next year will again be determined by employers based on the needs of their industry. There are currently 11,342 participants availing of ApprenticeshipsNI training, of which 699 are following construction related frameworks.

Annex A**ApprenticeshipsNI Starts**

Start Period	Electrical	Building and Construction
1 Apr 2007 31 Mar 2008	397	1014

Start Period	Electrical	Building and Construction
1 Apr 2008 31 Mar 2009	201	737
1 Apr 2009 31 Mar 2010	126	708
1 Apr 2010 31 Mar 2011	81	546
1 Apr 2011 31 Mar 2012	86	394

Jobskills Starts

Start Period	Wood Occupations, Plastering, Tiling	Brick Occupations - Paving, Stone
1 Apr 2007 31 Mar 2008	537	130
1 Apr 2008 31 Mar 2009	98	21
1 Apr 2009 31 Mar 2010	10	1
1 Apr 2010 31 Mar 2011	1	0
1 Apr 2011 31 Mar 2012	0	0

Construction Training Schools

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he has any plans to re-open the construction training schools.
(AQW 11090/11-15)

Dr Farry: It is not my intention to re-open the former training centres. A range of training provision across construction related disciplines is currently available, for example within the Further Education Colleges, other training organisations and Universities. In addition, CITB-ConstructionSkills NI organises training in the few specialist areas where mainstream training is not available. CITB-ConstructionSkills NI also pays training grants to employers out of the levy scheme in support of core workers, apprentices and entrant graduates. My Department is also funding schemes to provide accredited qualifications to experienced workers in the construction industry.

EU Students: Eligibility Criteria

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the eligibility criteria which determines whether a student is considered to be an EU student for the purpose of tuition fees; and whether owning a passport from an EU country is the sole determinant.

(AQW 11132/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Student Fees (Qualifying Courses and Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007 (as amended) detail the various categories of students who qualify to have their fees regulated for undergraduate courses at publicly funded Higher Education Institutions in Northern Ireland.

In accordance with the Regulations, an EU National (or the family member of such a person) qualifies to have his/her fees regulated provided he/she has been ordinarily resident in the territory comprising the European Economic Area and Switzerland throughout the three year period preceding the first day of the first academic year of the course. A passport from an EU country is not, therefore, the sole determinant.

Colleges and Community Outreach Centres that Deliver Further Education Courses

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to list the colleges and community outreach centres that deliver further education courses, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 11141/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department does not hold the information requested by the Member.

I have, therefore, passed this query to the six Further Education College Directors to respond to the Member directly.

Further Education Courses in the East Antrim Area

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to list the further education courses that are available in the East Antrim area, broken down by community outreach centre and further education college.

(AQW 11143/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department does not hold the information requested by the Member.

I have, therefore, passed this query to the Director of Northern Regional College, who will respond to the Member, directly.

Higher Education Strategy

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether his Department's Higher Education Strategy was approved by the Executive, and, if so, when.

(AQW 11328/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Higher Education Strategy was not submitted to the Executive for approval as it did not cut across the responsibilities of other ministers and, therefore, there was no requirement to do so.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Small and Medium Sized Enterprises: Logistics Solutions

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what work her Department has carried out on improving logistics solutions for small and medium sized enterprises.

(AQW 10721/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Invest NI works with small and medium sized enterprises to help them to build their capability across their supply chain to make them more competitive in today's challenging environment. This includes:

- Providing direct advice and guidance around best practice supply chain management tools and techniques
- Supporting businesses to review their logistics practices to enable them to develop more innovative solutions in this area
- Implementing a pilot programme in the Aerospace sector to develop the extended local supply base through the adoption of the SC21 (21st Century Supply Chain) model
- Providing supply chain advice and direction to specific sectors e.g. Hospitality sector etc
- Invest NI's Sustainable Development, Trade and Skills & Strategy teams working together on potential FDI projects and co-ordinating meet the buyer events to enable local businesses to promote their capabilities to the potential new customers with a view of developing the local supply base
- Linking with the local councils to help maximise supply chain opportunities for small and medium sized enterprises on pending capital investment programmes.

It is the intent of Invest NI to continue to develop their supply chain services offering and work at educating, coaching and mentoring small and medium sized enterprises to develop their supply chain capability and competitiveness going forward.

Grant Assistance for Equipping a Tourist Information Centre: Ranfurly House, Dungannon

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council's application for grant assistance for equipping a tourist information centre facility at Runfurly House, Dungannon was unsuccessful; and for her assessment of the quality of the application.

(AQW 10851/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The application to the Tourism Development Scheme (TDS) 2011-13 from Dungannon and South Tyrone Council for 'Ranfurly House Arts and Tourist Information Centre' was not unsuccessful.

It was evaluated against the Stage 1 key scoring criteria and has been placed on a reserve list of projects that may be brought forward for detailed Stage 2 assessment and economic appraisal should additional capital funding become available to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB).

As I had no involvement in the application process, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the quality of the application, however feedback on the stage 1 scoring of the application has been provided to the Council by officials at NITB.

Tourism Projects: Grant Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the total amount of grant aid provided to each local council for tourism projects in the last two years; (ii) the projects that were funded; (iii) the funding provided for each project; and (iv) the percentage that the grant aid represented of the total capital spend on each project.

(AQW 10853/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The table below details the information sought.

Local Authority and Projects (i) and (ii)	Grant Offered £ (iii)	Project Costs £	Percentage % (iv)
Antrim	0.00	0.00	-
Ards	0.00	0.00	-
Armagh	282,815.62	723,580.96	39.09%
St Patrick's Trail, Abbey Street Link	65,000.00	157,000.00	41.40%
Armagh Totem Poles Project	26,688.12	35,584.16	75.00%
Palace Demesne, Armagh	130,922.00	290,408.80	45.08%
Downpatrick Walking Trail, Armagh	20,205.50	40,411.00	50.00%
Saint Patrick's Festival, Armagh	20,000.00	85,000.00	23.53%
Georgian Christmas, Armagh	15,000.00	60,000.00	25.00%
Georgian Day, Armagh	5,000.00	55,177.00	9.06%
Ballymena	230,724.85	498,847.70	46.25%
Portglenone Marina	224,849.85	487,097.70	46.16%
Slemish, Broughshane	5,875.00	11,750.00	50.00%
Ballymoney	0.00	£0.00	
Banbridge	45,000.00	90,000.00	50.00%
Banbridge TIC	45,000.00	90,000.00	50.00%
Belfast	2,060,000.00	5,100,829.81	40.39%
European Pipe Band Championships and Piping is Class Festival	20,000.00	203,182.00	9.84%
Titanic and Maritime Heritage Signage	190,000.00	450,825.81	42.14%
Titanic Festival	1,400,000.00	3,438,822.00	40.71%
MTV EMA's	450,000.00	1,008,000.00	44.64%
Carrickfergus	0.00	0.00	
Castlereagh	0.00	0.00	
Coleraine	600,045.24	3,504,824.50	17.12%
Northern Ireland Community Archive	22,500.00	30,000.00	75.00%
Portstewart Strand Interpretation	15,215.24	30,430.50	50.00%
East Strand Public Art	49,724.00	103,648.00	47.97%
Lansdowne Shelter & Lighting	145,000.00	305,000.00	47.54%

Local Authority and Projects (i) and (ii)	Grant Offered £ (iii)	Project Costs £	Percentage % (iv)
Station Square, Portrush	250,000.00	2,403,484.00	10.40%
East Strand Lighting	51,606.00	103,212.00	50.00%
Northern Ireland International Airshow 2011	6,000.00	169,050.00	3.55%
Olympic Torch Culture, Arts and Sports Festival	30,000.00	130,000.00	23.08%
NI International Airshow 2012	10,000.00	170,000.00	5.88%
Portrush Regatta	20,000.00	60,000.00	33.33%
Cookstown	0.00	0.00	
Craigavon	0.00	0.00	
Londonderry	3,986,686.00	12,409,576.00	32.13%
Walled City Lighting Strategy	1,426,686.00	2,018,168.00	70.69%
Restoration of Guild Hall	2,500,000.00	9,599,436.00	26.04%
City of Derry Jazz and Big Band Festival 2011	30,000.00	285,740.00	10.50%
Banks of the Foyle Halloween Carnival 2012	20,000.00	274,676.00	7.28%
Banks of the Foyle Halloween Carnival 2011	10,000.00	231,556.00	4.32%
Down	2,656,103.28	7,622,546.33	34.85%
Slieve Patrick	43,514.80	94,529.60	46.03%
Local TIC Points	6,680.00	13,360.00	50.00%
Twelve Arches	58,462.00	116,923.00	50.00%
Inner Bay, Dundrum	93,104.00	186,707.84	49.87%
Dundrum Main Street	54,697.00	109,393.00	50.00%
Greenbanks, Dundrum	21,990.08	43,980.16	50.00%
Mourne Mountain Bike Trails	1,414,691.25	1,894,255.00	74.68%
Downpatrick Walking Trail	20,205.50	40,411.00	50.00%
St Patrick's Grave	4,692.00	9,384.00	50.00%
Down Cultural Development Plan	288,991.00	3,239,991.00	8.92%
Down Arts Centre	390,572.00	1,367,563.53	28.56%
Down Totem Poles	16,438.65	21,918.20	75.00%
Down Walking Routes	186,065.00	372,130.00	50.00%
Preparing for Market - Exporting Tourism	56,000.00	112,000.00	50.00%
Dungannon	0.00	0.00	
Fermanagh	0.00	0.00	
Larne	132,802.50	265,605.00	50.00%
Glenarm&Carnfunnock Visitor Infrastructure	132,802.50	265,605.00	50.00%
Limavady	31,237.50	62,475.00	50.00%
Limavady Explore See Do Arts & Sculpture Trail	31,237.50	62,475.00	50.00%
Lisburn	30,000.00	210,462.00	14.25%

Local Authority and Projects (i) and (ii)	Grant Offered £ (iii)	Project Costs £	Percentage % (iv)
3 Day Hot Air Balloon Festival	15,000.00	93,712.00	16.01%
2012 Northern Ireland Balloon Festival	15,000.00	116,750.00	12.85%
Magherafelt	£0.00	£0.00	
Moyle	315,898.91	644,352.07	49.03%
Ballycastle Town Trails	70,500.00	153,554.22	45.91%
Ballintoy Harbour	37,683.00	75,366.00	50.00%
Ballycastle Seafront	120,655.27	241,310.55	50.00%
Ballycastle Harbour	29,821.86	59,643.73	50.00%
Rathlin Harbour	54,238.62	108,477.25	50.00%
Coolranny	3,000.16	6,000.32	50.00%
Newry and Mourne	310,577.43	623,485.98	49.81%
Annalong Coastal Path	163,268.85	331,321.88	49.28%
Whitewater Visitor Amenity Upgrade	41,659.00	83,318.00	50.00%
Narrow Water & Mill Bill Amenity Signage	16,500.00	33,000.00	50.00%
Bagenal's Castle	48,310.00	96,620.00	50.00%
Donaghaguy Reservoir	37,160.00	74,320.00	50.00%
Bagenal's Castle Totem Pole	3,679.58	4,906.10	75.00%
Newtownabbey	0.00	0.00	
North Down	58,716.58	113,960.00	51.52%
North Down Mourne Coastal Route Improvements	11,891.00	23,782.00	50.00%
North Down Museum	10,386.00	22,771.00	45.61%
North Down Museum Christian Heritage Display	28,232.00	56,464.00	50.00%
North Down Totem Project	8,207.58	10,943.00	75.00%
Omagh	0.00	0.00	
Strabane	0.00	0.00	
Totals	10,740,607.91	31,870,545.35	33.7%

* Results are based on offers made in the requested timeframe.

Grant Assistance: Extension of Dungannon Park Tourist Caravan Site

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council's application for grant assistance on the extension of the Dungannon Park Tourist Caravan Site was unsuccessful; and for her assessment of the quality of the application.

(AQW 10855/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The application to the Tourism Development Scheme (TDS) 2011-13 from Dungannon and South Tyrone Council for the proposed extension of the Dungannon Park Tourist Caravan Site was not unsuccessful.

It was evaluated against the Stage 1 key scoring criteria and has been placed on a reserve list of projects that may be brought forward for detailed Stage 2 assessment and economic appraisal should additional capital funding become available to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB).

As I had no involvement in the application process, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the quality of the application, however feedback on the stage 1 scoring of the application has been provided to the Council by officials at NITB.

'Game of Thrones': NI Screen Funding

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much funding Home Box Office received from NI Screen to film Game of Thrones in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 10879/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Game of Thrones is a major international TV series by US based Home Box Office (HBO), arguably the world's most successful international producer of high end cinematic TV productions. Northern Ireland Screen, through its funding support from Invest NI, has provided HBO with assistance of £6.05m, under the Northern Ireland Screen Fund, to secure the pilot episode and the first two series of this award winning medieval fantasy drama. This assistance has generated in excess of £43m direct spend in the local economy.

Game of Thrones is a prime example of the type of production Invest NI and Northern Ireland Screen wish to secure for Northern Ireland and is a key element contributing to the continued success of our screen industries. It was recently announced that Series 3 of Game of Thrones will also film here and Northern Ireland Screen is currently in advanced discussions with HBO to secure the maximum economic benefits possible for Northern Ireland from this forthcoming production.

'Game of Thrones': Financial Benefit

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an estimate of the financial benefit derived from Home Box Office filming Game of Thrones in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 10880/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Northern Ireland Screen, through its funding support from Invest NI, has provided some £6.05m of financial assistance to Home Box Office (HBO) to secure the pilot episode and the first two series of Game of Thrones. This assistance has generated in excess of £43m of direct spend for the Northern Ireland economy. Direct Northern Ireland spend includes all expenditure generated in the local economy including wages and salaries of Northern Ireland resident cast and crew, hotel bills, facilities hire, transport hire and constructions costs.

HBO has recently announced that Series Three of Game of Thrones will also film in Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Screen is currently in advanced discussions with the award winning US broadcaster to secure the maximum economic benefits possible for Northern Ireland from this forthcoming production.

Throughout its lifespan it is likely that Game of Thrones will deliver the widest media exposure Northern Ireland has ever achieved outside of politics and the Troubles. Tourism Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board have, through this drama series, the opportunity to showcase many tourist attractions including the North Coast, Castle Ward, the Mourne Mountains, and Ballintoy to name but a few.

In addition Invest NI and Northern Ireland Screen are utilising Game of Thrones in their international sales pitch. The credibility of association with international projects of this nature and scale has significant added value potential for the Northern Ireland economy.

'Game of Thrones': Third Series

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department plans to maximise the opportunities resulting from the filming of a third series of Game of Thrones.

(AQW 10881/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI and Northern Ireland Screen are focussed on maximising the economic value of each series of Game of Thrones to Northern Ireland and in ensuring that HBO continues to utilise Northern Ireland as its primary filming base for all future series of this popular TV drama. Northern Ireland Screen is also working with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland to explore opportunities to showcase Northern Ireland from a tourism perspective on the back of Game of Thrones and continues to market Northern Ireland as a key production centre through advertising in key trade publications and attendance at key screen industry trade events.

In addition both Invest NI and Northern Ireland Screen are utilising Game of Thrones in their international sales pitch. The credibility of association with international projects of this nature and scale has significant added value potential for the Northern Ireland economy.

Gas Network: Extension

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to provide copies of any research commissioned by her Department on the extension of the gas network.

(AQW 11244/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A copy of the summary report of the 2010 feasibility study, 'Potential Extension of Natural Gas and Related Services in Northern Ireland', which was jointly commissioned by the Department and the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, is available on the DETI website at http://www.detini.gov.uk/potential_extension_of_natural_gas_and_related_services_in_ni_-feasibility_study_executive_summary.pdf.

Production Companies

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, further to the announcement about filming the third series of Game of Thrones, what additional steps are being taken to attract production companies to Northern Ireland.

(AQO 1921/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI and Northern Ireland Screen are focussed on maximising the economic value of each series of Game of Thrones to Northern Ireland and in ensuring that HBO continues to utilise Northern Ireland as its primary filming base for all future series of this popular TV drama.

Northern Ireland Screen actively markets Northern Ireland as a production centre through attendance at key trade events including Kidscreen in New York, MIPTV in Cannes and the Cannes Film Festival among others.

Work is at an advanced stage in Belfast's Titanic Quarter to develop new high end sound stages, to complement the existing Paint Hall facility, as a key tool to attract international productions to Northern Ireland. In addition, Invest NI and Northern Ireland Screen are utilising Game of Thrones in their international sales pitch. The credibility of association with international production projects of this nature and scale has significant added value potential for the Northern Ireland economy.

Department of the Environment

Enforcement Action: North Down Borough Council Area

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what is the average time taken to implement an Enforcement Action in the North Down Borough Council area.

(AQW 9438/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): It is only possible to provide details of a general nature on current and previous enforcement cases. Enforcement investigations are mainly carried out following notification from the public that permission has not been granted or that work has not being carried out in accordance with approved plans, etc. Only a small proportion of investigations result in formal enforcement action. In the current business year to date, four enforcement notices have been served in the North Down Borough Council area. The length of time that was required to reach this stage varied for each one and on average was 3 years and 10 months.

The Department is currently working to up-date data held on every current case in its recently introduced computer system. It is not possible at this point in time to provide up-to-date performance figures or general trends until this exercise is complete.

Electric Cars

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many electric cars are used by his Department; and (ii) whether he intends to use an electric car as his Ministerial vehicle or for some of his Ministerial duties.

(AQW 10351/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Transport overall, and the private car in particular, is a major contributor to our greenhouse gas emissions and I recognise the role which electric vehicles could play in tackling this challenge while retaining flexibility over transport choice. Although there are currently no electric cars being used by my Department, I and my Ministerial colleague Danny Kennedy recently agreed to each undertake a short trial of an electric vehicle for our Ministerial duties.

I was very impressed with the electric car and although it may not be suitable for all journeys I have asked my officials to work with their DRD colleagues to develop a business case to determine whether the purchase of a number of electric vehicles would be viable.

The global momentum towards the electrification of transport is gathering and it is encouraging to see that as a result of the "ecar" project several councils have already committed to the purchase of electric vehicles. However I believe we can all do more and I would encourage government Departments and local councils to consider all available opportunities to switch to, and promote, electric vehicle usage.

Statutory Off Road Notification Certificate

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment whether a Statutory Off Road Notification Certificate must be applied for annually for a vehicle that has been broken for spare parts.

(AQW 10380/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The law required that the registered keeper of a vehicle, including a vehicle that has been broken up or is being kept for parts, must either license it or, if it is being kept off the road, make an annual statutory off-road notification (SORN). SORN indicates that the vehicle is off the public road and therefore not liable for vehicle excise duty.

The keeper must continue to make SORN declarations until the vehicle has been transferred to another keeper or passed to an authorised treatment facility to be disposed off legally.

I understand that the Department for Transport, which has policy responsibility for vehicle licensing throughout the UK, is currently considering the need for annual SORN declarations.

Vehicles Required to be Crushed

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment under what circumstances a vehicle is required to be crushed.
(AQW 10381/11-15)

Mr Attwood: By law, an end-of-life vehicle must be taken to an authorised treatment facility (ATF) to be destroyed in an environmentally friendly way. The ATF notifies the Driver & Vehicle Agency that the vehicle has been destroyed and issues the person presenting the vehicle with a certificate of destruction. This effectively closes down the vehicle record and ends the registered keeper's responsibility for the vehicle.

Where an unlicensed vehicle has been wheelclamped by the contractor and it has not been reclaimed, the contractor, under the terms of the wheelclamping contract, the contractor makes the decision as to whether to sell the vehicle or pass it to an ATF for destruction.

There is no waste legislation which requires the crushing of cars. However, waste operators are required to recycle as much of a vehicle as possible.

End-of-life vehicles (ELVs) are classified as hazardous waste and must be depolluted in accordance with European legislation, prior to dismantling, crushing or shredding.

The End-of Life Vehicles Directive (2000/53/EC), which was adopted on 20 October 2000, introduced measures to promote and increase recycling and to further protect the environment by requiring adequate depollution. It also set minimum technical requirements for the treatment of ELVs.

ELV treatment facilities carrying out depollution must be licensed as ATFs by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

The Waste Management Licensing Regulations (NI) 2003 (as amended), Schedule 5, Part II, specify minimum technical requirements for the keeping and treatment of ELVs.

Vehicles Broken for Parts

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment what is the procedure where a vehicle has been broken for parts and is no longer usable.
(AQW 10426/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The law requires that the registered keeper of a vehicle must either license it or, if it is being kept off the road, make a statutory off-road notification (SORN).

If a vehicle keeper has broken up a vehicle but is keeping the parts, they must make a SORN declaration every year to let the Driver & Vehicle Agency know that the vehicle is unlicensed and being kept off the public road.

Only when the parts that remain of the vehicle are presented to an authorised treatment facility and a certificate of destruction has been issued is the vehicle record closed down.

Local Council Staff: Redundancy or Retirement Packages

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 8062/11-15, what position did each person hold prior to their retirement and to what position were they subsequently re-employed.
(AQW 10451/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I can advise that one of the three officers involved was re-employed in the same position and that two were re-employed in a lower position.

I am not able to provide further details since to do so could breach the principles of the Data Protection Act and be unfair to the officers involved.

Proposed Mechanical Biological Treatment and Energy from Waste Facilities

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of the Environment when arc21 will announce the preferred bidder for the proposed Mechanical Biological Treatment and Energy from Waste facilities.
(AQW 10476/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The appointment and announcement of a Preferred Bidder by arc21 remains subject to the completion of several procurement process and governance steps. arc21 currently expect this to be sometime in November or December 2012.

arc21 will make any appointment of a preferred bidder public by an announcement on its website and an appropriate media release issued via its communications advisors.

Proposed Mechanical Biological Treatment and Energy from Waste Facilities

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of the Environment when he expects arc21 to submit planning applications for the proposed Mechanical Biological Treatment and Energy from Waste facilities.

(AQW 10477/11-15)

Mr Attwood: arc21 has advised (week beginning 16 April) that its bidder's intention is to submit a draft Environmental Statement in June 2012. Assuming that this date is adhered to and the PAD then commences in the summer, a formal planning application would then be submitted in the first quarter of 2013.

Old Railway Station Building, Cultra

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what steps are being taken to preserve the Old Railway Station Building, Cultra.

(AQW 10483/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Cultra Station House, Cultra, County Down is a grade B1 listed building. The extent of listing covers the former Station Master's house and station, constructed as one building c.1880-1899. A Building Preservation Notice (spot listing) was served on the building on 29 June 2007, and the listing was confirmed on 12 December 2007.

NIEA has been concerned about the condition of the property and has been involved in discussion with the owner. After NIEA first raised concerns some steps to secure the building were taken. However, a further warning letter was sent to the owner on 29 March 2012, seeking additional works to secure the building. A reply was received on 2 April, indicating willingness to carry out any necessary works. A meeting has been arranged on site with the owner, to agree a schedule of works necessary to secure the building. It is expected that some progress will be made in the near future.

In addition, the NIEA Principal Conservation Architect is meeting with Cllr Andrew Muir (Councillor with North Down Borough Council, and Vice Chair of the Alliance Party), Larry Thompson and representatives of both the Holywood Conservation Group and Holywood Old School Preservation Trust on the 16 May, to discuss proposals for the building. This is a follow on meeting from an earlier one with the same individuals and groups plus the Director of Built Heritage in NIEA and a representative from NITB and NMNI (Cultra) at which a way forward was charted, with local interests/groups in the lead and with the offer of advice, support and, ultimately possibly also grant-aid from NIEA.

Bridgewater Park, Banbridge: Expansion

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on his Department's position on the expansion of Bridgewater Park, Banbridge, including the erection of the proposed Tesco Extra Superstore.

(AQW 10498/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Planning permission for this development was granted by the Department on 12 March 2012.

A legal challenge to the Department's decision has been mounted by Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA). The matter is due to be heard by the High Court on 24 September 2012.

Belfast City Council: 'Further Loughside Community Benefit Statement'

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will consider Belfast City Council's 'Further Loughside Community Benefit Statement' in relation to planning application Z/2009/1607/F, as part of his Department's assessment of the Article 31 planning application for the proposed mixed-use development on lands at Loughside Recreation Centre and playing fields, the former Tramway Depot and the Mount Vernon open space on the Shore Road, Belfast.

(AQW 10519/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am advised by my officials that the 'Further Loughside Community Benefit Statement' formed part of a package of further information that was submitted to the Department in March 2012. The information will be taken into consideration as part of the Department's ongoing assessment of the planning application. I expect to receive a report and recommendation from my officials in respect of the application before end of June 2012.

Planning Applications: Hydroelectric Power Schemes

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for hydro-electric power schemes are currently in the planning system; and how many have been approved to date.

(AQW 10803/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There are currently 35 planning applications for hydro-electric power schemes in the planning system awaiting decisions.

Since 2003 the Department has received 66 planning applications for hydro-electric schemes. Of these, 27 have been approved, 1 has been refused, 3 have been withdrawn and 35 are under consideration awaiting decisions.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Review of Public Administration.
(AQW 10870/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am currently managing the reform of local government in line with the 2015 timetable proposed in the Executive's Programme for Government 2011-15.

I am taking forward two main pieces of legislation required to give effect to local government reorganisation, the first of which is the draft Local Government (Boundaries) Order (NI) 2012, which was laid before the Assembly on 24 April 2012. 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.

In addition, to progressing the Bill through the Assembly, a programme of subordinate legislation and guidance will be taken forward to give effect to the Bill. This will include subordinate legislation on shadow arrangements, new governance arrangements, the new ethical standards regime and community planning.

I have also established a number of implementation structures to manage and integrate the work required to bring about the delivery of the overall reform programme. These include:

- a Regional Transition Committee (RTC) to provide high level political leadership and act as the main driver for implementing local government reform;
- a Regional Transition Operational Board to support the RTC and co-ordinate operational delivery, which comprises officers and officials from central and local government;
- a number of Task and Finish Working Groups to undertake key areas of work on transferring functions, finance, HR, legislation, programme delivery, communications and systems convergence, and
- local Voluntary Transition Committees to manage operations and commence convergence of their constituent councils on the ground.

The inaugural meeting of the Regional Transition Committee, which I chair, took place on 25 April 2012 and was attended by the Chairs of the 11 Voluntary Transition Committees including representatives of NILGA and officials from central and local government in support.

MOT Test Centres

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on plans for MOT test centres.
(AQW 10875/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The equipment used for vehicle testing at the Driver & Vehicle Agency's 15 test centres is being refreshed in a programme which started in August 2011 and is due to be completed by July 2012. The refresh programme, which involves some replacement of equipment is to ensure the continued reliability and consistency of the service, is provided under the current Private Finance Initiative contract.

Due to the scale of the work involved it has been necessary to close centres for periods of between four and six days depending on the size of the centre and the number of test lanes.

The programme is currently proceeding as planned with 12 of the centres having been completed and with only Newry, Coleraine and Mallusk still to be done.

Recently Implemented Changes to the MOT Process

The changes to the MOT test introduced as a result of European Commission Directive 2010/48/EU involve the addition of a number of new testable items including dashboard warning lights, towbars and trailer sockets.

The changes have been introduced on a phased basis. From 1 February 2012, a vehicle examiner who identified a defect relating to the new standards has been notifying the customer on an advisory basis, while 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 adopted by the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency in Britain.

Strategic Review

The Department has recently commenced a strategic review of options for the future delivery of vehicle testing in Northern Ireland.

Further details on the review and its findings will be provided to the Environment Committee as progress is made.

The Department continues to monitor European legislation which may have an impact on MOT testing in NI. At this stage, however, there are no immediate proposals which will affect NI's testing regime.

Defibrillators

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to increase the number of defibrillators in buildings used by his department or its arm's-length bodies.

(AQW 10883/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My department currently does not have defibrillators deployed in any of the buildings used by it or its agencies.

I have noted the recent publicity involving cases where the availability of this equipment has proven to be beneficial. Consequently I have asked officials to consult with the Occupational Health Service and report back to me so that I can decide on a policy for the deployment of defibrillators in the Department.

Planning Permission: Validity Period

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of the Environment, given the economic downturn, whether his Department would consider extending the five year validity period for granted planning permissions.

(AQW 10899/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department would already give consideration to granting planning permission for a longer period of time where an applicant indicates in making a planning application that this may be necessary, and can demonstrate that there are clear and justifiable reasons for doing so. An example of this may be an application for renewable energy development, where additional consents are required to be put in place following issue of planning approval. Requests made in this way would be considered on a case by case basis.

Under current planning legislation, there is the facility for those who do not wish to commence development to apply for the renewal of planning permission as the time limit for implementation of the planning approval approaches. For those who do not wish to apply for renewal of planning permission there is the opportunity to commence development on the site in order to implement the planning permission and prevent the permission from lapsing. To assist and provide clarification, my officials have published guidance on this issue 'Guidance on Renewing Planning Permission and Starting Development' which is available to view at DOE Planning Portal. This guidance includes useful examples of when the Department would accept that development has commenced in accordance with the approved planning permission.

However, I have been considering this particular issue, including practice in this regard in other jurisdictions and a potential reduction of planning renewal fees (as part of a current review of planning fees). This assessment is to acknowledge the current economic circumstances, market demand and banking practice (etc) and to interrogate where planning could act to help.

Taxi Meters

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will review the calibration of the proposed taxi meters to reflect local economic constraints in areas such as Derry.

(AQW 10902/11-15)

Mr Attwood: From 23 November 2011 to 17 February 2012 the Department consulted on proposals to introduce a Northern Ireland wide maximum taxi fare; linked to this was a proposed requirement to have all taxis fitted with taximeters. The proposed maximum fare was calculated on the basis that drivers would be able to cover their costs and make a reasonable living. This fare was to be set as a maximum to prevent overcharging of customers; drivers would be able to decide on and offer lower fares if they wished.

From responses to the consultation, it is clear that current fare levels across Northern Ireland vary significantly as does the customer's experience and expectation on the level of charges. There is a particular disparity in fares in the North West and the Department is considering a range of options to address this. Responses to the consultation suggested that the taxi industry would prefer to have taximeters pre-calibrated with the discounted fare rate of their choice; the Department is considering how best to provide for this within the regulatory framework.

Officials are currently completing analysis of the responses to the consultation and, based on this work, I will make my decision on the most appropriate means of bringing forward proposals that will deliver a safe and fit for purpose taxi industry in Northern Ireland that allows those involved in it to make a living from it.

I am aware of the issue and the member's suggestion to which I am giving full consideration.

Narrow Water Bridge: Planning Application

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether his Department will process the Narrow Water Bridge planning application before September 2012; and (ii) whether his Department can expedite the application due to the social and economic benefits that would flow from the development of the bridge.

(AQW 10909/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I can advise that the Southern Area Planning Office is already processing the planning application for the Bridge at Narrow Water as a matter of priority. The proposal raises a number of important issues given the sites location including its position adjacent to a scheduled monument, road safety and navigation issues. The application will be dealt with as quickly

as possible and I have advised officials to be vigilant in managing the application. Clearly, the timeframe will rely on prompt responses from consultees, the applicant and further engagement with Louth Council.

Independent of this is the issue of funding and the view, for example, of the Special EU Programme Body.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment when the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan will come into effect.
(AQW 10911/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) has now delivered all outstanding information to my Department relating to the BMAP Public Inquiry that finished in May 2008.

A dedicated team is currently considering the extensive PAC recommendations in order to prepare the Plan for publication. Significant work has been undertaken in relation to the individual Districts within the Plan area, and work on adoption is progressing.

I fully acknowledge that the delay in publishing BMAP is frustrating, and I am considering what steps can be taken to address this issue. I anticipate making a judgement on the matter in the near future.

Draft Northern Ireland Marine Bill: Clause 24

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has considered how Clause 24 of the draft Northern Ireland Marine Bill might impact on country sport and leisure.
(AQW 10984/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Marine Bill will provide for a new national designation process for the establishment of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) in our territorial waters to enhance protection for nationally important marine wildlife and habitats.

Clause 24 gives the Department the power to make byelaws for the protection of features of an MCZ. Byelaws will be site specific and made on a case-by-case basis. It is envisaged that most MCZs will be designated primarily for the protection of seabed features and as such any related byelaws will have little impact on country sport.

Byelaws are intended to manage activities which could be detrimental to a MCZ and are not regulated or the responsibility of a government department. Examples of such activities include the use of jet skis, diving, or vessel access/speeds. Also, anchoring by leisure craft could cause impacts by damaging delicate seagrass beds, fanshells and other sensitive marine habitats/species. Byelaws could be used to control this on a seasonal or permanent basis, throughout the whole or part of the site. The level of restriction will depend on the feature(s) being protected.

Planning Management Board Referrals

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 10478/11-15, to detail the cases where a decision was overturned due to the number of residential units involved.
(AQW 11068/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department had concerns in relation to the number of residential units proposed in all five of the Management Board Referral applications cited in AQW10478/11-15. The application numbers and refusal reasons are detailed in the attached annex.

ANNEX 1

F/2007/0432/F

The proposal is contrary to Policy QD 1 criterion (a) of Planning Policy Statement 7 (Quality Residential Environments) in that the proposed development, if permitted, together with existing and approved apartment schemes will result in unacceptable damage to the environmental quality, residential amenity and local character of the surrounding area.

The proposal is contrary to Policy QD 1 criterion (a) of Planning Policy Statement 7 (Quality Residential Environments) in that the proposed development, if permitted, would create an unacceptable precedent and the cumulative impact of similar development will result in unacceptable damage to the environmental quality, residential amenity and local character of the surrounding area.

Q/2007/0720/F

The proposal is contrary to Policy QD1 of the Department's Planning Policy Statement 7: Quality Residential Environments in that the development would, if permitted, cause unacceptable damage to the local character, environmental quality and residential amenity of an established residential use and inappropriate layout, scale and massing.

M/2006/1492/F

The proposal is contrary to Policy QD1 of the Department's Planning Policy Statement 7: (PPS 7) Quality Residential Environments and the Dungannon & South Tyrone Area Plan 2010 Plan Policy SETT 1, in that it has not been demonstrated that the proposal is sensitive to the size, character and function of the settlement in terms of scale, form, design and use of materials.

The proposal is contrary to Policy QD1 of the Department's Planning Policy Statement 7: Quality Residential Environments in that the development would, if permitted, cause unacceptable damage to the local character, environmental quality and residential amenity of an established residential area by reason of the intensification of the existing residential use and inappropriate layout, scale and massing.

U/2006/0209/O

The proposal is contrary to Policy QD1 of the Department's Planning Policy Statement 7: Quality Residential Environments in that the development would, if permitted, cause unacceptable damage to the local character of an established residential area by reason of an increase in the scale, form and density of development which represents an overdevelopment of the site and is out of keeping with the character of the area which consists of dwellings with individual curtilages.

W/2005/0668/F

The proposal is contrary to policy QD1(a) of the Department's Planning Policy Statement 7: Quality Residential Environments in that it is out of character with the surrounding context, as the height, scale and massing of the proposed apartments would result in a development that is incongruous in the village of Crawfordsburn and this, when combined with its relationship to other buildings in the vicinity, would be detrimental to visual amenity.

Planning Management Board Referrals

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 10478/11-15, how many of the proposals were (i) solely; or (ii) partly in relation to residential units.

(AQW 11070/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Of the five applications referred to in AQW 10478/11-15 in relation to Management Board Referral cases, (i) four applications were solely for residential development and (ii) one application included residential development as part of a mixed use scheme.

Adria Site, Strabane

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of the Environment whether he intends to change the planning designation of the Adria site, Strabane from industrial use to mix use, to facilitate the development of the site which has become the main focal point for anti-social behaviour and vandalism which affects residents in the adjoining residential areas of Melmount Road and the old Ballycolman areas of the town.

(AQW 11078/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Current planning policy permits the redevelopment of the Adria site, Strabane and therefore it is unnecessary to amend the Area Plan designation which does not specifically zone the site for a particular use. Any proposals may be considered on their merits in line with regional policy (PPS4).

I am aware that the site was previously subject to a planning application (ref J/2006/0907/0) for a mixed use development which was refused planning permission and subsequently dismissed at appeal. The refusal related to concerns at the time that there was a shortage of industrial land available and it was important to maintain this essential industrial land supply.

The need for industrial and business land in Strabane has now been addressed in the short to medium term with the approval of 12 hectares of industrial land at Melmount Road and a mixed use development approved at Strabane/Lifford Road. Therefore a mixed use development would now be acceptable in principle at the Adria site.

The Department is currently considering a planning application on the site for residential development, enterprise units, open space and a school (J/2011/0361/O). This application will be considered on its merits in line with policy.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Economy: Expected Growth

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 8783/11-15, why Northern Ireland does not have an independent growth forecast for the 2012/13 financial year; and whether he will consider introducing a growth forecast.
(AQW 9761/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) is responsible for producing official, independent growth forecasts for the UK. The OBR does not produce regional forecasts and much of the data required for the national model that is used to generate the UK forecasts is not available at a regional level.

Some local academics and economic commentators provide forecasts for the Northern Ireland economy, however, these are often reliant on a wide range of assumptions about how the economy behaves. While these forecasts provide a useful barometer of local economic conditions, these can vary and are commonly subject to revision.

I do not believe there is any real merit in producing a further DFP forecast that would be firstly costly to develop, and secondly which might not be any more reliable or robust given the regional data limitations that we know exist.

Special EU Programmes Body: Peace III Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) how many groups that benefited from PEACE III had their funding withdrawn by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB); (ii) what was the rate or level of disallowance in each case; and (iii) how much the SEUPB has recovered from the groups.

(AQW 10363/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In the last three years, SEUPB has withdrawn PEACE III funding from four organisations in respect of seven separate projects. In each case, the full value of each Letter of Offer has been disallowed, and all of the funding that had been paid to the project is eligible for recovery. This is detailed in the table overleaf. No funds have been recovered to date.

Year Investigation Commenced	Organisation	Project	Letter of Offer value (£)	Percentage of Letter of Offer value disallowed	Amount Eligible for Recovery (£)
2010	FAIR	SACRED	324,628	100%	155,931
	FAIR	CAPABLE	400,725	100%	187,578
	FAIR	EINSTEIN	155,031	100%	25,250
	SAVER / NAVER	Practical Steps Towards Reconciliation	469,686	100%	208,035
2011	SEEDS	One World Centre	60,000	100%	36,951
	Forward Learning	Thin End of the Wedge	1,497,753	100%	429,275
	Forward Learning	Knowing Me Knowing You	309,215	100%	151,789

Special EU Programmes Body

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) what processes are followed by the Special EU Programmes Body when it investigates funded groups and subsequently withdraws funding; and (ii) whether the processes in place are natural justice compliant.

(AQW 10365/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) operates within a strict regulatory environment and, as required by European Commission Regulations, adheres to a number of procedures and protocols in relation to the identification and management of financial irregularities. SEUPB's Certifying Authority has the responsibility for reporting irregularities and ensuring that any amount paid as a result of an irregularity is recovered from the Lead Beneficiary. Article 61 of EU's General Provisions Regulation No.1083/2006 outlines the key roles and responsibilities of the Certifying Authority, the most important being that the Certifying Authority must ensure the claims submitted to the European Commission are based on verifiable supporting documents and comply with applicable Community and national rules.

SEUPB has produced formal Guidance Notes on the treatment of irregularities and fraud within the PEACE III Programme. These are available on the SEUPB website at the following locations:

http://www.seupb.eu/Libraries/PEACE_III_Reports_Pubs/PEACE_III_Guidance_Note_13_-_Treatment_of_Irregularities.sflb.ashx

http://www.seupb.eu/Libraries/PEACE_III_Reports_Pubs/PEACE_III_Guidance_Note_3_-_Guidance_on_Fraud.sflb.ashx

In addition, SEUPB has an internal fraud policy which sets its fraud response plan and whistle-blowing procedures.

All claims submitted by Lead Partners undergo a rigorous vouching and verification process managed by SEUPB's Financial Control Unit.

The Financial Control Unit takes action to follow-up and correct all recorded irregularities, recovering grant where applicable and taking steps to ensure the irregularity is not repeated. Where an irregularity involves an incorrect payment of grant, action must be taken to recover any overpayment. If recovery proves to be impossible, or the Financial Control Unit wishes to recover less than the full amount due, the matter must be referred to the Certifying Authority and the relevant Accountable Departments for consideration for write off and removal from the declared expenditure to the European Commission.

If the Financial Control Unit has a suspicion of fraud, theft or corruption then the details are reported to the SEUPB's Managing Authority and Certifying Authority.

In accordance with its fraud policy, SEUPB ensures that investigations into potential fraud or corruption are investigated vigorously and promptly. SEUPB holds a Service Level Agreement for the provision of fraud investigation services with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Central Investigation Service. Upon notification of a suspected fraud the SEUPB will consult with the Central Investigation Service and appropriate audit authorities and arrange for an investigation. The body carrying out the investigation is responsible for collating evidence and documentation and interviewing key members of the organisation. SEUPB informs the Member States and relevant Accountable Departments, and refers to the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Comptroller and Auditor General in the Republic of Ireland. If appropriate, SEUPB will also make contact with the police.

During routine audits, funded groups will be afforded every opportunity to respond to the queries raised. However, if the police take the investigation forward, SEUPB cannot have any further contact with the project until that investigation has concluded.

SEUPB must take the appropriate legal and/or disciplinary action in all cases where that would be justified; and make any necessary changes to systems and procedures to try to ensure that similar frauds will not happen again.

The SEUPB considers that its procedures are natural justice compliant.

Civil Service: Essential Car Users

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many Civil Service staff currently receive a payment for being an essential car user.

(AQW 10531/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As at March 2012, 111 non-general service civil servants in the Youth Justice Agency of the Department of Justice received a payment for being an essential car user. These staff transferred to the NICS from the former NIO on 12 April 2010 on the devolution of policing and justice functions. The total cost paid to these staff is shown for the two financial years since that date.

Financial Year	Total spend
2010/ 2011	£127,919.11
2011/ 2012	£128,815.88

Civil Service: Essential Car Users

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the cost of payments to staff in the Civil Service who are essential car users in each of the last five years.

(AQW 10532/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As at March 2012, 111 non-general service civil servants in the Youth Justice Agency of the Department of Justice received a payment for being an essential car user. These staff transferred to the NICS from the former NIO on 12 April 2010 on the devolution of policing and justice functions. The total cost paid to these staff is shown for the two financial years since that date.

Financial Year	Total spend
2010/ 2011	£127,919.11
2011/ 2012	£128,815.88

Orange Order Event to be held in the Stormont Estate

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to the approval for an Orange Order event to be held in the Stormont Estate on the centenary of the Ulster Covenant (i) which groups his Department consulted; (ii) which departmental branch carried out the consultation; (iii) what criteria his Department used to decide whether this event could take place; (iv) whether his Department will use the same criteria for all future requests for the use of the Stormont Estate; and (v) what restrictions are in place for the event.

(AQW 10790/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Department has not consulted any groups in relation to this event.

The event was approved "subject to the detailed arrangements and relevant paperwork in relation to the event being agreed with the Department's Estate Management Unit and other relevant authorities" and the same criteria are used for all major events.

First Trust Bank: Possible Job Losses

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the discussions he has had with the Minister for Finance, Michael Noonan TD, and the senior management of the Allied Irish Bank Group in relation to the possible job losses at the First Trust Bank.

(AQW 10840/11-15)

Mr Wilson: While both Minister Noonan and I did not attend the recent North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Institutional Meeting on 27 April 2012, the First and Deputy Ministers did discuss the issue of job losses in First Trust and the wider banking sector with the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade and stressed our concerns regarding the impact job losses would have in Northern Ireland. Irish Ministers indicated that the downsizing of staff as a result of bank restructuring – including in the Allied Irish Bank Group / First Trust Bank – was a concern for them also and advised that the Irish Government was working with the banks on this.

I plan to follow up on this matter with Michael Noonan TD in the margins of the next North-South Ministerial Council plenary meeting in June 2012. In my previous discussions with Mr Noonan (and his predecessor) regarding the potential impact of bank restructuring we have agreed that Northern Ireland should not be disproportionately affected by any restructuring.

While I have not discussed the issue of redundancies directly with senior management in Allied Irish Bank / First Trust I met with Mr Larry Broderick, General Secretary Irish Bank Officials Association (IBOA), on 1 May 2012 and got an update from the IBOA on the ongoing situation regarding job losses in our local banks. While this situation is largely outside of the Executive's influence, I will be monitoring it very closely and will continue to engage with all parties involved as and when appropriate.

First Trust Bank: Possible Job Losses

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action his Department is taking in relation to the possible job losses at the First Trust Bank.

(AQW 10841/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The First and Deputy Ministers discussed this issue with the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Institutional Meeting on 27 April 2012 and stressed our concerns regarding the impact job losses would have in Northern Ireland. Irish Ministers indicated that the downsizing of staff as a result of bank restructuring – including in the Allied Irish Bank Group / First Trust Bank – was a concern for them also and advised that the Irish Government was working with the banks on this.

I plan to follow up on this matter with Michael Noonan TD in the margins of the next North-South Ministerial Council plenary meeting in June. In my previous discussions with Mr Noonan (and his predecessor) regarding the potential impact of bank restructuring we have agreed that Northern Ireland should not be disproportionately affected by any restructuring.

I also met with Mr Larry Broderick, General Secretary Irish Bank Officials Association (IBOA), on 1 May 2012 and got an update from the IBOA on the ongoing situation regarding job losses in our local banks. While this situation is largely outside of the Executive's influence, I will be monitoring it very closely and will continue to engage with all parties involved as and when appropriate.

Tourism Industry: County Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the total number of people employed in the tourism industry; (ii) the number of people employed in the tourism industry in Co Fermanagh; (iii) the percentage of the total number of people employed in the tourism industry that were employed in Co Fermanagh, in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 10889/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Official statistics are not collected on the number of persons employed in the tourism industry at County level. However, an estimate of the number of employee jobs in key tourism related sectors is available biennially between 2003 and 2009 and in 2010, at District Council level.

The number of employee jobs in such sectors in Fermanagh District Council area and Northern Ireland is shown in the table.

Table 1: Number of employee jobs in the 'tourism industry'¹ for Fermanagh District Council and Northern Ireland, 2003 to 2010

Year	Standard Industrial Classification System	Total number of employee jobs in the Tourism Industry in Northern Ireland	Total number of employee jobs in the Tourism Industry in Fermanagh District Council	Percent
2010 ²	SIC(2007)	55,075	1,983	3.6%

1

Year	Standard Industrial Classification System	Total number of employee jobs in the Tourism Industry in Northern Ireland	Total number of employee jobs in the Tourism Industry in Fermanagh District Council	Percent
2009 ³	SIC(2007)	54,290	1,775	3.3%
2007 ³	SIC(2003)	54,079	1,727	3.2%
2005 ³	SIC(2003)	52,025	1,766	3.4%
2003 ³	SIC(2003)	50,419	1,797	3.6%

- 1 The 'tourism industry' is defined as comprising the following Standard Industrial Classifications (2007) 'Libraries, archives, museums and other cultural activities', 'Gambling and betting activities', Sports activities and amusement and recreation activities', 'Travel agency, tour operator and other reservation service and related activities', 'Accommodation', 'Restaurants and mobile food service activities' and 'Beverage serving activities'.
- 2 Source: Business Register and Employment Survey 2010
- 3 Source: Census of Employment, 2003 – 2009

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much money under the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme has not been claimed in each of the last two years.

(AQW 10903/11-15)

Mr Wilson: No money has been unclaimed under the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme in each of the last two years as there is no application procedure for Small Business Rate Relief. Relief is applied automatically by Land & Property Services to all businesses that qualify.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme, to detail (i) the cost to the Exchequer; and what percentage of the costs have benefited the National Federation of Retail Newsagents.

(AQW 10904/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As at 31st March 2012 relief totalling almost £13.8 million (covering the years 2010/11 and 2011/12) has been discharged against rating debt as a result of properties qualifying for the Small Business Rate Relief.

Information on the percentage of costs that have benefited the National Federation of Retail Newsagents is not available as information is not collected that would allow properties related to the National Federation of Retail Newsagents to be identified.

Narrow Water Bridge Project

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of Louth County Council's decision to appeal the decision taken by the Special EU Programmes Body not to proceed with the Narrow Water Bridge Project, what action his Department intends to take to support the project.

(AQW 10907/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Louth County Council applied to the INTERREG IVA Programme for funding for the Narrow Water Bridge project. It was the INTERREG IVA Steering Committee, rather than SEUPB alone, that assessed the application. And it was the Committee, not SEUPB alone, that agreed the project did not meet all of the agreed selection criteria and should not therefore proceed to the next stage of the assessment process.

All applications for INTERREG IVA funding are assessed by the Steering Committee, which is a subgroup of the Programme Monitoring Committee. The Steering Committee is chaired by the SEUPB and comprises social partners, elected representatives and officials from government departments, including DFP. Using the information provided by the applicant, the Committee scores applications against the agreed selection criteria and reaches its decisions on a consensus basis.

I understand that Louth County Council has appealed the Steering Committee's decision not to fund the Narrow Water Bridge project and that SEUPB has, in response, initiated the agreed review process. A Review Panel will be convened and will comprise three members of the Programme Monitoring Committee and one independent representative, none of whom were members of the Steering Committee that took the original decision.

Review Panel members do not support or otherwise the projects that come to them. The purpose of the review will be to consider the reasonableness of the original Steering Committee decision based on the evidence that was provided in the application.

Performance Bonuses: Public Servants

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, since coming into office, to detail (i) the proposals he has (a) received; and (b) approved for the payment of performance bonuses to public servants; and (ii) how much was paid on each occasion to each office holder.

(AQW 10939/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The information requested is not readily available and can only be compiled at disproportionate costs.

North/South Bodies: Annual Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the annual spend on each of the North/South bodies since each came into existence.

(AQW 10941/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I refer the Member to my response to question AQW 2960/11-15 answered on 17 October 2011. The position remains as set out in that answer – the information requested is included in the departmental Resource Accounts that were laid in the Assembly each year.

Rating Review

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he intends to provide any further emergency aid for town centre businesses in advance of the rating review scheduled for 2015.

(AQW 10963/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Currently there are no further plans for special relief for town centres. Such provision presents major difficulties in terms of choosing exactly where to designate it and the impact it is likely to have, in terms of the unfair competitive disadvantage it may create for those outside the chosen areas and the likelihood of causing displacement. Furthermore, even if I wanted to intervene in this way, the risk of someone successfully challenging such a policy is unacceptably high. I would rather direct resources to the business community than waste them on defending well meaning schemes which are vulnerable to challenge through the courts.

I prefer a broader approach. This includes continuing to freeze the regional rate in real terms and alleviating the impact of rates on the smallest businesses; which currently pay a disproportionate amount, regardless of location. The recent extension to the small business rate relief scheme was achieved by charging the very largest retail premises a levy. This is rather than imposing an additional burden on local business ratepayers, which is the way similar schemes are paid for in other parts of the UK.

I will be considering extending the scope of the scheme, again at no cost to other ratepayers. What I am able to do will depend on the outcome of my Department's evaluation of the scheme which will be carried later this year. That evaluation will include consideration of how best to recycle the savings which have been achieved through exclusion of ratepayers with multiple premises.

Other measures have been introduced this year to help regenerate town centres. This includes a concession which allows new occupiers of long term empty retail premises to receive a 50% rebate on their rates for 12 months. In addition, the use of any empty shop window displays for non-commercial purposes will be disregarded for rating purposes. These measures are unique to Northern Ireland.

Rating Review

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the rating review scheduled for 2015 might result in new rates valuations being applied.

(AQW 10965/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Revaluation is an exercise that redistributes the rating burden amongst business ratepayers and all 72,500 non domestic rateable properties in Northern Ireland will be revalued at 2013 rental value levels.

The same amount of money still has to be raised from the system and so the tax rate, or rate in the pound, adjusts accordingly following revaluation.

This means that areas and business sectors that have fared better than others over the period since the previous revaluation exercise will face higher rate bills from April 2015, even if values have declined across the board since the downturn. Occupiers of business premises that have experienced rental value decreases more than the average will pay less following a revaluation and vice versa.

Many will find their rate bills not changing much. The last time a general revaluation took place in 2003 almost three quarters of business ratepayers' rates bill went up or down by less than 20%.

Revaluations are a regular feature of the business rates system, and make sure that liability for rates is fairly spread across all sectors in line with up to date rental values.

Land & Property Services will shortly begin the work to assemble the evidence and begin the process of revaluing non-domestic properties in Northern Ireland.

Outsourced Work to the Private Sector

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what proportion of the work of Departments and arm's-length bodies is outsourced to the private sector.

(AQW 10970/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In 2010-11 my Department (including its arm's-length bodies) spent 7.6% of its budget on services that are contracted out to the private sector.

This response is provided for the Department of Finance and Personnel only, as information is not held centrally for the wider Civil Service and arm's-length bodies. The Member should contact individual departments for their information.

Recession

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the economy is in recession.

(AQW 11002/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Data released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) last month revealed that Gross Domestic Product for the UK as a whole contracted by 0.2 per cent in the first quarter of 2012. This is the second successive quarter of negative economic growth which means that the UK is now technically in recession.

At a local level, it is not possible to say whether Northern Ireland is also in recession as regional output data for 2012 is not yet available from ONS. Clearly however, falling output in the UK as a whole will impact negatively on economic conditions in all regions including Northern Ireland. While it is obviously disappointing that the UK is once again in recession, we can however take some encouragement from the fact that the Office for Budget Responsibility still forecasts that the UK economy will grow overall in 2012, albeit only marginally.

Amateur Boxing Clubs: Peace III Funding

Mr Allister asked of Finance and Personnel to detail the level of funding, provided under PEACE III, to assist amateur boxing clubs, including the amount awarded to each club.

(AQW 11014/11-15)

Mr Wilson: No PEACE III funding has been awarded to amateur boxing clubs.

Domestic Rates: Payments by Credit or Debit Card

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 10413/11-15 and AQW 10754/11-15, to detail (i) the name of the payment provider that processes Land and Property Services payments; and (ii) how much has been paid to the payment provider in each year since the introduction of the option to pay by credit/debit card.

(AQW 11092/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Santander is the organisation that provides internet and telephone payment services to LPS.

The total amount paid by LPS to Santander for debit card transactions from 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2012 is set out in following table.

Table: Transaction Costs paid to Santander 2010 to 2012 for debit card payments

Year	Cost	No. of Transactions
2010-11	£1,462.52	4,958
2011-12	£7,837.85	26,663
Total	£9,300.37	31,621

Transaction fees for credit card payments are charged directly to the customer by Santander. LPS does not pay or administer these charges. As LPS is not invoiced for these charges, it cannot provide exact figures as for debit card payments. However, on the basis of the amount of money collected by LPS from credit card payments, it is estimated that charges to customers in 2011-12 were approximately £32,000 for 2,498 transactions. Vacant Domestic Properties in the Mid Ulster Area

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the (i) number; and (ii) location of vacant domestic properties in the Mid Ulster area.

(AQW 11123/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Information on the number of vacant residential properties is not available at constituency level as data is collated at district council and ward level only. The attached tables indicate the number of vacant residential properties for each ward within the Cookstown, Dungannon & South Tyrone and Magherafelt Council areas as at 29th April 2012.

Vacant Residential Properties in the Cookstown District Council Area as at 29th April 2012

Ward	Number of Properties
Ardboe	51
Coagh	45
Dunnamore	83
Gortallowry	36
Killycolpy	67
Killymoon	29
Lissan	57
Moneymore	74
Newbuildings	58
Oaklands	58
Oldtown	31
Pomeroy	103
Sandholes	41
Stewartstown	34
The Loop	65
Tullagh	57
Cookstown DC Total	889

Vacant Residential Properties in the Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council Area as at 29th April 2012

Ward	Number of Properties
Altmore	110
Augher	97
Aughnacloy	122
Ballygawley	106
Ballysaggart	66
Benburb	74
Caledon	95
Castlecaulfield	76
Clogher	128
Coalisland North	91
Coalisland South	68
Coalisland West	56
Coolhill	87
Donaghmore	61
Drumglass	46
Fivemiletown	66
Killyman	79

Ward	Number of Properties
Killymeal	88
Moy	105
Moygashel	42
Mullaghmore	96
Washing Bay	78
Dungannon & South Tyrone BC Total	1,837

Vacant Residential Properties in the Magherafelt District Council Area as at 29th April 2012

Ward	Number of Properties
Ballymaguigan	39
Bellaghy	65
Castledawson	48
Draperstown	77
Glebe	31
Gulladuff	43
Knockcloghrim	50
Lecumpher	37
Lower Glenshane	53
Maghera	56
Swatragh	62
Tobermore	57
Townparks East	25
Townparks West	19
Upperlands	54
Valley	51
Magherafelt DC Total	767

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Paediatric Care: Transporting Children from the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of transporting children, due to capacity pressures, who were in need of paediatric care from the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children to hospitals in the UK and the Republic of Ireland in (i) 2009/10; and (ii) 2010/11.

(AQW 10683/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): This information can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Paediatric Care: Transporting Children from Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of transporting children, due to capacity pressures, who were in need of paediatric care from Altnagelvin Hospital to hospitals in the UK and the Republic of Ireland in (i) 2009/10; and (ii) 2010/11.

(AQW 10685/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Paediatric Care: Transporting Children from Craigavon Hospital

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of transporting children, due to capacity pressures, who were in need of paediatric care from Craigavon Hospital to hospitals in the UK and the Republic of Ireland in (i) 2009/10; and (ii) 2010/11.

(AQW 10686/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Paediatric Care: Transporting Children Outside Northern Ireland

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of transporting children and their families, due to capacity pressures, who were in need of paediatric care outside Northern Ireland to hospitals in the UK and the Republic of Ireland in (i) 2009/10; and (ii) 2010/11.

(AQW 10687/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Northern Ireland Cost Investigation Working Group

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why representatives of the community pharmacy sector have not been selected to serve on the Northern Ireland Cost Investigation Working Group.

(AQW 10770/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board has undertaken to carry out further cost investigations with respect to community pharmacy services provided in Northern Ireland.

The Board has now developed the Terms of Reference and the High Level Methodology for the cost investigation and these have been shared with the community pharmacy contractor representative body, Community Pharmacy NI (CPNI). It should be noted that within the Terms of Reference it is clearly stated that the Board will seek representations from CPNI at appropriate key stages of the process in order to obtain views and to ensure that CPNI feedback is fully considered. The process will be open and transparent at all stages.

Private Finance Initiative Contracts

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to each currently active Private Finance Initiative contract in each Health and Social Care Trust, to detail (i) the contract start and expiry date; (ii) the name and address of the business holding the contract; and (iii) the nature of each contract.

(AQW 10786/11-15)

Mr Poots: The details regarding the currently active Private Finance Initiative contracts with HSC Trusts are detailed in the table below:

HSC Trust	PFI Contract	Contract Start Date	Contract Expiry Date	Company Name & Address	Nature of Contract
Belfast HSC Trust	RGH Car Park	01/04/1997	30/03/2017	Car Park Services 36 Great Patrick Street Belfast BT1 2LT	Provision of Car Parking at RGH site
Belfast HSC Trust	Cancer Centre	01/01/2006	31/12/2030	Partners in Healthcare Technology Ltd Lagan Villas Dromore Co Down BT25 1LN	Provision, maintenance and replacement of medical equipment
Belfast HSC Trust	BCH Renal Unit	01/11/1998	31/10/2013	Graham Gambro Ltd Lagan Mills Dromore Co Down BT25 1AS	Provision of dialysis building, equipment, maintenance and consumables

HSC Trust	PFI Contract	Contract Start Date	Contract Expiry Date	Company Name & Address	Nature of Contract
Belfast HSC Trust	RGH Managed Equipment Service	01/10/2006	30/09/2021	Philips Medical Systems UK Philips Centre Guildford Business Centre Guildford GU2 8XH	Provision, maintenance and replacement of medical equipment
Northern HSC Trust	Renal Dialysis Service, Antrim Hospital	17/4/2000	16/4/2015	Baxter Healthcare 1 West Bank Road Belfast BT3 9JL	Provision of a renal dialysis service at Antrim Hospital.
Western HSC Trust	Laboratory and Pharmacy Services Centre at Altnagelvin	January 2007	January 2032	United Healthcare Land Company Ltd 4 Lovat Lane London EC3R 8DT	The contract is for 25 years for the design, build, operation and maintenance of a Laboratory and Pharmacy Centre at Altnagelvin. This facility includes provision of five specialist laboratory areas, along with a new pharmacy department which incorporates special cancer drug dispensing facilities.
Western HSC Trust	South West Acute Hospital at Enniskillen	May 2012	May 2042	NIHG SW Health Partnership Marlborough House 30 Victoria Street Belfast	The contract with Northern Ireland Health Group is a 30 year PFI contract to design, build, operate, maintain and finance the New Acute Hospital for the South West on a green field site within the development to the north of Enniskillen.
All HSC Trusts	Northern Ireland Picture Archiving and Communications System and Radiology Information System (NIPACS)	September 2008	September 2018	Sectra Ltd Baird House Seabank Place Knowhill Milton Keynes MK5 8FR	This is a managed service contract for radiology information. It provides information and images across the region and ensures that images and radiology reports are always available to clinical users irrespective of their location.

Gay Men's Clinic: Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 10355/11-15, to detail (i) how many consultants applied for the position; and (ii) the number of people that attended the Gay Men's Clinic in each of the last three years.

(AQW 10848/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Belfast Trust has advised that one consultant applied for the advertised post. The Department collects information on outpatient attendances at specialty level but does not hold information on attendances at specific clinics.

Defibrillators

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to increase the number of defibrillators in buildings used by his Department or its arm's-length bodies.

(AQW 10886/11-15)

Mr Poots: There is no legal requirement for employers to provide defibrillators in their buildings. However, in 2003, my Department took the lead among NI Departments in providing defibrillators in buildings where staff worked.

Currently there are three defibrillators in Castle Buildings and there are no plans to increase this number.

My Department's Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) are a diverse group of organisations ranging from large Health and Social Care Trusts to small organisations such as the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority. Each ALB is responsible for determining its own requirements in respect of the number of defibrillators required, and for their provision.

Haematology Unit: Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans for a haematology unit at Altnagelvin Hospital which would service the North West region.

(AQW 10888/11-15)

Mr Poots: There is currently a Haematology unit at Altnagelvin hospital which provides full clinical and laboratory Haematology services to the population of Limavady, Derry, Strabane and Omagh district council areas. There are currently no plans to expand the existing service.

Ambulance Service Vehicles: Bull Bars

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Ambulance Service vehicles have bull bars fitted.

(AQW 10890/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have been advised by NIAS that none of its vehicles has bull bars fitted.

Heart Surgery Referrals

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number referrals for heart surgery to (i) the Mater Private Hospital, Dublin; (ii) the Blackrock Hospital, Dublin; (iii) Guys Hospital, London; (iv) HCI International Medical Centre, Glasgow; and (v) any other hospital in Great Britain or the Republic of Ireland, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 10929/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below shows the number of referrals for heart surgery to (i) the Mater Private Hospital, Dublin; (ii) the Blackrock Hospital, Dublin; (iii) Guys Hospital, London; (iv) HCI International Medical Centre, Glasgow; and (v) any other hospital in Great Britain or the Republic of Ireland, in each of the last three years.

Number of referrals for heart surgery to:	Year		
	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Mater Private Hospital, Dublin	184	154	163
Blackrock Hospital, Dublin	6	6	14
Guys Hospital, London	38	50	63
HCI International Medical Centre, Glasgow	0	0	0
Other Hospitals in Great Britain or the Republic of Ireland	73	4	3
Total	301	214	243

Source: Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Board

Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many beds and cots are available for children at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children.

(AQW 10947/11-15)

Mr Poots: During April – December 2011, the average number of available beds for children at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children was 92.7P

P The data shown for 2011 is provisional and may change.

Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of staff employed at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children, broken down by post.

(AQW 10951/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of staff employed at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children was provided by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and is given in the table below.

Number of staff employed at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children as at 31 March 2012

Occupational Family	Grade	Headcount	WTE
Administration & Clerical	Medical / Personal Secretary	37	31.98
	Other Admin & Clerical staff	72	58.04
Support Services	Domestic / Catering	83	55.18
Nursing	Qualified Nurses	366	291.26
	Nurse Support	62	47.45
Social Services	Social Workers	12	9.14
Professional & Technical	Dieticians	11	8.52
	Occupational Therapists	3	2.50
	Physiotherapists	16	12.04
	Radiographers	15	13.48
	Speech & Language Therapists	9	5.57
	Support to Allied Health Professions	6	4.53
	Play Specialist / Support	16	11.35
	Psychologists	10	8.70
	Scientific staff	8	7.91
Medical & Dental	Consultants	34	31.66
	Staff Grade / Associate Specialist / Specialty Doctor	9	7.40
	Training Grades	59	54.46
Total		828	661.17

Source: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

- 1 WTE = Whole-time Equivalent.
- 2 Medical training grades include Foundation House Officers and Specialty Registrars.

Cycling and Walking: Promotion

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions his Department has had with the Department for Regional Development to ensure that his Department's plans to promote cycling and walking correlate with the level of funding for cycling infrastructure.

(AQW 10958/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has had no specific discussions on plans to promote cycling and walking to correlate with the level of funding for cycling infrastructure. However both Departments have discussed the promotion of walking and cycling within the context of the Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity in Northern Ireland 2012-2022, entitled A Fitter Future for All and through both Department's participation in the Active Travel Forum and the development of DRD's Active Travel Strategy for Northern Ireland ('Building an Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland').

Cycling has benefitted from several years of investment and the cycling infrastructure, as set out in the Regional Transport Strategy and the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan, is well established. In the 10 year period, up to the end of the last financial year, DRD's Road Service has invested almost £9 million in the provision of 230km of cycle lanes.

A Fitter Future for All was launched for implementation on 9 March 2012 and

the Framework contains outcomes regarding the increase and promotion of physical activity in general within a variety of settings including the outcome 'Active Travel Strategy developed for Northern Ireland' for which the Department of Regional Development is listed as the key delivery partner.

The development of the new updated Strategic Framework for Public Health will also provide an overarching Framework for meaningful cross-departmental and cross-sectoral collaboration and actions within the Active Travel Strategy will also contribute to this achievement.

Cycling: Uptake

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department has to increase the uptake of cycling to tackle obesity and other health issues.

(AQW 10959/11-15)

Mr Poots: Being physically active, including through cycling, can contribute to maintaining a healthy weight and also improving mental health, promoting self-esteem, boosting the immune system, and helping to prevent heart disease, cardiovascular disease, and Type 2 diabetes. It is therefore important that we encourage and support people to be more physically active.

On 9 March 2012, I launched the cross-sectoral Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity in Northern Ireland 2012-2022, entitled A Fitter Future for All. This Framework contains outcomes specifically to promote and increase participation in physical activity within a variety of settings. Particularly relevant outcomes include supporting the development of the Active Travel Strategy for Northern Ireland; promoting and disseminating the new CMO Physical Activity Guidelines; and ensuring more people are aware of, and have access to, local facilities and opportunities for organised and non-organised physical activity.

The Public Health Agency (PHA), who is leading on the implementation of the Framework, continues to promote and develop projects and programmes to increase participation in physical activity, including cycling. Many of these initiatives are taken forward by local health improvement teams in conjunction with partners across a range of sectors, including local government, health, education, community and voluntary sectors.

These initiatives include:

- Bike It! - supporting Sustrans for the Bike It! programme in a number of schools.
- Promotion of the Cycle to Work Scheme for all employees.
- Development of a public information campaign on the prevention of obesity which will promote the importance of physical activity and healthier eating for adults.
- Supporting DRD in the implementation of the Active Travel Strategy.
- Dissemination of the information on the new CMO guidelines on physical activity to ensure professionals and the public are aware of recommended physical activity levels at each life stage.

Ambulance Downtime

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average ambulance downtime at each Accident and Emergency Unit in the last month.

(AQW 11003/11-15)

Mr Poots: For the purposes of this question, it has been assumed that ambulance downtime refers to the turnaround time measured from when an ambulance arrives at a hospital until it has 'cleared' the location or 'stood down'. This includes the time taken for patient handover to relevant clinical personnel and ensuring the vehicle is ready for the next call.

The average ambulance turnaround time during March 2012 is detailed below for each hospital with an emergency care department:

Hospital	Average Turnaround Time
Altnagelvin	00:20:43
Antrim Area	00:27:27
Ards	00:20:21
Armagh Community	00:00:00
Bangor	00:00:10
Causeway	00:19:28
Craigavon Area	00:30:26
Daisy Hill	00:24:59

Hospital	Average Turnaround Time
Downe	00:20:40
Erne	00:19:46
Lagan Valley	00:25:44
Mater	00:26:52
Mid Ulster	00:19:38
Mullinure	00:12:51
RBHSC	00:20:34
Royal Victoria	00:36:48
South Tyrone	00:14:17
Tyrone County	00:17:28
Ulster	00:38:38

Source: Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS)

Sunbeds Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the Sunbeds Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

(AQW 11007/11-15)

Mr Poots: Most of the provisions in the Sunbeds Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 came into force on 1 May 2012. The Act and subsequent associated regulations have had full cross-party support in the Assembly and reflect the contributions made by the Health Committee during the passage of the Bill.

The measures introduced in the Act will deliver significant public health benefits in the longer term, in particular to reduce the number of cases of, and deaths from, skin cancer.

The Department has helped sunbed operators to comply with the measures by providing initial supplies of the poster that must be displayed, information sheets which must be provided to sunbed users, and a guidance booklet which describes fully and clearly what sunbed operators are required to do in order to comply with the Act, and what to expect from District Councils in terms of enforcement.

The Department has also assisted in a training event for District Council officers on the requirements of the new legislation.

Although the measures have only been in force for a short time, the early indications are that sunbed operators are seeking to comply fully with the new law.

Dental Services

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 4877/11-15, to detail the timescale for the consultation with stakeholders.

(AQW 11034/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department is finalising consultation documents and associated impact assessments on these proposals. In addition, to the pre-existing engagement with the British Dental Association, my Department will be consulting on these proposals with the British Dental Association, the Patient Client Council, wider dental profession and public. The Committee on Health, Social Services and Public Safety will be notified in advance of the launch of the consultation. It is intended that the consultation process will begin in May 2012.

Rape and Sexual Abuse: Organisations that Support Victims

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much funding his Department has provided to organisations that support victims of rape and sexual abuse in each of the last three years.

(AQW 11040/11-15)

Mr Poots: DHSSPS has provided the following amount of funding to organisations that support victims of rape and sexual abuse in each of the last three years.

	09/10	10/11	11/12
Sexual Violence Funding	£718k	£525k	£525k

Circa £2m capital has also been provided for the development of the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) over this period.

Health Service Dentists

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the maximum length of time his Department expects to take in granting Health Service dentists permission to carry out dental work that requires prior approval.

(AQW 11042/11-15)

Mr Poots: The average length of time to process a prior approval application is 8 weeks. If, however, the dental officer considering the application requires more clinical information, radiographs, photographs or other evidence, the application will be returned to the dental practitioner.

Dental practitioners are able to proceed with treatments that would normally require an application for prior approval in emergency situations, such as when it is necessary for the relief of pain.

Dental Work: Prior Approval System

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide an estimate of the cost of administering the system of prior approval for dental work.

(AQW 11043/11-15)

Mr Poots: The estimated annual cost of administering the system of prior approval for dental work is £280k. This includes administrative and dental staff time and goods and services.

Dental Treatment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many dental treatments, which have been categorised as treatments requiring prior departmental approval, have been administered by Health Service dentists in each of the last three years.

(AQW 11044/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information to answer this question is set out in the table below:

Year	Number of claims seeking approval ¹	Number of claims paid
2009/10	37,710	22,620
2010/11	48,859	26,470
2011/12	46,576	25,536

1 Claims seeking prior approval may be processed a number of times due to the need for additional clinical information to be submitted by the practitioner. The figures represent the number of times claims are processed.

Prior approval applications frequently reflect complex treatments and require the Business Services Organisation (BSO) to seek further evidence, such as radiographs and photographs, of the need for these proposed treatment plans. Consequently these claims are handled more than once by administrative and professional staff in BSO. Furthermore, due to the complex nature of such treatments, receipt of a payment claim may be in a different financial year from the original application for prior approval.

Dental Work: Prior Approval System

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide an estimate of the savings that are made as a result of the requirement on dentists to seek prior approval from his Department.

(AQW 11045/11-15)

Mr Poots: In order to address the pressures on the General Dental Services budget, my Department has made a series of proposals. One of these is a proposed move to a core of services that would be available under the Health Service. The available treatments would focus on those which improve oral health, rather than those which are more cosmetic in nature such as certain types of bridgework and veneers. However, there may be occasions where a treatment, normally excluded from the core service, would be clinically justified and cost efficient. In these circumstances, the practitioner would be able to apply to the BSO dental committee for prior approval. Under the current arrangements for the delivery of General Dental Services, Dental practitioners are already required to seek prior approval for certain treatment items or where a course of treatment will cost more than £280.

The move to a core service is supported by my Department's Primary Dental Care Strategy and is consistent with the proposed model for the new General Dental Services contract. It is estimated that this proposal would save approximately £2 million per annum.

Foster Carers

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average waiting time for prospective foster carers to be assessed in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 11073/11-15)

Mr Poots: Figures detailing the average waiting time for prospective foster carers to be assessed in each Health and Social Care Trust area are not centrally available, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis: North Down Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are available for people with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis in the North Down area.

(AQW 11086/11-15)

Mr Poots: The variability of symptoms in patients with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME)/ Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) mean that they will need to access different parts of the health service, depending on their specific symptoms and the severity of their condition. The focus of treatment in Northern Ireland is therefore centred on close co-operation between patients, carers and the relevant health and social-care professionals, which is essential for ensuring that sufferers obtain the most suitable treatment for their needs.

Whilst the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, covering the North Down area, does not have a specialist ME service, patients may be seen by consultants and referred on to the Belfast Trust or back to GPs, with a treatment plan which may include referral to psychology services in primary care for cognitive behavioural therapy.

Out-of-Hours Social Work Service

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain the rationale behind the proposals for Out-Of-Hours Social Work Service; and whether it is in line with his Department's reform and modernisation agenda.

(AQW 11099/11-15)

Mr Poots: The HSCB and five HSC Trusts have established a Project Team to develop proposals for the introduction of a regional Out-of-Hours Social Work Service. This initiative follows the recommendations contained within the Social Services Inspectorate Child Protection Inspection Report in 2006 and the Independent Review in 2008 by Mr Henry Toner into the death of Mr McElhill and his family. In addition, the Agenda for Change: HSC On-Call Circular (HSC (JMF)(8) 2011) was introduced on 1 October 2011. This Circular had implications in relation to on-call payments, particularly for social workers, making the current out-of-hours arrangements untenable into the future. More recently, Out-of Hours Social Services was identified as a priority in the DHSSPS Social Work Strategy (2012) which recognises the need to design a model and produce regional standards for a dedicated out-of-hours service.

It is anticipated that the Project Team will produce a consultation document in the near future which will outline the detail of the proposed regional model. Any future model of service delivery will be in keeping with my Department's reform agenda.

Out-of-Hours Social Work Service

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to list the agencies which received the consultation document on Out-of-Hours Social Work Service; and (ii) whether the current Out-of-Hours co-ordinators and responders have been consulted on the proposed changes; and (iii) whether they are in agreement with the proposals.

(AQW 11100/11-15)

Mr Poots: The HSCB and HSC Trusts have established a Project Team to develop proposals for the introduction of a regional Out-of-Hours Social Work Service. When those proposals have been developed there will then be a consultation about the proposed model, which will include staff and staff-side organisations. This consultation has not happened as yet, but is expected to take place in the near future.

Out-of-Hours Social Work Service

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there will be any job losses as a result of the changes proposed for the Out-of-Hours Social Work Service.

(AQW 11102/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has received an assurance from the HSCB which is responsible for the review of Out-of-Hours Social Work Services that there will be no compulsory redundancies as a result of any new staffing arrangements pursuant to the review and the introduction of a regional out-of-hours service.

Social Care Providers

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) for his assessment of the effectiveness of private residential dwellings becoming social care providers; and (ii) to provide a list of the private dwellings that have become social care providers in the South Antrim constituency in each of the last five years.

(AQW 11105/11-15)

Mr Poots: The effectiveness or suitability of using a private dwelling as a setting for providing social care could only be assessed by allowing a full inspection of the premises by The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA).

Any person who carries on or manages such an establishment or care service must make an application to RQIA, and once granted, is issued a certificate of registration. RQIA maintains a register of all approved establishments and care services.

With regards to part (ii) of the question, this information is not collected centrally and is not available in the format requested.

Air Ambulance Provision

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 9625/11-15, (i) for an update on the feasibility study; (ii) when the Health and Social Care Board expects the consultants to present a final report; (iii) why the consultants did not meet the previous timescale for the presentation of the report in April 2012; (iv) when he expects the report to be submitted to his Department; and (v) when his Department will publish the report.

(AQW 11107/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have been advised by the HSC Board that the feasibility study on the need for and sustainability and affordability of an air ambulance for Northern Ireland has been submitted to the Board in final draft form and is awaiting approval for subsequent submission to the Department.

As I advised previously in my response to AQW 9625/11-15, the consultants were expected to present their final report to the HSC Board in April this year. They submitted their final draft report in accordance with this timetable. The Board expects to submit the report to the Department by the end of May 2012.

As I have not yet seen the report, I cannot advise when it is likely to be published. I should be in a position to do so when I have had a chance to consider its findings.

Health Service Staff: Derry Area

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of full-time Health Service staff in the Derry area who have (i) had their hours reduced; and (ii) had their employment terminated in the last 12 months.

(AQW 11114/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) It has not been possible to provide this information as service requirements can dictate the hours that some staff work. Details of when the hours worked fluctuate regularly could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.
- (ii) 27 staff (19.03 whole time equivalents) in the Derry area, including Limavady, have had their employment terminated by the Western HSC Trust in the last 12 months.

Podiatry Appointments

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average length of time between podiatry appointments for senior citizens in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area who are (i) diabetic; and (ii) non-diabetic.

(AQW 11140/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available centrally within the DHSSPS and in reply to a request for this information, the Southern Health and Social Care Trust stated that whilst patients are reviewed on average at 3-4 month intervals, the length of time between review appointments is decided following the carrying-out of a clinical risk assessment with each patient. Diabetic patients may, on assessment, be identified as being at higher clinical risk although this is not universally the case. Those patients assessed as being at higher risk are seen most frequently. Referrals classed as urgent are prioritised at all times.

Out-of-Hours Social Work Service

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) how the current out-of-hours social work service is managed; (ii) what are the current supervision and training arrangements in each Health and Social Care Trust; and (iii) how calls are prioritised within the system.

(AQW 11142/11-15)

Mr Poots: Two systems of Out-of-Hours Social Work Service currently operate in Northern Ireland. Belfast and South Eastern Trusts combine their service into a dedicated Emergency Duty Team which is managed by the Belfast Trust. The Northern, Western and Southern Trusts each use a 'co-ordinator/responder' model where staff undertake these roles in addition to their substantive posts. These services are managed within the structures of the respective Trusts.

Emergency Duty Team staff receive professional supervision from the manager of the service and their training needs are identified through training needs analysis and ongoing appraisal. Staff who provide out-of-hours social work services in the remaining Trusts receive supervision and training through their substantive posts within Health and Social Care.

Across all of the Trusts, calls to the Out-of-Hours Services are dealt with on the basis of the need for an emergency response, where that response cannot wait until the next working day.

Out-of-Hours Social Work Service

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the new proposed out-of-hours social work service is based on a new service model or whether it is intended to be an extension of the current Belfast scheme, which is primarily urban-based.

(AQW 11144/11-15)

Mr Poots: The HSCB and HSC Trusts have established a Project Team to develop proposals for the introduction of a regional Out-of-Hours Social Work Service. When those proposals have been developed there will then be a consultation about the proposed model. This consultation is expected to take place in the near future.

Any decisions regarding the configuration of a regional Out-of-Hours Social Work Service will be taken after consultation has occurred.

Out-of-Hours Social Work Service

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the catalyst which led to the proposed changes to the out-of-hours social work service; (ii) any significant issues which triggered the review; and (iii) the recommendations for the service.

(AQW 11145/11-15)

Mr Poots: The HSCB and five HSC Trusts have established a Project Team to develop proposals for the introduction of a regional Out-of-Hours Social Work Service. This initiative follows the recommendations contained within the Social Services Inspectorate Child Protection Inspection Report in 2006 and the Independent Review in 2008 by Mr Henry Toner into the death of Mr McElhill and his family. In addition, the Agenda for Change: HSC On-Call Circular (HSC (JMF)(8) 2011) was introduced on 1 October 2011. This Circular had implications in relation to on-call payments, particularly for social workers, making the current out-of-hours arrangements untenable into the future. More recently, Out-of Hours Social Services was identified as a priority in the DHSSPS Social Work Strategy (2012) which recognises the need to design a model and produce regional standards for a dedicated out-of-hours service.

The Project Team established to develop proposals for the introduction of a regional out-of-hours service will issue a consultation document in the near future which will provide details of the proposed model.

Out-of-Hours Social Work Service

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, for each of the last five years, (i) to provide a breakdown of the operation costs of the out-of-hours social work service in each Health and Social Care Trust area; and (ii) the number of people employed in the service in each Trust area.

(AQW 11146/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has been advised by the HSCB that the operational costs of the current Out-of-Hours Social Work Service is approximately £1.6m across the five Trusts. The present configuration of the different out-of-hours services means that it is not possible to accurately quantify the number of staff employed in the delivery of the service.

Out-of-Hours Social Work Service

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of the proposed new out-of-hours social work service and from where the funding will be sourced.

(AQW 11147/11-15)

Mr Poots: The HSCB and HSC Trusts have established a Project Team to develop proposals for the introduction of a regional Out-of-Hours Social Work Service. When those proposals have been developed there will then be a consultation about the proposed model. This consultation is expected to take place in the near future.

Any decisions regarding the configuration and potential cost of a regional Out-of-Hours Social Work Service will be taken after consultation has occurred.

Blood Drives

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many blood drives have been carried out due to low blood stocks in each of the last 24 months, broken by constituency.

(AQW 11174/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion issued 2 appeals for blood donors in the last 24 months. The first in December 2010 due to severe weather, and the second in January 2012 due to Christmas /New Year depletion of stocks.

The appeals are province-wide and therefore cannot be broken down by constituency.

Legislative Programme

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his Department's legislative programme for the next 18 months, including the timescales for introduction.

(AQW 11207/11-15)

Mr Poots: As indicated in my response to AQW 10636/11-15, I have stated my intention, subject to the agreement of the Executive, to bring forward a number of Bills during the current Assembly mandate. At this stage, I am not in a position to provide dates for the introduction of the Bills.

Pseudomonas Infection: Interim Report

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the publication of the interim report on the pseudomonas infection, whether he will now provide the information requested in (i) AQW 8803/11-15; (ii) AQW 8805/11-15; (iii) AQW 8807/11-15; (iv) AQW 8810/11-15; (v) AQW 8585/11-15; (vi) AQW 85861/11-15; and (vii) AQW 8587/11-15.

(AQW 11228/11-15)

Mr Poots: Although the interim report has been published, the review is ongoing and the technical areas in these questions continue to form part of the investigations of the review team. I cannot therefore comment on these areas until the review investigations have been completed and I have received the final report at which time I will bring the report to the Assembly.

Pseudomonas Incident: Altnagevlin Area Hospital

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 7493/11-15, whether the date of the submission on the pseudomonas outbreak, namely 13 December 2011, was the date on which he became aware of the incident, and if not, on what date he became aware of the incident.

(AQW 11229/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can confirm that 13 December 2011 was the date I became aware of this incident.

Out-of-Hours Social Work Service

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what added value the proposed new out-of-hours social work service will have; and how it will benefit local populations.

(AQW 11236/11-15)

Mr Poots: The HSCB and HSC Trusts have established a Project Team to develop proposals for the introduction of a regional Out-of-Hours Social Work Service. When those proposals have been developed there will then be a consultation about the proposed model. This consultation is expected to take place in the near future.

The intended outcome of the review of the Out-of-Hours Social Work Service is to produce a standardised system across NI which will facilitate improved governance arrangements and enhance the delivery of high quality social work services to the public.

Out-of-Hours Social Work Service

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of calls received by out-of-hours social work teams in the Health and Social Care Trusts in each of the last five years; (ii) how these calls were managed; and (iii) the current response times from receipt of a call in each Trust area.

(AQW 11237/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

A consultation paper on the proposed new model for out of hours social work services is to be produced by the HSCB. The paper will outline the proposed staffing arrangements to support the implementation of the HSCB and HSC Trusts' new model for delivery of out of hours services. It is anticipated that the new model will build upon much of the work already undertaken within the Department, HSCB and Trusts to enhance the delivery of high quality social work services to the public.

Out-of-Hours Social Work Service

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) how the new out-of-hours social work service will be staffed; (ii) how calls will be managed; (iii) how the new service will be resourced and from where the funding will be sourced; and (iv) the estimated additional cost of the new service.

(AQW 11242/11-15)

Mr Poots: The HSCB and HSC Trusts have established a Project Team to develop proposals for the introduction of a regional Out-of-Hours Social Work Service. When those proposals have been developed there will then be a consultation about the proposed model. This consultation is expected to take place in the near future.

Any decisions regarding the configuration and potential cost of a regional Out-of-Hours Social Work Service will be taken after consultation has occurred.

Out-of-Hours Social Work Service

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current management arrangements for out-of-hours social work services in each Health and Social Care Trust area; and (ii) how this will change under the proposals. (AQW 11243/11-15)

Mr Poots: Two systems of Out-of-Hours Social Work Service currently operate in Northern Ireland. Belfast and South Eastern Trusts combine their service into a dedicated Emergency Duty Team which is managed by the Belfast Trust. The Northern, Western and Southern Trusts each use a 'co-ordinator/responder' model where staff undertake these roles in addition to their substantive posts. These services are managed within the structures of the respective Trusts.

The HSCB and HSC Trusts have established a Project Team to develop proposals for the introduction of a regional Out-of-Hours Social Work Service. When those proposals have been developed there will then be a consultation about the proposed model. This consultation is expected to take place in the near future.

Any decisions regarding the configuration of a regional Out-of-Hours Social Work Service will be taken after consultation has occurred.

Accident and Emergency Department: Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, since the closure of the Accident and Emergency Department at Belfast City Hospital, how many patients have been discharged from triage in the Accident and Emergency Department at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast by staff nurses. (AQW 11276/11-15)

Mr Poots: Between 1st November 2011 and 30th April 2012, 218 patients were discharged from triage in the Royal Victoria Hospital emergency care department, by staff nurses.

Ambulance Service Station Officers

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of 999 calls that required Ambulance Service Station Officers to attend emergency situations, in each of the last three years. (AQW 11284/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is shown in the table below:

Year	Station Officer attendances
2009/2010	719
2010/2011	591
2011/2012	520
Total	1,830

Source: Northern Ireland Ambulance Service

Out-of-Hours Social Work Service

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the out-of-hours social work service links with other local agencies. (AQW 11300/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Out-of-Hours Social Work Service links with other statutory and voluntary sector organisation's as required, including PSNI, NI Housing Executive and Social Security Agency.

Out-of-Hours Social Work Service

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) whether staff engaged in the out-of-hours social work service will be automatically transferred into the proposed new system at each locality; (ii) whether there will be any job losses as a result of the implementation of the proposed new system; and (iii) how the proposed changes will contribute to his Department's Decentralisation Policy. (AQW 11301/11-15)

Mr Poots: The HSCB and HSC Trusts have established a Project Team to develop proposals for the introduction of a regional Out-of-Hours Social Work Service. When those proposals have been developed there will then be a consultation about the proposed model. This consultation is expected to take place in the near future.

My Department has received an assurance from the HSCB, which is responsible for the review of Out-of-Hours Social Work Services, that there will be no compulsory redundancies as a result of any new staffing arrangements pursuant to the review and the introduction of a regional out-of-hours service.

Any decisions regarding the configuration of a regional Out-of-Hours Social Work Service will be taken after consultation has occurred.

Out-of-Hours Social Work Service

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what potential risks and problems have been identified in the new proposals for out-of-hours social work service; and how these will be addressed.

(AQW 11302/11-15)

Mr Poots: The HSCB and HSC Trusts have established a Project Team to develop proposals for the introduction of a regional Out-of-Hours Social Work Service. When those proposals have been developed there will then be a consultation about the proposed model. This consultation is expected to take place in the near future.

Any decisions regarding the configuration of a regional Out-of-Hours Social Work Service will be taken after consultation has occurred.

Kangaroo Birth

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of 'kangaroo birth' and whether it is there is a policy in maternity units to promote 'kangaroo birth' for premature and non-premature babies.

(AQW 11342/11-15)

Mr Poots: Kangaroo care is the practice of skin-to-skin contact between a mother and her newborn baby, which encourages bonding, breastfeeding and early discharge from hospital.

Although there is no formal Departmental or Trust guidance specifically on kangaroo care, all Trusts encourage skin-to-skin contact for all newborn babies where appropriate.

Department of Justice

Thomas Ward: Release

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to Thomas Ward being permitted to return to reside in Coalisland, (i) on what date was permission granted; (ii) at which court; (iii) what release or bail terms were imposed; and (iv) who was the presiding judge.

(AQW 10762/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Mr Ward did not require permission to return to reside in Coalisland.

At Belfast Crown Court on 20 December 2010, Her Honour Judge Smyth granted him Crown Court Bail on a number of motoring offences, subject to the following conditions:-

- (i) That he complies with curfew restrictions;
- (ii) That he does not enter licensed premises or consume alcohol;
- (iii) That he resides at an address in Coalisland;
- (iv) That he does not enter a designated area of West Belfast; and
- (v) That he must not travel in a motor vehicle unless accompanied by a Probation Officer.

This bail remained in force until 2 February 2011.

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Justice what agencies or organisations are represented in the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences model of intervention.

(AQW 10804/11-15)

Mr Ford: The key agencies who attend MARACs include Police Service of Northern Ireland, Health and Social Care Trusts, Education and Library Boards, Probation Board for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and voluntary organisations.

The role of voluntary organisations, such as Women's Aid, is to share relevant information they hold and to volunteer actions to assist in the creation of an effective safety plan to protect the victims and their children. Actions, as part of the safety plan, may also be allocated to voluntary organisations.

Pending finalisation of a MARAC Information Sharing Agreement, and on the recommendation of the Information Commissioner's Office, the MARAC Operational Group agreed, with effect from 6 April 2012, that voluntary organisations will only attend MARACs for those cases being referred and presented by them.

Further discussions to finalise the MARAC Information Sharing Agreement have been scheduled with the Information Commissioner's Office. Such discussions will include agreement on the limitations to be placed on the sharing of information. The issues of representation at MARAC, including the role of voluntary organisations and how they share information, are currently under consideration by the MARAC Operational Group.

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Justice how voluntary organisations, such as Women's Aid, are involved and included in Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences.

(AQW 10806/11-15)

Mr Ford: The key agencies who attend MARACs include Police Service of Northern Ireland, Health and Social Care Trusts, Education and Library Boards, Probation Board for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and voluntary organisations.

The role of voluntary organisations, such as Women's Aid, is to share relevant information they hold and to volunteer actions to assist in the creation of an effective safety plan to protect the victims and their children. Actions, as part of the safety plan, may also be allocated to voluntary organisations.

Pending finalisation of a MARAC Information Sharing Agreement, and on the recommendation of the Information Commissioner's Office, the MARAC Operational Group agreed, with effect from 6 April 2012, that voluntary organisations will only attend MARACs for those cases being referred and presented by them.

Further discussions to finalise the MARAC Information Sharing Agreement have been scheduled with the Information Commissioner's Office. Such discussions will include agreement on the limitations to be placed on the sharing of information. The issues of representation at MARAC, including the role of voluntary organisations and how they share information, are currently under consideration by the MARAC Operational Group.

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Justice in instances where a voluntary organisation makes a referral to a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference, what limitations are placed on sharing information, concerning the referral, with that voluntary organisation.

(AQW 10807/11-15)

Mr Ford: The key agencies who attend MARACs include Police Service of Northern Ireland, Health and Social Care Trusts, Education and Library Boards, Probation Board for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and voluntary organisations.

The role of voluntary organisations, such as Women's Aid, is to share relevant information they hold and to volunteer actions to assist in the creation of an effective safety plan to protect the victims and their children. Actions, as part of the safety plan, may also be allocated to voluntary organisations.

Pending finalisation of a MARAC Information Sharing Agreement, and on the recommendation of the Information Commissioner's Office, the MARAC Operational Group agreed, with effect from 6 April 2012, that voluntary organisations will only attend MARACs for those cases being referred and presented by them.

Further discussions to finalise the MARAC Information Sharing Agreement have been scheduled with the Information Commissioner's Office. Such discussions will include agreement on the limitations to be placed on the sharing of information. The issues of representation at MARAC, including the role of voluntary organisations and how they share information, are currently under consideration by the MARAC Operational Group.

Youth and Juvenile Cases

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many youth and juvenile cases are currently in the court system in which the accused are (i) remanded in custody; and (ii) resident or bailed to a care home.

(AQW 10813/11-15)

Mr Ford: As at 27 April 2012, there were 434 active cases involving 332 youth defendants before the Youth Court and Crown Court who were in custody or on bail. 20 were remanded in custody and 312 were remanded on bail. It is not possible to determine the residence of each defendant without incurring disproportionate cost.

HMP Magilligan Employees

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Justice how many people are employed in HMP Magilligan; and how many of the employees live within the Limavady Borough area.

(AQW 10825/11-15)

Mr Ford: Four hundred and forty four staff currently work at Magilligan Prison.

One hundred and twenty seven of those staff currently reside in the Limavady Borough area. Of those staff who reside in the Limavady Borough area, 18 are considered to be non mobile grades.

HMP Maghaberry: Circumstances of Fire

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the circumstances of the fire in HMP Maghaberry on 23 April 2012, including (i) in which area the fire occurred; (ii) whether any staff or prisoners were injured as a result of the fire; (iii) what started the fire; (iv) the extent of the damage caused; and (v) whether anyone has been charged in connection with the fire.

(AQW 10858/11-15)

Mr Ford: At 18.40hrs on 23 April 2012 a small fire was discovered in a recreation room on landing five in Erne House. The fire was confined to a cupboard containing some books and stationary and was extinguished by staff and some prisoners. One officer went off duty after inhaling smoke. The fire was confined to the cupboard and there was minimal damage caused. The matter is the subject of an ongoing police investigation and no one has been charged at this time.

Fines: Non-Payment

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been committed to prison for non-payment of fines in each of the last five years; and what percentage this group represented of the total prison population in each year.

(AQW 10874/11-15)

Mr Ford: The number and percentage of people committed to prison solely for non-payment of fines across the last five years for which data is available is provided in the Table below.

New Committals	Year				
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Fine Default Nos.	1,724	1742	1,247	1,891	2,179
Fine Default percentages	28%	28%	28%	35%	36%
All Other Prisoners	4337	4443	3,133	3,461	3,825
Total	6061	6185	4,380	5,352	6,004

Data for 2007 and 2008 should not be directly compared with data from 2009 to 2011 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

Defibrillators

Mr Weir asked Minister of Justice what action his Department is taking to increase the number of defibrillators in buildings used by his Department or its arm's-length bodies.

(AQW 10895/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice currently has defibrillators in a number of buildings occupied by the Department, Agencies and arm's length bodies.

We will continue to keep health and safety matters under review through our annual buildings inspection programme and further defibrillators will be obtained if needed.

Taking, Possession, Making or Distribution of Indecent Photographs of Children

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many cases involving the taking, possession, making or distribution of indecent photographs of children are currently in the court system, broken down by court division.

(AQW 10933/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below details the number of active cases in the court system in Northern Ireland involving the taking, possession, making or distribution of indecent photographs of children.

	Number of Cases
Court of Appeal	1
County Court Divisions:	
Antrim	5
Ards	4
Armagh and South Down	1
Belfast	20
Craigavon	4

	Number of Cases
Fermanagh and Tyrone	1
Londonderry	3
Total	39

Prison Service

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the recent claims by the Head of the Prison Officers Association that the situation in prisons 'is a mess' and that it will get worse due to staff cuts and that the Strategic Efficiency and Effectiveness Programme has 'dismantled the Prison Service'.

(AQW 10935/11-15)

Mr Ford: The objective of the Strategic Efficiency and Effectiveness Programme is to reform not dismantle the Northern Ireland Prison Service. In line with a series of external reports which highlight the need to deliver an efficient and cost-effective Service, NIPS is committed to the introduction of modern working practices, a more streamlined management structure and the delivery of a focused approach to reducing the risk of reoffending.

The Strategic Efficiency and Effectiveness Programme is being delivered in a measured way with change being implemented incrementally in line with the four-year implementation framework outlined in the NIPS Corporate and Business Plan. I do not accept that the Prison Service is "in a mess" and I welcome the fact that NIPS management have reached an agreement with the Prison Officers' Association in terms of a series of reform measures which will be implemented over the coming months.

In the context of such a wide-ranging change programme, it must be recognised that it will take time for the benefits of the process we have commenced to be fully realised.

Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) what is the current total in legal aid granted in the case of the five remand prisoners from HMP Maghaberry, who initiated a judicial review of the decision to take them for further questioning by police in relation to alleged terrorism charges; (ii) what is the estimated final legal aid total of this case; and (iii) how many (a) legal firms; and (b) counsel were instructed.

(AQW 11033/11-15)

Mr Ford: To date £2,010 has been paid to a firm of solicitors. The payment comprises £1,500 in solicitor profit costs, £300 in VAT and £210 in disbursements.

One legal aid certificate was granted to a prisoner in respect of the judicial review proceedings. The certificate allows for one solicitor, one junior counsel and one senior counsel.

As yet the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission has not received a full claim in respect of the certificate, so I am unable to comment on the final legal aid cost of this case.

Electricity: Dishonest Use

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 10609/11-15, how many of these cases relate to cannabis factories.
(AQW 11052/11-15)

Mr Ford: Pursuant to my answer to AQW10609/11-15, of the 63 cases referred to, 38 cases had other charges associated with the cultivation and possession of cannabis.

Thomas Ward

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many times Thomas Ward was visited or interviewed by his Designated Risk Manager after his return to Coalisland and prior to his arrest for an incident in February 2011, broken down by month.

(AQW 11053/11-15)

Mr Ford: I do not give detailed information on the risk management procedures adopted for specific individual cases, as to do so could undermine the effectiveness of those measures. Visits and interviews are carried out only as part of a comprehensive risk management plan and cannot be considered in isolation from other aspects of that overall plan.

Sexual Offences Prevention Order

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many people are currently under a Sexual Offences Prevention Order in each court division; and how many have (i) breached their Order; and (ii) been charged with breaching their order.

(AQW 11058/11-15)

Mr Ford: Table 1 below details by County Court Division the number of people who were subject to a Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO) as of 3 May 2012.

Table 1: Number of defendants with a Sexual Offences Prevention Order

County Court Division	Number of Defendants
Antrim	73
Ards	75
Armagh and South Down	38
Belfast	145
Craigavon	60
Fermanagh and Tyrone	63
Londonderry	72
Total	526

Data is provisional and may be subject to change.

It would not be possible to identify which of these specific orders had been breached without an extensive manual tracking exercise for each individual record which would incur disproportionate cost.

Table 2 below details by County Court Division the number of defendants convicted of a breach of a SOPO in each of the last five years.

Table 2: Number of defendants convicted of breaches of SOPO

County Court Division	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*	1st January 2012 – 3rd May 2012*	Total
Belfast	2	7	18	23	14	7	71
Londonderry	0	3	1	0	3	0	7
Antrim	1	4	1	2	3	3	14
Fermanagh and Tyrone	2	0	1	5	1	0	9
Armagh and South Down	0	0	0	0	3	1	4
Ards	4	2	3	2	7	4	22
Craigavon	0	1	1	2	2	4	10
Total	9	17	25	34	33	19	137

* Data is provisional and may be subject to change.

Table 3 below details the number of defendants currently charged with breach of a Sexual Offences Prevention Order.

Table 3: Number of Defendants with current breach proceedings

County Court Division	Number Defendants
Antrim	2
Ards	3
Armagh and South Down	1
Belfast	5
Craigavon	1

County Court Division	Number Defendants
Fermanagh and Tyrone	1
Londonderry	5
Total	18

Data is provisional and may be subject to change.

Magilligan Prison

Mr McClarty asked Minister of Justice to detail the number of (i) prisoners who are currently residing in Magilligan Prison whose address, prior to imprisonment, was within a 50-mile radius of Magilligan Prison; (ii) prisoners who are currently residing in Magilligan Prison whose address, prior to imprisonment, was outside a 50-mile radius of Magilligan Prison and; (iii) staff who are working in Magilligan Prison who live within a 50-mile radius of the prison.

(AQW 11060/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) 156 prisoners currently reside in Magilligan Prison who, prior to imprisonment, had an address that was within a 50-mile radius of the prison prior to imprisonment.
- (ii) 354 prisoners had an address that was outside a 50-mile radius of Magilligan Prison prior to imprisonment.

A further 19 prisoners were identified as having No Fixed Abode.

(iii) A total of 439 staff currently work in Magilligan Prison. 422 staff live within a 50-mile radius of the prison.

It should be noted that a 50-mile radius includes most of County Tyrone and County Antrim, though not Greater Belfast.

Republican Separated Prisoners Protest

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 10338/11-15, given that the Compact signed by separated republican prisoners states, in Point 14.1, that charges and disciplinary proceedings will be held if rules are broken, how many of these prisoners, who are on protest, have been charged or are subject to disciplinary proceedings as a result of their actions, since the protest began.

(AQW 11063/11-15)

Mr Ford: Of those 29 prisoners currently participating in the ongoing protest action at Maghaberry, 25 have been subject to disciplinary proceedings since the protest began. All prisoners on protest are being managed under prison rule 32 (restricted association).

When deemed necessary for the maintenance of good order or discipline, or to ensure the safety of officers, prisoners, or any other person, the governor may arrange for the restriction of a prisoner's association. The governor has determined that rule 32 is the most effective and appropriate manner in which to manage those on protest. Each individual prisoner has regular reviews in regard to continuation of rule 32. All those prisoners subject to the restrictions under rule 32 can avail of their basic entitlements to visits; telephone; and one hour of daily exercise.

Orders Prohibiting Publicity on the Granting of Injunctive Relief

Mr Allister asked Minister of Justice (i) how many orders have been made by the High Court of Justice prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive relief since 26 May 2011; (ii) when each order was made; (iii) how many are still extant in Northern Ireland; and (iv) whether any such orders have been discharged since 23 June 2011.

(AQW 11075/11-15)

Mr Ford: Two orders prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive relief have been made in the High Court since 26 May 2011. One is still extant and one has been discharged.

As one of the orders is extant further information cannot be provided without risking contravening the terms of the order.

The order that has been discharged was made on 8 December 2011.

Parades

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many (i) unionist; (ii) republican; and (iii) other parades have taken place in each of the last two years.

(AQW 11077/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department is not responsible for parading.

Statistics in relation to parades may be obtained by contacting the Parades Commission directly.

Medical Records of Interned and Sentenced Prisoners

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Justice whether the medical records of interned and sentenced prisoners that were held in Maze/Long Kesh in the aftermath of the fire and riots in October 1974 are still in existence.

(AQW 11098/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not hold the medical records dating from the incidents in 1974 in a readily retrievable format. There may still be some prisoner custody files in existence which would hold some medical information however it is impossible to say with certainty which files these would be. In the event that an ex-prisoner from that time wishes to obtain a copy of their prison records they should make a subject access request under the terms of section 7 of the Data Protection Act 1998. On receipt of such a request, the Records and Information Management Team of the Northern Ireland Prison Service will carry out a comprehensive search of the archives in accordance with their duties under that Act. All subject access requests will be dealt with on an individual basis and any records found will be provided to the data subject.

Historical Enquiries Team Cases

Mr Copeland asked Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7487/11-15 (i) for a breakdown of the £1,588,898 expenditure, including an overview of the cases involved; and (ii) how much of this expenditure has led to convictions; and (iii) to detail the cases to which these convictions relate.

(AQW 11101/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Historical Enquiries Team is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Witness Service and Young Witness Service Officers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many (i) Witness Service; and (ii) Young Witness Service officers are available in each court division; and for his assessment of the value of this service to people attending court.

(AQW 11117/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Witness Service has a team of ninety nine volunteers providing support to witnesses across the seven court divisions. There is one staff member available to co-ordinate support in each of the court divisions with the exception of the Belfast division, where two staff members are available, and the Craigavon division and Armagh and South Down division, where one staff member is responsible for both.

The Young Witness Service has a team of forty-two volunteers providing support to young witnesses across the seven court divisions. There is one full time and one part time staff member available covering two court divisions with the exception of the Belfast division, which has two full time staff members.

These services play a significant role in assisting witnesses to give their best evidence at court and this is reflected in the high level of satisfaction reported by users.

Alleged Sexual Assault Cases

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 10611/11-15, for a breakdown of the figures by (i) youth/juvenile; and (ii) adult defendants.

(AQW 11124/11-15)

Mr Ford: Table 1 below details the number of active cases involving sexual offences in the Magistrates' Court and Crown Court broken down by County Court Division and by youth and adult defendants as at 2 May 2012. These figures will differ to those provided in AQW 10611/11-15 because they are extracted from a live database and cases are added or disposed of daily.

Table 1

County Court Division	Magistrates' Court		Crown Court		Total	
	Adult	Youth	Adult	Youth	Adult	Youth
Antrim	28	2	25	3	53	5
Ards	17	0	18	3	35	3
Armagh and South Down	10	0	14	0	24	0
Belfast	87	10	73	3	160	13
Craigavon	21	2	19	0	40	2
Fermanagh and Tyrone	20	1	16	1	36	2
Londonderry	30	2	19	0	49	2
Total	213	17	184	10	397	27

Table 2 details the number of active cases involving sexual offences that are currently being appealed before the Court of Appeal and County Court broken down by youth and adult defendants as at 2 May 2012.

Table 2

	Adult	Youth
Court of Appeal	18	0
County Court Divisions:		
Antrim	1	0
Armagh and South Down	1	0
Belfast	3	0
Fermanagh and Tyrone	1	0
Total	24	0

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Justice how many applicants to each Policing and Community Safety Partnership have been rejected on the basis of their criminal record background checks.

(AQW 11177/11-15)

Mr Ford: The process of appointing independent members to Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) and District Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (DPCSPs) is a restricted function of the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

However, the Board has confirmed that no applicants to PCSPs or DPCSPs were rejected on the basis of their criminal record background checks.

Withholding of Information about the Commission of a Criminal Offence

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether the withholding of information about the commission of a criminal offence remains an offence in Northern Ireland, and was so in 1975; (ii) if he can confirm that there is no time limit prosecution for withholding information; and (iii) whether he will enquire, and report to the Assembly, on any police action taken in regard to the issues surrounding Cardinal Brady, as highlighted in the recent BBC 'This World' programme.

(AQW 11192/11-15)

Mr Ford: Under Section 5 of the Criminal Law Act (NI) 1967, which came into force on 29th August 1967, the withholding of information, without reasonable excuse, which is likely to secure, or to be of material assistance in securing, the apprehension, prosecution or conviction of any person for an offence attracting a sentence of five years or more is an offence. There is no time limit for a prosecution under section 5 of that Act. Actions that the police may take regarding the issues raised in the recent BBC programme are an operational matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Policing Board. I would encourage anyone with information about child abuse, past or present, to bring it to the immediate attention of the police.

Case 11/039234 at Dungannon Magistrates Court

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 10656/11-15, whether the recording of this matter by the Court Service, at the time of dismissal, is contradictory to that which was recorded by the Public Prosecution Service, which claimed that it had agreed to provide an adult caution but that this agreement was later withdrawn; and for a detailed timeline of this case as it progressed through the court system.

(AQW 11208/11-15)

Mr Ford: As stated in my answer to AQW10656/11-15, the issues associated with case number 11/039234 are a matter for the Public Prosecution Service and I cannot comment on how they recorded the outcome of this case.

The timeline of the case as it progressed through the court system is set out in the table below.

Date	Case Event
20 May 11	Case First Listed - Adjourned
27 May 11	Defendant Pleaded Not Guilty - Adjourned
10 June 11	Case Adjourned
22 July 11	Case Adjourned
19 August 11	Case Adjourned
15 September 11	Contested hearing. Case Dismissed - On Merits
03 April 12	Charge re-instated at request of the Public Prosecution Service
18 April 12	Charge Withdrawn

Department for Regional Development

RAF Base: Ballyhornan, Co Down

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development what assessment Roads Service has made of adopting roads at the former RAF base in Ballyhornan, Co Down.

(AQW 10714/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I have personal knowledge of this site, having visited the former Bishops court RAF base last year. The base is adjacent to Ballyhornan village and was vacated by the RAF in 1990. It included a

number of small, single storey, accommodation buildings which, although having pitched roofs, are similar in size to the 'Nissen' huts erected during the war.

The access roads in the base have never been brought up to an adoptable standard and consequently have not been adopted into the public road network. To be adopted, the roads would have to be brought up to the standards indicated in the Department's 'Creating Places' document, which gives guidance on layout and access requirements. Public money is not available to undertake this work. A recent study by Roads Service found that there were some 600 km of unadopted roads in Northern Ireland, serving five properties or more. It would cost some £300 million to bring these roads up to adoption standards

Unfortunately, therefore, the owners/frontagers of the site would have to complete this work, at their own expense, before Roads Service could consider the access roads for adoption into the public road network.

Gritting Applications

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to list (i) the applications for roads to be gritted that have been received by (a) Ballymoney; and (b) Ballymena Borough Councils in each of the last ten years; (ii) the vehicle-per-day rate on each of these roads; and the applications that were successful.

(AQW 10738/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it holds records of gritting applications received from Ballymoney Borough Council for a seven year period (2005-2012) and for a five year period (2007-2012) in respect of Ballymena Borough Council. Details of those applications are set out in the table below:

Ballymoney Borough Council				
Date	Road Name	Comment	Traffic Count	Approved
Jan 2010	Mullan Road, Ballymoney	Not main through route	N/A minor rural road	No
Dec 2010	Ballinlea Road, Stranocum	Not main through route; (currently salted to Bushvalley school)	1192	No
Feb 2008	Ballyveely Road, Cloughmills	Not main through route	1835 (incl bus seat factor)	No
June 2010	Ballyweany Road, Cloughmills	Not main through route	None available	No
Jan 2010	Duneany Road, Rasharkin	Not through route/ parallel salted route available	917 (incl bus seat factor)	No
Mar 2012	Gortahar Road, Rasharkin	Not through route / parallel salted route available	975	No
Sept 2010	Station Road, Dunloy	Not main through route	1468 (incl bus seat factor)	No
Jun 2010	Galdanagh Road, Dunloy	Not main through route	N/A very minor rural road	No
Dec 2006	Corkey Road, Loughguile	Not main through route	None available	No
Jul 2005	Tullaghans Road Dunloy	None	1500	Yes
Jan 2011	Bendooragh Road, Ballymoney	Not main through route	N/A minor rural road	No
Dec 2008	Vow Road, Ballymoney	Not main through route	1199 minor rural road	No
Dec 2011	Carcullagh Road, Dervock	Not main through route	N/A minor rural road	No
Jan 2010	Topp Road, Stranocum	Not main through route	N/A very minor rural road	No
Dec 2010	Tamlaght Road, Rasharkin	Not main through route	N/A very minor rural road	No
Jan 2009	Moneycannon Road, Ballymoney	Not main through route	N/A very minor rural road	No

Ballymoney Borough Council				
Date	Road Name	Comment	Traffic Count	Approved
Jul 2007	Taughey Road, Ballymoney	Not main through route	2102	Yes
Jan 2005	Coolkeeran Road, Armoy	Not main through route	N/A minor rural road	No
Oct 2006	Gracehill Road, Armoy	None	1856	Yes
Dec 2010	Lislagan Road, Ballymoney	Not main through route	N/A very minor rural road	No
Nov 2011	Loughill Road, Cloughmills	Not main through route	N/A minor rural / part urban	No
Jan 2007	Carnamenagh Road Loughguile	Not main through route	N/A Very minor rural road	No
Nov 2006	Fivey Road, Stranocum	Short Link	None available	Yes
Mar 2006	Moneyleck Road, Rasharkin	Short Link	None available	Yes
Dec 2011	Westgate, Ballymoney	Not main through route	N/A urban housing cul-de-sac	No
Dec 2009	Bamford Park, Rasharkin	Not main through route	N/A urban housing cul-de-sac	No
Jan 2010	Intermediate Road, Ballymoney	Not main through route	N/A urban housing cul-de-sac	No
Jan 2010	Greengage Lane, Ballymoney	Not main through route	N/A urban housing cul-de-sac	No
Jun 2007	Castlehill, Ballymoney	Not main through route	N/A urban housing cul-de-sac	No
Dec 2010	Macfin Road, Ballymoney	Not main through route	N/A minor rural road	No
Feb 2009	Seacon Rd., Ballymoney	Not main through route	N/A minor rural road	No

Ballymena Borough Council				
Date	Road Name	Comment	Traffic Count	Approved
Feb 2012	Taylorstown Road, Ballymena	Parallel Route	1084	No
Jan 2012	Lisnamanny Road, Martinstown, Ballymena	None	1129	No
Jan 2012	Carneaney Road, Ballymena	None	506	No
Jan 2012	Castle Tower School	Not RS Property	Not Applicable	No
Dec 2011	Duneaney Road, Cullybackey, Ballymena	None	981	No
Feb 2011	Carnalbanagh Road, Ballymena/Larne	Parallel Route	Not Available	No
Jan 2011	Ballybollen Road, Ballymena	Parallel Route	920	No
Nov 2010	Lisnamanny Road, Ballymena	None	1129	No

Ballymena Borough Council				
Date	Road Name	Comment	Traffic Count	Approved
Jan 2010	Cloughwater Road, Clough, Ballymena	Parallel Route	Not Available	No
Jan 2010	Magheralane Road, Ballymena	Parallel Route	888	No
Jan 2010	Slaght Road, Slaght	Parallel Route	1257	No
Jan 2010	Garvaghy Road, Ballymena	Parallel Route	1169	No
Jan 2010	Ballyconnelly Road, Ballymena	Parallel Route	1365	No
Dec 2009	Duneaney Road Cullybackey, Ballymena	None	917	No
Dec 2009	Duneaney Road, Cullybackey, Ballymena	None	917	No
Jan 2009	Carnalbanagh Road, Ballymena/Larne	Parallel Route	Not Available	No
Jan 2009	Garvaghy Road, Ballymena	Parallel Route	1169	No
Dec 2008	Craigdunloof Road, Newtowncrommelin, Ballymena	Link to Hamlet	Not Applicable	Yes
Dec 2009	Lisnahunshin Road, Portglenone, Ballymena	Parallel Route	784	No
Nov 2007	Ballbollen Road	Parallel Route	920	No
Oct 2007	Cloughwater Road, Ballymena	Parallel Route	Not Available	No
Aug 2007	Dunminning Road, Ballymena	Parallel Route	1152	No
June 2007	Cloughwater Road, Ballymena	Parallel Route	Not Available	No

Roads Service: Gritted Network

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development how much it costs on average to grit a (i) mile; and (ii) kilometre of the Roads Service gritted network.

(AQW 10739/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the average cost for salting a mile of the salted network is £20.62 per mile and £12.81 for salting a kilometre of the salted network.

Salt Bins: North Antrim Area

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to list (i) the requests that were received, and scored, for salt bins in the North Antrim area in the last five years; (ii) the score that each request achieved; (iii) the criteria for which points were awarded; and (iv) the requests that resulted in the provision of salt bins.

(AQW 10740/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of requests for the provision of salt bins in the North Antrim area, the scoring of each, where applicable, and the decision taken are shown in the table below.

To qualify for consideration for the provision of a salt bin, the gradient of the road must be equal to or greater than 5% with no reasonable alternative route available. The points scoring system also takes account of further factors such as geometry, community welfare and usage characteristics.

Ballymoney & Moyle Council Areas			
Road Name/Location	Comment	Score	Approved
Agherton Park, Ballymoney	Assessment sheet missing		Yes
Ballyveely Road, Cloughmills	Existing boxes close to site		No
Ballyvenaght Road, Ballycastle	Existing boxes close to site		No
Balnamore Road, Ballymoney	Grittied Route		No
Bannfields, Ballymoney		21.12	No
Bayview Park, Waterfoot		12	No
Beckett Avenue, Ballymoney		13.08	No
Beech Hill, Ballymoney	Flat, no assessment		No
Bellaghy Park, Dunloy		25	No
Blackpark Cottages, Ballyvoy	Existing boxes close to site		No
Braeside Park, Dunloy		19.2	No
Bush Gardens, Bushmills	Flat, no assessment		No
Cambourne Drive, Ballymoney		0	No
Carness Drive, Dunloy		23.04	No
Chestnut Grove, Ballymoney		19.2	No
Church Hill, Cloughmills		44.02	No
Churchfield, Rasharkin	Not adopted by Roads Service		No
Churchill Avenue, Cloughmills		25.27	No
Clady Road, Cushendall		7.8	No
Cloneen Drive, Ballymoney	Existing boxes close to site	34.32	No
Cypress Park, Cloughmills		19.44	No
Dalriada Drive, Cushendall		16	No
Donnelly Park, Bendooragh Road	Flat, no assessment.		No
Downview Drive, Ballymoney		16	No
Drumavoley Grange, Ballycastle	Not adopted by Roads Service		No
Drumavoley Road, Ballycastle	Salt pile provided instead	8.93	No
Drumvale Drive, Ballymoney		0	No
Dunamallaght Road, Ballymoney	Flat, no assessment.		No
Eagry Gardens, Bushmills		51.48	Yes
Eastburn Avenue, Ballymoney	Existing boxes close to site		No
Fairhead Crescent, Ballycastle		0	No
Fassagh Park, Dunloy		14.4	No
Feigh Road, Stranocum	Flat, no assessment.		No
Fenton Park, Cloughmills	Flat, no assessment.		No
Fermount Park, Armoy		52.42	Yes
Gaults Road, Cushendall		15	No
Glebe Avenue, Derrykeighan	Flat, no assessment.		No

Ballymoney & Moyle Council Areas			
Road Name/Location	Comment	Score	Approved
Glebe Park, Derrykeighan	Flat, no assessment.		No
Glenann Road, Cushendall		16	No
Glendun Road, Cushendall		16	No
Glenmore Gardens, Ballymoney		52.8	Yes
Gortamaddy Drive, Ballycastle	Flat, no assessment.		No
Gortamaddy Park, Ballycastle	Flat, no assessment.		No
Greenans Road, Ballycastle		48.8	Yes
Greenville Avenue, Ballymoney	Existing boxes close to site		No
Greenwood Park, Rasharkin	Flat, no assessment	-	No
Hawthorn Crescent, Dunloy		52.4	Yes
Hawthorn Park, Dunloy	Not adopted by R.S.		No
Hillside Drive, Dunloy	Existing boxes close to site		No
Hollybrook, Drumahiskey Road, Ballymoney		18.48	No
Knockklayde Park, Ballymoney		52.75	Yes
Layde Road, Cushendall		16	No
Leyland Heights, Ballycastle		9.36	No
Margaret Avenue, Ballymoney	Flat, no assessment		No
Margaret Square, Ballymoney	Flat, no assessment		No
McClelland Park, Dunloy	Disabled child.	41.0	Yes
Meadow View, Ballymoney	Existing boxes close to site		No
Mill Street, Ballycastle		57.3	Yes
Millbrook Manor, Ballymoney		19.2	No
Millfields, Balnamore	Flat, no assessment.		No
Millgrange, Ballymoney		21.12	No
Mount Edwards Hill, Cushendall	Assessment sheet missing		Yes
Mountview Crescent, Ballybogey		13.2	No
Moyle View, Cushendall		20.8	No
Mullan Road, Rasharkin		31.2	No
Newhill Drive, Ballymoney	Flat, no assessment.		No
Nursery Ave, Ballymoney	Not adopted by R.S.		No
Park View, Ballymoney	Existing boxes close to site	28.6	No
Parklands, Ballymoney		19.2	No
Parkview Close, Ballymoney		50.92	Yes
Postboys Walk, Ballymoney	Flat, no assessment.		No
Princess Gargens, Cloughmills		19.2	No
Raceview Drive, Ballymoney	Flat, no assessment		No

Ballymoney & Moyle Council Areas			
Road Name/Location	Comment	Score	Approved
Rathlin Avenue, Ballycastle	Flat, no assessment.		No
Richmond Crescent, Ballymoney		21.12	No
Rosemount, Cloughmills		13.2	No
Seymour Street, Ballymoney		31.44	No
Shelton Road, Loughguile		52.5	Yes
Springhill Manor, Cloughmills		14.52	No
St James' Road, Ballymoney		64.27	Yes
Station Cottages, Dervock	Not adopted by R.S.		No
Strand Park, Cloughmills		52.42	Yes
Sunnyside Drive, Rasharkin		21.12	No
The Birches, Rasharkin	Not adopted by R.S.		No
The Brambles, Dervock		34.32	No
Trinity Drive, Ballymoney	Flat, no assessment.		No
Tullaghgore Road, Seacon	Assessment sheet missing		No
Wallace Park, Rasharkin	Flat, no assessment.		No
Westfield Park, Seacon	Flat, no assessment.		No
Westoncroft, Ballymoney		52.75	Yes
Whitepark Court, Ballycastle	Existing boxes close to site		No

Ballymena Borough Council Area			
Road Name	Comment	Score	Approved
Parklands	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Douglas Road		37	No
Wellbourne Grove	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Millwater Court	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Thornbrook	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Parkmount	Box nearby	Not Applicable	No
Carnvale	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Galgorm Hall	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Maybin Park	Box nearby	Not Applicable	No
Whinsmour	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Long Common	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Kirk Gardens		42	No
Mansfield Heights	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Fenaghy Heights	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Ballyloughan Heights	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Chichester Park East	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No

Ballymena Borough Council Area			
Road Name	Comment	Score	Approved
Long Common	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Woodcroft Heights	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Long Common	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Crosshill View		42	No
Lantara		36	No
Carnvale		33	No
Chichester Park		25	No
Deramore Crescent	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Farm Lodge	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Thornbrook	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Sourhill	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Rathmore Heights	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Kew Link/ Kew Gardens	Box nearby	Not Applicable	No
Staffa Drive	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Millfield	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Brackley Manor		36	No
Brackley Manor	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Brooklands	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Mill Hollow		59	Yes
Raceview Ind. Estate	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Kew Gardens	Box nearby	Not Applicable	No
Tullymore Dale	Not adopted	Not Applicable	No
Millfield	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Shane Manor	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Ballybollen Road	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Dunclug Gardens	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Hillside Park	< 5% Gradient	Not Applicable	No
Fenagh Road	Private property	Not Applicable	No

Salt Bins

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the average cost of (i) providing a salt bin; and (ii) stocking a salt bin on an annual basis.

(AQW 10741/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the average cost of supplying and maintaining a grit box is approximately £167.00 for the first year. This cost includes the capital costs of the grit box and the costs associated with the average winter replenishment cycle.

Detailed costs cannot be provided for reasons of commercial sensitivity.

Translink: Contractual Arrangements for Pension Schemes

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development how much Translink has paid to senior management as part of contractual arrangements for pension schemes, in each of the last five years; and what elements of these payments were additional.
(AQW 10776/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink advise that they have not paid anything directly to senior managers as part of contractual arrangements for pension schemes. Employer contributions are made for all staff and paid directly to pension schemes. Note 21 of Translink's annual reports and accounts details Directors and Employees' Staff Costs.

Warrenpoint Harbour Authority

Mr Rogers asked the Minister for Regional Development how many full-time workers are employed by Warrenpoint Harbour Authority.
(AQW 10901/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There are 46 full time equivalents (FTEs) employed at Warrenpoint Harbour Authority. Of these 37 are full time workers with a further 20 employed on a part time basis to provide the further nine full time equivalent jobs.

A5: Impact on Future Roads Programmes

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the impact of the A5 on future roads programmes; and whether it will necessitate the delay of any proposed road schemes in the Five Year Programme.
(AQW 10934/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that the Executive agreed to proceed with two sections of the A5 which includes 14km of new off-line dual carriageway between New Buildings and Strabane and approximately 21km between Omagh and Ballygawley. A 1.5km single carriageway bypass of New Buildings is also proposed. Final decisions on the extent of the works will depend on the outcome of the Public Inquiry process.

Future funding for further sections of the A5 will be agreed through the structures of the North South Ministerial Council. This, along with the funding envisaged through the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-21, and that confirmed through subsequent budget settlements, will determine the timing of delivery of other schemes in the Strategic Road Improvement Programme.

Penalty Charge Notices

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development to explain the rationale behind the plans to increase the Penalty Charge Notices fine from £60 to £90.
(AQW 10942/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: During my recent briefing to the Committee for Regional Development, I indicated that I have approved an increase to the amount of a parking Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) from £60 to £90, with a 50% reduction for early payment if the charge is paid within 14 days.

While this increase has not yet been implemented, I consider the increase is necessary to act as a strong deterrent to those who park illegally and to ensure it is those road users who contribute more towards the considerable cost of providing parking services. I should stress that this increase will not affect those who park legally and abide by the law.

The proposal to increase the amount of a PCN is included in my Department's Budget 2011-15.

Penalty Charge Notices

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development how many Penalty Charge Notices have been issued in (i) Bangor town centre; (ii) the Donaghadee area; and (iii) the Holywood area, in each year since 2006.
(AQW 10943/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of Penalty Charge Notices issued on behalf of my Department's Roads Service in Bangor, Donaghadee, and Holywood in each financial year since 2006, are set out in the table below:

	2006/07*	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Bangor	1,519	4,456	4,464	3,672	3,156	3,411
Donaghadee	10	211	142	171	352	234
Holywood	690	977	1037	1,201	1,865	1,657

* Decriminalised Parking Enforcement was introduced at the end of October 2006.

Car Parking Charges

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development why car parking charges are going to be introduced in (i) Abbey Street West; (ii) Dufferin Avenue; and (iii) Central Avenue car parks in Bangor.

(AQW 10944/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I updated the Committee for Regional Development on 18 April 2012 on my proposals to implement the Savings Delivery Plans detailed in my Department's four year budget 2011-15. This included the introduction of charging to some car-parks.

The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 sets out a range of measures to control the demand for parking within the Belfast Metropolitan Area. It identified an area of parking restraint within Bangor, and the Abbey Street West, Dufferin Avenue, and Central Avenue car parks all fall within this area.

Car Parking Charges

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development, given the changes in car parking charges introduced in 2011 and the proposed changes currently being introduced, to provide an estimate of the difference in total income from all car parks in 2013 compared with 2010.

(AQW 10952/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the total income received from all car parks in 2010 was £10.7 million and that the projected income for 2013 is some £12.9 million, representing an estimated difference of some £2.2 million.

The figure for 2013 includes income from the 25 car parks where tariffs are due to be introduced in June 2012 and increased tariffs which were implemented in August/September 2011.

Cycling Infrastructure

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how much funding has been allocated for the cycling infrastructure in each year of the 2011-15 budgetary period.

(AQW 10960/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service is committed to provide safer roads for all road users, particularly for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists. My Department aims to achieve this by utilising a range of measures, such as road safety education and engineering, traffic calming and enhancement of the pedestrian and cycling network.

Cyclists have benefited from several years of investment in cycling infrastructure which, as set out in the Regional Transport Strategy and the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan, is well established. In the 10-year period, up to the end of the last financial year, my Department's Roads Service has invested almost £9 million in the provision of 230km of cycle lanes.

In the financial year 2011/12, some £0.95 million was allocated for the provision of cycling infrastructure and provided 6.3km of cycle lanes. Roads Service proposes to invest a further £140k to provide an additional 1.6km of cycle lanes in the 2012/13 financial year.

Detailed budgets for the remainder of the 2011-15 budget period have not been finalised. While I am currently unable to provide details of future programmes, the Member will be aware that capital budgets for the remaining budget period are under pressure and my Department is faced with the difficult task of maximising outputs from the limited resources available. In the prevailing circumstances, it will not therefore be possible to continue to fund all of our functions at the same levels as in previous years.

Cycling Measures

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the proportion of the roads budget that has been spent on cycling measures in each of the last five years.

(AQW 10961/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service's budget includes expenditure for both capital investment on, and maintenance of, the road, pedestrian & cycle network.

While capital investment on cycling measures, which includes paths that are shared between pedestrians and cyclists, can be identified separately, information on costs associated with the maintenance of these cycling paths is not recorded separately.

Details of expenditure on roads and cycling measures, in the last five financial years for which information is available, are set out in the table below:

Expenditure on roads and cycling measures over the last five years £'000

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Total Roads Service Capital and Maintenance Expenditure	260,104	219,876	222,042	246,416	198,333
Cycling Measures	1,151	1,056	1,360	981	311

Outturn for the financial year 2011/12 is currently being finalised. However, I can advise that information on completed and proposed cycle path schemes for the 2011/12 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.drni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils

Roads Programmes

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how his Department prioritises (i) new roads programmes; and (ii) roads maintenance programmes.

(AQW 10962/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The current programme of road improvements has been identified as part of a process which has evolved over the last decade and is based upon a number of key strategies and documents.

The Regional Development Strategy (RDS), first published in 2001 and revised in 2012, sets out the development of Northern Ireland over the period to 2035. The RDS is supported by the Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS), which was endorsed by the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2002, to make a significant contribution towards achieving the longer term vision for transportation. It has also been reviewed and a new document "Ensuring a Sustainable Transport Future – A New Approach to Regional Transportation" was published in March 2012.

The RTS is delivered by three transport plans The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan, the Sub Regional Transport Plan and the Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan. These plans have been enhanced through the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland.

The Strategic Road Improvement Programme has been developed from this framework, and embraces the five key assessment criteria of environment, safety, economy, accessibility and integration. Accordingly, priority has been given to upgrading the key transport corridors, then the link corridors and the remainder of the trunk road network.

With regard to the roads maintenance programme, Article 8 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, places a duty on my Department's Roads Service to maintain all public roads and footways in a safe and serviceable condition as far as is reasonably practicable. In recognition of its duty of care, Roads Service has put in place a set of Maintenance Standards for Safety and an inspection programme, to ensure that roads have a satisfactory level of skidding resistance which reduces the risk of uncontrolled skids and improves braking efficiency. These standards, which are designed to ensure a consistent service level and a safe highway, while offering value for money, are based on best practice, research and consultation with both the public and other professional bodies and industry.

The Safety Standards and procedures currently in operation establish frequencies for road and footway inspections dependent on traffic / pedestrian volumes and specify response times for the repair of defects. Inspection frequencies vary between daily cycles for motorways to four-monthly cycles for carriageways carrying low volumes of traffic. Response times specified for the repair of defects are dependent on the severity of the defect and range from one calendar day to routine inclusion in the next work programme for that particular route. These systems and procedures are recognised and accepted by the courts as being robust given the finite level of funding available. The Standards were last reviewed in 2006 and continue to provide a systematic approach to road maintenance management.

Surface defects which are identified outside of these inspection regimes will be dealt with according to the above standards and remedial work arranged as necessary. If it becomes apparent that the relevant response time cannot be met or is not appropriate, then the Department has the option of installing signs to warn road users of a possible danger.

The regular safety inspections help identify the condition of roads and footways and aid the preparation and prioritisation of Roads Service's annual reconstruction and resurfacing programme. The programme is prepared on the basis of a number of factors encompassing usage, general surface condition, structural deformation, public enquiries and public liability claims.

Special Rapid Electricity Chargers

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development where he plans to install special rapid electricity chargers which can charge electrically powered vehicles to 80 percent of their capacity in 25 minutes.

(AQW 10964/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: ecar is a consortium of public and private sector partners working together to bring electric vehicle charging infrastructure to Northern Ireland with grant funding from the Office for Low Emission Vehicles. It is jointly led by my Department and the Department of the Environment.

In 2011/2012, ecar installed three rapid charge posts:

- Jamsies Garage, Glenshane Pass, Magherafelt;
- Fiveways Shops and Service Station, Newry; and
- Donnelly Group Garage, Dungannon.

Officials from my Department are working with ecar consortium partners to determine the number and location of rapid charge posts to be installed in 2012/2013. The aim is to provide a strategic network of rapid charge posts across Northern Ireland.

A bid is also being prepared for EU funding for 5 rapid charge posts on the TENT-T network in Northern Ireland.

As charge points are installed, their details will be published on the NIDirect website www.nidirect.gov.uk/ecar

War Disablement SmartPass

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development how many people have a War Disablement SmartPass for concessionary travel.

(AQW 10966/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can confirm that, as of 30 April 2012, there were 1,444 individuals who had a War Disablement SmartPass.

Half-Fare SmartPass

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development how many people have been in receipt of a Half-Fare SmartPass due to being in receipt of Disability Living Allowance, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 10967/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: It is not possible to answer this question in the manner specified: the card management database can only provide information on a snapshot basis, and cannot produce historical data. I can confirm, however, that as of 30 April 2012 there were 9,564 individuals in receipt of a Half-Fare SmartPass issued under the Disability Living Allowance category.

A5 Upgrade

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the upgrade on the A5 (i) whether the upgrade will be on the existing A5; and (ii) why a decision was made ahead of the report being published.

(AQW 10972/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that the scheme proposed by my Department at the Public Inquiry in summer 2011 involves construction of a new off-line dual carriageway on a route generally remote from the existing A5 route. However, adoption of the scheme is subject to the outcome of the Public Inquiry process, at which the issue of on-line widening was discussed in depth.

The Inspector's Report from the Public Inquiry has been received by the Department and is currently being considered. I plan to publish a Departmental Statement outlining my response to the Report's findings and recommendations in early summer 2012. The report will also be made available to the public at that time.

My announcement of the upgrade of two stretches of the A5 to dual carriageway standard is part of a balanced package of improvements to the Strategic Road Network in Northern Ireland. The announcement is part of a collective decision taken by the Executive. The timing of this decision was necessary in order to give all NI Departments clarity on their budgets.

Car Parks

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the anticipated annual revenue that will result from the decision to charge drivers to use three previously free of charge car parks in Bangor.

(AQW 11025/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: It is estimated that the annual revenue accruing from the decision to introduce charging at the car parks in Bangor, that were previously free of charge, will be approximately £24,000.

Car Parks

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the anticipated annual revenue that will result from the decision to charge drivers to use car parks that were previously free of charge.

(AQW 11026/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: It is estimated that the annual revenue accruing from the decision to introduce charging at a number of car parks, that were previously free of charge, will be approximately £178,000.

Translink: Train Fares

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the anticipated additional annual revenue that will result from Translink's decision to increase train fares.

(AQW 11027/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that based on the level of average fare increase implemented, they anticipate that the additional annual revenue which will result from the decision to increase train fares is circa £1m.

Motorcycle Speeds

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development whether motorcycle speeds can be detected by speed cameras; and if not, how he plans to tackle the issue of motorcycles travelling at excess speeds.

(AQW 11119/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is not responsible for the operation of speed cameras and the recording of motor cycles travelling at excess speeds.

Information in relation to these issues may be obtained by contacting PSNI directly by writing to the Chief Constable.

Translink: Price Rises

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the publicised price rises by Translink, why return tickets have been replaced by the Daysaver Fare.

(AQW 11175/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have advised that assuming your question relates to town services, there had previously been a Day Ticket and no Day Return available. Translink believe that the DaySaver fare will prove more popular with customers and is actually a reinstatement of previous arrangements.

The Day Ticket provides unlimited travel for those making more than two journeys in a day or making cross-city journeys, which offers good value for money. For those who travel only twice in the day or do not use the Day Ticket, the best value is to use Smartlink at only £0.90 per journey. (A minimum of five journeys are purchased at a time, to be used in twelve months (the equivalent per journey cost on the Day Return was £1.00).

Rural Community Transport Organisations

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Regional Development when the Rural Community Transport organisations will receive information from his Department on their grant allocations for the 2012/13 financial year.

(AQW 11190/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Information regarding the level of funding for 2012/13 to each of the rural community transport organisations will be made available to them week commencing 7 May 2012.

Water Bills: Charitable Shops and Services

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration has been given to having an exemption from, or a reduction in, water bills for charitable shops and services, particularly those whose bills are based on valuation rather than by metered usage.

(AQW 11239/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Under the existing legislation the setting and approving of water and sewerage tariffs is the responsibility of NI Water subject to the approval of the Utility Regulator. Both are obliged to ensure that there is no undue discrimination against any class of customers and should keep tariffs under review to see if adjusting tariffs could result in a better reflection of costs. If charitable organisations were to be exempted from water and sewerage charges other customers would bear the cost unless there was additional government intervention.

I have every sympathy with those bodies which are trying to manage in the current economic climate. However, Budget 2010, which the Executive has agreed, does not anticipate providing the additional funds that would be needed to support the increased subsidies (unmeasured non-domestic consumers already receive a 50% subsidy) which would result from introducing exemptions or reductions in water bills. It would be necessary to reduce funding to other services to pay for exemptions and reduction. While I would not want to rule out looking at non-domestic charging issues in the future it would not be appropriate for me to consider at this time.

20mph Speed Limits

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost to his Department of enforcing ad-hoc 20mph speed limits in each of the last 12 months.

(AQW 11299/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is not responsible for the enforcement of ad-hoc 20mph speed limits.

Information in relation to these issues may be obtained by contacting PSNI directly by writing to the Chief Constable.

Belfast Transport Hub

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on Translink's plans for a new Belfast transport hub.

(AQW 11317/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The plans to construct a new Transport Hub in Belfast are still at an early stage. Translink has submitted a Strategic Outline Case which my Department and the Department of Finance and Personnel have approved. Translink is now in the process of developing the Outline Business Case for the project. When complete this will also be submitted to my Department for approval.

Narrow Water Bridge Project

Ms Ruane asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of Louth County Council having decided to appeal the decision by the Special EU Programmes Body not to proceed with the Narrow Water Bridge project, to outline any objections his Department made to the funding application.

(AQO 1893/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that my Department did not raise any objections to the funding proposal for the Narrow Water Bridge proposal.

A26 Dual Carriageway: Farmers

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development how he intends to make provision for farmers along the route of the proposed dualling of the A26.

(AQO 1883/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that I fully support the proposed A26 dualling scheme and would welcome any support the Member, and indeed other Members, can bring in respect of lobbying for funding for the scheme.

However, while my Department has responsibility for transportation and road infrastructure, I fully recognise the significant contribution that agriculture makes towards our economy. I am also mindful of the sensitivities relating to disturbance to farm businesses arising from the development of new schemes.

The proposed A26 dualling scheme would provide an all-purpose dual carriageway. Landowners and farmers will be able to access it from either left in - left out junctions or from one of the adjacent full movement side road junctions.

Appropriate accommodation works, such as, fencing, hedging, gates and laneways will also be provided as a result of the scheme.

Where land is required for the scheme, landowners will be compensated in accordance with the Land Compensation (Northern Ireland) Order 1982. The purpose of this compensation is that the landowner is put, as far as money can do it, in the same position as if the land or property had not been taken. Compensation matters are dealt with directly by the Department of Finance and Personnel's Land and Property Services on behalf of my Department.

Delivery of this project will be determined by the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-21.

A6: Upgrade

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the upgrading of the A6 road.

(AQO 1892/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that I am highly supportive of this particular scheme and indeed would welcome any support he or other Members can offer to secure additional funding for this proposal.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that planning for improvement of the A6 is well advanced. A Public Inquiry held in November 2007 approved construction of a dual carriageway between Randalstown and Castledawson and I am awaiting the outcome of a supplementary Inquiry, held in February 2012, to further examine junction provision at Castledawson. It is expected that a Public Inquiry will be held later this year to examine the case for and against the construction of a dual carriageway from Londonderry to Dungiven, including a dual carriageway bypass of Dungiven.

Unfortunately it has not been possible to allocate any funds from the 2011-2015 budget for either of the A6 schemes. Spending beyond the current budget period on schemes such as the Randalstown to Castledawson and Londonderry to Dungiven dual carriageway schemes will depend on funding issuing from the 2011-2021 Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Translink: Fare Increases

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the proposed fare increases by Translink.

(AQO 1895/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My role, and that of my officials, is to consider and approve the assumptions underpinning the cost and revenue changes included in the Translink Corporate Plan for each of Metro, Ulsterbus and Northern Ireland Railways. In my assessment of any proposed fare increases I have to balance social considerations against the commercial obligations placed on Translink. I agree any fare increase is unwelcome but equally, significant service cuts or job losses at a time of economic difficulty are not something I can endorse.

Given the current financial climate and in particular increasing costs of fuel, I believe an average fare increase below inflation combined with significant improved services on rail is a positive outcome. Obviously fare increases are not welcome but we must

remember the context where Translink has not put fares up since June 2010, which contrasts markedly with the position in the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland. A recent survey in the UK shows, for example, that average fares have increased by nearly one tenth (10%) over the last 2 years. In addition, as: Concessionary Fares will remain in place; 20 new trains are being introduced to service; the Londonderry to Coleraine track project will begin this July and we expect 77 million passenger journeys to take place on the Translink services this year, there are a lot of positives to report.

Parking Charges

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the impact of car parking charges in various towns. (AQO 1896/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's budget, which was approved in March of last year, included a number of savings delivery plans, one of which was to introduce on-street parking charges to approximately 30 towns and cities across Northern Ireland.

Having inherited the proposal to introduce on-street parking in these towns I consulted widely on the issue and as Members will be aware, in September last year I announced that I was not proceeding with this proposal.

Prior to making that decision, I had met with and listened carefully to concerns expressed by elected, local and traders' representatives, including Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIRTA), across Northern Ireland about the potential impact on city and town centre trading.

My decision not to extend on-street charging results in a shortfall in revenue of £8.8m during the 2011-15 budget period. While I have identified the majority of the savings required from within my Department's budget, just over £2m will be required from increases to other car parking charges, including the introduction of charging in some car parks that are currently free.

Increased off-street parking charges are therefore necessary to help offset the shortfall in funding as a result of my decision not to extend on-street charging. This protects frontline services such as essential road maintenance and ensures that local traders and shoppers can benefit from free on-street parking.

Department for Social Development

Consultation Documents and Official Reports: Cost

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development what was the cost to his Department of producing (i) consultation documents; and (ii) official reports in the 2010/11 financial year. (AQW 10600/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The table below provides details of the cost of producing consultation documents and official reports in 2010/11.

Document Type	Cost £ 2010/11
Consultation Documents	109,796
Official Reports	13,646

Former Police Station, Belcoo: Redevelopment

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update of the redevelopment of the former police station in Belcoo, including the planned date for the commencement of work and the proposed completion date. (AQW 10692/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Ark Housing Association has been nominated to take this scheme forward through the public sector clearing house process. The Association is currently in discussion with Land and Property Service to reach an agreed valuation. The discussions are expected to conclude within the coming months. In the event that a valuation can be agreed and the scheme remains financially viable, it could potentially go on site towards the end of this financial year.

Personal Independence Payment: Impact on Disability Living Allowance Claimants

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the potential impact of the new Personal Independence Payment on Disability Living Allowance claimants. (AQW 10736/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Personal Independence Payment will replace Disability Living Allowance for people of working age only (aged 16-64). Children will continue to receive Disability Living Allowance provided they satisfy the conditions of that benefit until they reach age 16 and people over the age of 65 who are already receiving Disability Living Allowance will continue to receive the benefit.

Whilst the legislative framework underpinning Personal Independence Payment has already been set out in the Welfare Reform Act in Great Britain, it is too early to meaningfully estimate the impact given the differences in the Disability Living Allowance

caseload between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. It is also important to highlight work to finalise key elements of the new benefit, including the assessment criteria and proposed thresholds for Personal Independence Payment, is still ongoing. Public consultation exercises have already been undertaken on the assessment criteria and proposed thresholds for Personal Independence Payment and one is currently undergoing on the design of the new benefit. This will close on 30 June 2012. I fully understand and appreciate that existing working age Disability Living Allowance customers may be anxious and concerned about the change and my Department, through the Social Security Agency, will be working to fully support them on an individual basis as they encounter the new benefit.

Disability Living Allowance

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development whether he is aware of the concerns of Disability Living Allowance claimants, who are partially sighted, that the new Personal Independence Payment does not adequately recognise the daily impact of sight loss.

(AQW 10751/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I acknowledge that many people have concerns about the proposed reform of Disability Living Allowance. You will be aware that Personal Independence Payment will assess a person's ability to perform a range of everyday tasks – entitlement will not be based on their specific disability or condition. The proposed assessment criteria, weightings and entitlement thresholds for the new benefit are intended to reflect and differentiate between the barriers and extra costs faced by disabled people. They are designed to take into account that impairments can affect people in different ways. 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 RNIB and Action for Blind People. The assessment looks at the impact of sensory, mental and cognitive impairments, for example, by taking account of the ability to plan and follow a journey.

I should emphasise that the development of the proposals is an iterative process and changes have already been made to the assessment criteria as a result of earlier informal consultation, for example, to reflect the need for supervision from another person and to include specific references to the need for support dogs in the mobility criteria. Formal consultation on the assessment criteria and proposed entitlement thresholds ended on 30 April and we have received responses from a number of organisations who work with blind or visually impaired people. I will consider these and all other responses carefully.

SS Nomadic: Restoration

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how much funding has been spent on restoring the SS Nomadic; (ii) by how much has this sum exceeded the initial contract price or projection; (iii) why has the restoration taken 6 years; (iv) what are the projected maintenance and running costs; and (v) how these costs will be met.

(AQW 10816/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

- (i) the projected cost for restoring the SS Nomadic amounts to £5.129million; (ii) this amount includes £169,000 for additional works related to cleaning, painting and steelworks; (iii) the restoration has taken 6 years as it has taken this length of time for the Nomadic Charitable Trust, a voluntary body, to raise the necessary funding and complete the procurement for the restoration works; (iv) the estimated projected maintenance and running costs for the initial three years of operation once the vessel opens as a visitor and industrial maritime heritage attraction amounts to £1.55million; and, (v) it is anticipated that these costs will be met from a combination of admission income, corporate sponsorship, venue hire, dining and café income, retail and booklet sales and a £535,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Housing Executive: Multi-Element Improvement Scheme

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Social Development how many district office areas are not included in the Housing Executive's Multi-Element Improvement Scheme; and to detail the reason for each area not being included.

(AQW 10823/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are currently no Multi Element Improvement Schemes planned for any Housing Executive District Office area as the programme ended in 2008/09 because of funding pressures on the capital budget available to the Housing Executive for these of major improvement schemes.

I have however asked the Housing Executive to bring forward a substantial programme outlining the homes that need significant capital upgrading that could potentially be delivered by Housing Associations, subject to tenant support. I am expecting details of that Programme in the coming weeks and will be happy to publish it at that time.

Grounds Maintenance Contracts

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Social Development why grounds maintenance contracts between his Department and the Housing Executive have been allowed to expire before new contracts are put in place.

(AQW 10837/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are no grounds maintenance contracts between my Department and the Housing Executive. The Housing Executive grounds maintenance procurement process is due to complete with the renewal contracts commencing on 1 June 2012. This will coincide with the completion of the current contracts.

Defibrillators

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department is taking to increase the number of defibrillators in buildings used by his Department or its arm's-length bodies.

(AQW 10884/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department and its arm's-length bodies do not have defibrillators in any of their buildings and there are currently no plans to introduce them.

Social Housing: Applications

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the 40,000 applications for social housing that are currently lodged with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and the annual rate at which this number is increasing, for his assessment of the period of time it will take to bring this number under control, given the projected rate of provision of new social homes.

(AQW 10983/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have just published plans to deliver 4,600 new social homes over the next three years as part of our Programme for Government commitment to deliver 8,000 new social and affordable homes by 2015.

The construction of more new social housing will of course help to meet housing need, but we must also recognise that up to 9,000 existing homes are re let each year to those on the waiting list and this contribution must not be underestimated.

However social housing alone cannot and will not meet the needs of all those in need of housing. Many applicants, particularly the thousands with no assessed points whatsoever, will never qualify for social housing and for them we need to make sure there are viable alternatives, either in terms of more affordable housing or in the Private Rented Sector.

My forthcoming announcement on the new Housing Strategy will provide more detail on this.

Social Housing: Banbridge Area

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development (i) what steps he intends to take to provide more social housing in the Banbridge area; (ii) what discussions have taken place on developing the Brookfield Factory site; and (iii) when he expects to provide additional social housing in Banbridge, given that at March 2011 there were 677 people on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's waiting list in the Banbridge area, with 446 of them awaiting housing in Banbridge town.

(AQW 10991/11-15)

Mr McCausland: During the last financial year (20011/12) we completed 49 new homes in the Banbridge District Office area. In addition to these new homes, we also re-let approximately 200 further homes from our existing stock to help meet housing need in the area.

The Social Housing Development Programme for the next 3 years has just been published and provides details of 48 new homes for the Banbridge District of which 36 are located in the Town. This will be further complemented throughout the year by the re-letting of existing homes.

In respect of the Brookfield factory site, the Housing Executive has not received any proposal from a Housing Association for the development of social housing on this land, nor has any discussion taken place on this.

Social Housing: Tiger's Bay, North Belfast

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Social Development (i) whether there are any plans to make the vacant houses at Halliday's Road in North Belfast habitable; (ii) the level of social housing in Tiger's Bay, North Belfast, including how many properties are owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Housing Associations; and (iii) for his assessment of the suitability of the housing stock in the Tiger's Bay area in relation to the needs of local people.

(AQW 11108/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Tigers Bay Estate comprises of 491 dwellings of which 69 have been sold to sitting tenants under the House Sales Scheme. There are currently no Housing Association properties in this area. There is a range of housing in the estate including 1 and 2 bedroom flats, bungalows and 2, 3, and 4 bedroom houses.

In September 2009 the Board of the Housing Executive and my Department approved the regeneration plan for Tigers Bay. This regeneration plan has the full support of local residents and elected representatives.

To date 37 dwellings have been demolished by the Housing Executive. The remaining 10 at Halliday's Road, although vacant, remain standing at the request of the community, to provide a security buffer at the interface. Environmental improvements have been completed in 3 areas of the estate, Mackey Street, Lawlor Court and Edlingham Street.

The 10 void properties at Limestone Road and Halliday's Road have been transferred to Apex Housing Association and will now be replaced with new family housing. Work has already commenced on site.

A further phase of new build for 12 units has been included in the Social Housing Development for 2013/14.

This regeneration plan should, on completion, ensure that the housing stock on the estate will meet the existing and future housing needs of this community.

Flats at Kilclief Gardens, Kilcooley Estate, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the timescale for demolishing the flats at Kilclief Gardens, Kilcooley Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 11162/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department gave the Housing Executive approval to demolish these flats in February. However, seven of the twenty four flats are still occupied and the District Office are working to relocate these tenants as quickly as possible. The demolition of the flats will commence when the tenants have all been re-housed.

Public Sector Jobs: Omagh

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department or the Housing Executive has any plans to reduce or increase the number of public sector jobs in Omagh.

(AQW 11267/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Neither my Department nor the Housing Executive currently has any plans to reduce or increase the number of public sector jobs in Omagh.

Welfare Reform

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to provide an estimate of the number of people that will be affected by the changes to Disability Allowance with the introduction of Welfare Reform.

(AQW 11338/11-15)

Mr McCausland: All existing Working Age customers (aged 16-64) currently in receipt of Disability Living Allowance, of which there are approximately 121,000, will be affected by the introduction of Personal Independence Payment. All such customers will be required to claim and be assessed for Personal Independence Payment. Children will continue to receive Disability Living Allowance provided they satisfy the conditions of that benefit until they reach age 16 and people over the age of 65 at 8 April 2013 who are already receiving Disability Living Allowance will continue to receive the benefit.

Whilst the legislative framework underpinning Personal Independence Payment has already been set out in the Welfare Reform Act in Great Britain, it is too early to estimate meaningfully the impact given the differences in the Disability Living Allowance caseload between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. It is also important to highlight that work to finalise key elements of the new benefit, including the assessment criteria and proposed thresholds for Personal Independence Payment, is still ongoing. Public consultation exercises have already been undertaken on the assessment criteria and proposed thresholds for Personal Independence Payment and one is currently ongoing on the design of the new benefit. This will close on 30 June 2012. I fully understand and appreciate that existing working age Disability Living Allowance customers may be anxious and concerned about the change and my Department, through the Social Security Agency, will be working to fully support them on an individual basis as they encounter the new benefit.

Welfare Reform: Blind or Partially Sighted Claimants

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the impact of the proposed Welfare Reform changes on benefit claimants who are blind or partially sighted.

(AQO 1906/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A key part of the proposed welfare reforms will be the replacement of DLA with a new benefit - Personal Independence Payment (PIP). PIP will assess the impact a person's condition or disability has on their ability to undertake a range of everyday tasks such as preparing a meal, communicating or planning and undertaking a journey. Claimants will be able to tell their story to a healthcare professional as part of the assessment and can have support with them if they need it.

Entitlement will not be based on a claimant having a particular condition or disability. A condition or disability may impact on people in different ways and it would therefore be unhelpful to generalise about the impact on individuals before they are assessed. As the assessment is still being developed, it is not yet possible to predict the likely impact of PIP on people who are blind or partially sighted. I accept that some individuals will have a condition that is unlikely to change, such as blindness, and this will be reflected in decisions about the duration of an award. However, people who are visually impaired will be able to qualify for the enhanced rate of the mobility component of PIP, for example, if they need or use supervision, prompting or a support dog to get to a familiar location.

The Department has consulted widely on the criteria and will carefully consider the responses received.

Welfare Reform: Children and Families

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Social Development, given the report by the Commissioner for Children and Young People that children and their families will be most affected by Welfare Reform, to outline any discussions he has had with his Executive colleagues to mitigate the impact.

(AQO 1907/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Executive Ministers are continually considering how best to militate against the negative impacts arising from Welfare Reforms through the Executive Sub-Committee, which I established in January of this year. Since its establishment, the sub-committee have met on 5 occasions to consider the wider key issues in relation to Welfare Reform, with particular focus on militating against the negative impacts, developing proposals to achieve potential long term benefits for the people of Northern Ireland and ensuring that operational flexibilities are being maximised in the introduction of Welfare Reform.

Whilst recognising that there are both negative and positive aspects to Welfare Reform, I believe that the recent reports by the Commissioner for Children and Young People on Welfare Reform did not properly reflect on the available evidence as to the impact of Welfare Reform in Northern Ireland. My Department, working with their Department for Work & Pensions counterparts, has already published information showing that Universal Credit will lift 34,000 people, including 10,000 children, out of poverty in Northern Ireland by 2017. In addition, by that timeframe, current indications estimate Universal Credit will lead to an additional benefit spend of £11.0m in Northern Ireland. It is estimated that there are 60,000 (15%) children in Northern Ireland currently living in households where no adults are in employment. Universal Credit will help many parents in these households to move into work, thereby not only improving their financial situation but also providing the other positive attributes for children that come from parents being in work.

Town Centre Regeneration: Dromore

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Social Development to outline any plans for the development of Dromore Square and the surrounding buildings to help with the regeneration of the town centre as a hub for local shoppers and businesses.
(AQO 1908/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department has recently approved funding of £150,000 for a Revitalisation Scheme for Dromore town centre which includes Market Square. The approved scheme consists of a paint scheme for Church Street, window panels for vacant properties and a shop front improvement scheme in Church Street, Bridge Street and Market Square. In addition, tourism information panels and additional planting in tubs and baskets are planned for Market Square. A garden seating area is also planned for a derelict site in Market Square which will help to make the centre more attractive for local shoppers and businesses.

Investment: Coleraine

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development what future investment is planned for the Coleraine area.
(AQO 1910/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department is working on a number of projects and schemes in the Coleraine Borough which will either involve direct public funding or lever in investment from the private sector.

The specific projects and schemes being worked on by my Department include the following –

- 10 educational, health and community based projects in the Coleraine Neighbourhood Renewal Area requiring grant input of £2.3 million;
- An extensive regeneration programme for Portrush which would involve investment of up to £60 million from the public and private sectors;
- Two development schemes in Coleraine town centre which would involve private sector investment of approximately £100 million;
- A public realm upgrade for Portstewart estimated to cost up to £1 million; and
- Six housing schemes to provide 63 units as part of the Social Housing Development Programme.

Any funding for these projects to be provided by my Department will be subject to a satisfactory appraisal being completed and sufficient budget cover being made available to my Department.

In addition the Department has commissioned a masterplan for Coleraine town centre which includes an action plan involving some 61 initiatives over the next 15 years, to be delivered through a partnership of public and private stakeholders led by Coleraine Borough Council.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Cree asked the Minister for Social Development how many recipients of Disability Living Allowance have qualified as a result of suffering from the legacy of the past.
(AQO 1911/11-15)

Mr McCausland: This information is not held by my Department. 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. Whilst information is held on what is known as primary disabling conditions for Disability Living Allowance recipients, information is not held on the causes of the disability.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Minutes of the Meetings of the Assembly Commission

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission to explain the delay in publishing the minutes of the meetings of the Assembly Commission on the Assembly website.

(AQW 11074/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission is not aware of a delay in publishing minutes of previous meetings of the Commission on the Assembly website. The Commission usually meets on a monthly basis, on the last Tuesday of each month. The Commission held its last monthly business meeting on 20 March 2012. The Commission did not meet on the last Tuesday of April 2012. The minutes of the March business meeting will be considered by the Commission at the next monthly business meeting which is scheduled to take place on 29 May 2012. Following agreement, those minutes will be published on the Assembly website in good time.

Laptops in the Assembly Chamber

Mr McKay asked the Assembly Commission why laptops are not allowed to be used in the Assembly Chamber.

(AQW 11080/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Committee on Procedures considered the use of electronic devices in the Chamber on a number of occasions and reached a decision at its meeting on 27th March 2012. The Committee subsequently wrote to the Speaker informing him of their decision and asking him to issue a ruling.

Members of the Committee were concerned that the use of laptops posed risks in relation to the smooth running of Assembly business. These risks included the potential for noise interference from laptop hardware and software, limited battery life and the hazards of trailing leads arising from the need to provide mains power.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 18 May 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Programme for Government

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 7005/11-15, to detail (i) whether quarterly delivery reports will be published, given that progress against the new Programme for Government (PfG) will be reported and monitored on a quarterly basis; and (ii) whether Departments will develop annual action plans for the delivery of the new PfG, with quarterly targets and milestones so that progress can be monitored accurately.

(AQW 8311/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Executive is presently finalising reporting and monitoring arrangements and these will be announced shortly.

Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre at the Maze Site: Peace III Funding

Mr McCallister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide an outline of how the £18 million of Peace III funding for the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre at the Maze site will be spent.

(AQO 1366/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The £18m EU funding will be used primarily to build and fit out the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre and cover essential professional fees associated with the construction of the PBCRC. Necessary and essential statutory work on the listed and retained buildings will also be completed to ensure we meet our legal duties.

The Department of Finance and Personnel has approved the proposals for the Centre.

Along with the potential relocation to the site of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society, we hope that these initial projects will be a catalyst for future investment helping to stimulate economic growth in the region and beyond.

Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre at the Maze Site

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the proposed Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre at the Maze site, (i) whether the listed and retained buildings, including H block, the prison hospital, visitors and administration blocks, will be open to the public; (ii) for what they will be used; and (iii) whether they will form part of the Centre.

(AQW 9094/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The proposed Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre will encompass the erection of a new building which will be a working peace building and conflict resolution facility. It will be a centre for international exchange, education and research. All such activity will take place within the new purpose built facility which is separate from the former prison and in a landscaped setting.

There are a number of buildings on the site which are listed and retained. The Department has a legal obligation to maintain the listed buildings within the parameters of the listing.

Youth Unemployment

Mr D McIlveen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) what consideration their Department has given to the potentially destabilising effect of youth unemployment on peace in Northern Ireland; and (ii) whether they have allocated any additional funding to address this issue.

(AQW 9244/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We note the Peace Monitoring Report and its assessment of the potentially destabilising effect of youth unemployment on peace in our society.

Issues around the disengagement of our young people emerged through the consultation on the draft strategy for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI). Addressing the factors that contribute to the alienation of our youth will continue to be a priority as the strategy is developed further.

We remain committed to building a united and shared society. For us to achieve this vision, we must address the division that continues to mar many areas in our community; tackle the segregation that has enabled our people to live often separate lives for too long; and encourage and nurture an environment where cultural diversity is celebrated and embraced.

We believe that the finalised CSI strategy will be an important building block for tackling these issues. Addressing issues affecting our young people will be a key component of the CSI strategy as it develops and the strategy will inform any additional actions required in respect of the allocation of resources and funding.

The Executive is considering a specific approach to tackling youth unemployment. The package proposed by the Minister for Employment and Learning seeks to link economic and social policy in a way that will help to rebuild and rebalance the local economy while continuing to address the social consequences of unemployment among our young people.

OFMDFM: Funding Allocations

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQO 1370/11-15, to detail (i) the eight cases to which funding was allocated prior to Ministerial approval; (ii) how much funding was allocated in each case; (iii) the dates when funding was allocated and approval subsequently granted; and (iv) the procedures which have been put in place to ensure that Ministerial approval is obtained before letters of offer are issued.

(AQW 9284/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The eight cases provided in response to AQO 1370/11-15 to which funding was allocated prior to Ministerial approval are under consideration

On subsequent checking of the electronic files it was discovered that at least four of the eight cases had received Ministerial approval before letters of offer issued. We are currently actively considering the issues.

Photographers Selected to Accompany Ministers on Ministerial Visits

Mr Flanagan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 9210/11-15, where each of the six photographers is based.

(AQW 9999/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Five of the six photographers are based in Belfast and one in Derry/Londonderry.

Ministerial Visit to the United States During St Patrick's Week

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to provide a breakdown of the costs of the Ministerial visit to the United States during St Patrick's week; (ii) which Ministers made the trip; and (iii) how many (a) staff; and (b) Special Advisers accompanied the Ministers.

(AQW 10047/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have now received all of the invoices associated with our visit to the United States in March 2012. The cost of our visit to the United States is broken down as follows:

Flights	£20,453.90
Rail costs	\$1,015.00
Accommodation	£8,553.60
Car Hire	£4,657.90
Hospitality	£1,480.44

We were accompanied on our visit by five members of staff, two of whom are Special Advisers.

Barroso Task Force: Desk Officers

Mr Kinahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the process for appointing the Barroso desk officers; (ii) the grade of each officer; (iii) the aims and objectives the officers have been set; and (iv) how they will measure the overall success of the appointments.

(AQW 10138/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:

- (i) The Barroso Taskforce Working Group (BTWG) Desk Officers were appointed on secondment following a selection process which was managed in line with NICS Policy. The secondment notice was advertised to civil servants through the HRConnect portal. All secondment opportunities are advertised in this way. The secondment notice sought applications from staff at Deputy Principal level and provided details of the job description, location of posts and other eligibility criteria. A selection panel comprising 3 staff at Senior Civil Service level – Grade 3 (chairperson) and 2 Grade 5 (panel members) – carried out interviews and listed successful candidates in merit order, in line with NICS selection processes.

- (ii) Four Desk Officers were appointed at Deputy Principal level, one for each of the four priority thematic areas for NI – competitiveness and employment, social cohesion, innovation and technology and climate change and energy.
- (iii) The aims and objectives for the posts were set out in the Job Description, a copy of which has been placed in the Assembly Library.
- (iv) The overall success of the appointments will be gauged principally in terms of the recognition by departments of the value added by Desk Officers to the process of European engagement. This in turn will be measured against the success of all departments in meeting their European objectives as outlined in the Executive Priorities for 2012/13 and the current Programme for Government commitment to increase drawdown of European elective funding by 20%.

Programme for Government 2011-2015: Monitoring

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will introduce a requirement for Departments to report to the statutory committees on a six-monthly basis and for their Department to report to the Assembly on annual basis on progress against targets, as part of the Delivery Framework for the Programme for Government 2011-2015.

(AQW 10607/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is our intention, as stated within the Programme for Government, that an annual report will be produced on implementation progress. This report will be presented to the Assembly in due course.

In our view it is a matter for individual departments, and Committees, as to how they wish to review progress. This is particularly the case, as PfG commitments will be built into Departmental Plans, which will themselves be subject to scrutiny and review by Committees in the normal way.

Ministerial Subcommittee on Children and Young People

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the Terms of Reference of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People.

(AQW 10798/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Terms of Reference of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People are detailed below.

Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People

Terms of Reference

Aim

The Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People was established with the ultimate aim of improving the lives of Northern Ireland's children and young people. It is intended that through the workings of the Committee, the six objectives contained in the 10 Year Children and Young People's Strategy will be placed at the heart of the government's agenda. The Committee will:

- drive forward the implementation of the 10 year strategy for children and young people;
- seek to achieve greater integration of policy, funding and service delivery relevant to children and young people without compromising or blurring the respective roles and responsibilities of individual Ministers;
- strive to achieve transparency through the timely sharing of information relevant to children and young people (particularly in relation to resources, including financial resources); and
- identify key cross-cutting priorities to drive forward on a Ministerial level.

Membership

Membership of the Sub-Committee consists of all departmental Ministers. Ministers attend where appropriate.

Departmental Business Plan for 2012-13

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when their Department's business plan for 2012/13 will be published.

(AQW 10846/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Subject to approval by Ministers in the coming weeks, the draft Plan will be submitted to the OFMDFM Committee for consideration and when agreed, will be placed on the OFMDFM website.

Childcare Strategy

Mr D Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made on the development of a Childcare Strategy.

(AQO 1786/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Programme for Government sets out our commitment to publish and implement a Childcare Strategy with key actions to provide integrated, accessible and affordable childcare. The Strategy will be an integral part of our work to tackle disadvantage and improve wellbeing.

Supporting and launching the Strategy requires a joined-up approach across Government. A high level working group has met to scope the new Childcare Strategy and the initial interventions. Members have begun to engage with key stakeholders in developing particular elements of the work. Preparation of the consultation document is now underway, and so too is work with partner bodies which will culminate, in December this year, in the publication of the Childcare Strategy.

Alongside this and in advance of the launch of the Strategy and its implementation, Government departments are able to bid to the £12m Childcare Fund which has been earmarked to address identified needs or improve provision. This is additional funding for the development of the Childcare Strategy and will not replace existing baseline provision.

Child Poverty

Mrs Overend asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will introduce targets to reduce child poverty.

(AQO 1791/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Child Poverty Act 2010 required the Executive to lay a Child Poverty Strategy before the Assembly. The Act also described the targets against which the success of the Strategy would be measured. These included:

The relative low income target which is

- (i) that less than 10% of children who live in qualifying households live in households that fall within the relevant income group;
- (ii) a household falls within the relevant income group, in relation to a financial year, if its equivalised net income for the financial year is less than 60% of median equivalised net household income for the financial year.

The combined low income and material deprivation target which is

- (i) that less than 5% of children who live in qualifying households –
 - (a) live in households that fall within the relevant income group, and
 - (b) experience material deprivation.
- (ii) a household falls within the relevant income group, in relation to a financial year, if its equivalised net income for the financial year is less than 70% of median equivalised net household income for the financial year;
- (iii) regulations must specify the circumstances in which a child is to be regarded for the purposes of subsection (1)(b) as experiencing material deprivation in a financial year.

The absolute low income target which is

- (i) that less than 5% of children who live in qualifying households live in households falling within the relevant income group;
- (ii) a household falls within the relevant income group, in relation to a financial year, if its equivalised net income for the financial year is less than 60% of the adjusted base amount;
- (iii) “the adjusted base amount”, in relation to a financial year, is the base amount adjusted in a prescribed manner to take account of changes in the value of money since the base year;
- (iv) “the base amount” means the amount of median equivalised net household income for the base year;

“the base year” means the financial year beginning with 1 April 2010.

The persistent poverty target which is

- (i) in relation to a financial year (“the relevant financial year”), the persistent poverty target is that less than the target percentage of children who have lived in qualifying households during each of the survey years have lived in households that have been within the relevant income group in at least 3 of the survey years.
- (ii) The survey years are –
 - (a) the calendar year that ends in the relevant financial year; and
 - (b) the 3 previous calendar years.
- (iii) the target percentage is a percentage to be prescribed by regulations made before 2015;
- (iv) a household falls within the relevant income group, in relation to a calendar year, if its equivalised net income for the year is less than 60% of median equivalised net household income for the year.

We have no plans to introduce further targets.

Former Shackleton Barracks, Ballykelly

Mr McQuillan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether their Department supports, in principle, the transfer of the Officers' Mess Building and the land adjacent to the former Shackleton Barracks, Ballykelly, to the local community for use as a new community hub for the entire village.

(AQW 10863/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Options for disposal of the Shackleton Barracks site, including its buildings, are currently under consideration and no decisions have been taken. The transfer of the Officers' Mess Building for use as a community hub has been noted and will be considered as part of the wider discussion on the future of the site.

Peace Bridge and Ebrington Barracks Site in Derry: Opening Ceremonies

Mr P Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of value for money in relation to the Ilex Urban Regeneration Company's delivery of the opening ceremonies of the Peace Bridge and the Ebrington Barracks site in Derry.

(AQW 10893/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Business cases for the opening ceremony events for the Peace Bridge and the Ebrington Parade Ground were developed and in each case the business cases identified the best value for money option. These options were tendered by Ilex using Central Procurement Directorate practices. In line with governance procedures, a Post Project Evaluation (PPE) to ascertain if value for money was achieved will be completed. PPEs are completed in retrospect. The PPE for the opening of the Peace Bridge is due for completion in June 2012 and on the opening of the Parade Ground due for completion in August 2012.

Ebrington Barracks Site in Derry: Opening Ceremony

Mr P Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many companies tendered for services for the opening ceremony of the Ebrington Barracks site in Derry, including the name of the companies and the costs quoted.

(AQW 10897/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The new public realm at Ebrington was officially opened on 14 February 2012 and to mark this historic occasion an evening of events was organised to celebrate our new public space. A business case was developed by Ilex and the preferred option identified was to engage a specialist event management team to produce and manage the event. Three companies were invited to tender for the event management. The contract was awarded to Eventor for £19,995 to manage the opening ceremony. Eventor was also responsible for managing all procurement and tenders for the opening ceremony.

Ministerial Subcommittee on Children and Young People: Action Plan 2012-2016

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the development of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People's Action Plan 2012-2016; and what bodies/organisations have been consulted in relation to the development of this Action Plan.

(AQW 10913/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Work on implementing the Ten Year strategy for Children and Young People is now being taken forward through the Delivering Social Change framework. Plans are underway to hold a consultation and engagement event with key stakeholders as soon as possible.

Ilex: Staffing

Mr P Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the number of staff employed by Ilex, broken down by (a) full-time; (b) part-time; and (c) retainer contracts; (ii) the salary bands; (iii) how many staff received bonuses in each of the last three years; and (iv) the total cost of the (a) bonuses; and (b) salaries.

(AQW 10922/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The staffing position in Ilex as at 26 April 2012 is as follows:

- (i) (a) Full-Time Staff: 28 Full-Time Staff including seven secondees and two temporary agency members of staff and one temporary contract covering maternity leave.
- (b) Part-time staff: Nil
- (c) Retainer Contracts: two agency staff (included in (a))
- (ii) Salary Bands

Grade	No.	Pay Scale
G3	1	£98,059 - £205,000
G5	4	£57,300 - £116,000

Grade	No.	Pay Scale	
G6	2	£48,527- £62,407	1 Substantive and 1 Acting up
G7	2	£41,661 - £50,796	
DP	9	£31,663- £38,893	8 Substantive and 1 Acting up
SO	2	£25,278- £30,520	
EO1	1	£21,826 - £26,086	
EO2	1	£20,285- £23,250	
AO	2	£16,312- £22,180	
AA	4	£14,131- £17,533	

(iii) No bonuses paid in the last three years

(iv) (a) Total Cost of bonuses: Nil

(b) Total Cost of Salaries (before Pension adjustment):

As per Annual Accounts:

2009/10	£1,043,505
2010/11	£1,308,729
2011/12 (draft)	£1,739,100

Public Sector Employment: Decentralisation

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps they are taking to encourage, at Executive level, greater decentralisation of (i) public sector employment; and (ii) the construction of new build facilities.

(AQW 10953/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Programme for Government contains a key commitment to “Advance the relocation of the Headquarters of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to a rural location by 2015”, and appraisal processes are currently underway to determine the Department’s future accommodation requirements.

Public Bodies: Boards

Mr Gardiner asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many former civil and public servants are employed as paid and unpaid members of the boards of public bodies; and what is this figure as a proportion of the total number of board members.

(AQW 10973/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Sixteen former civil and public servants are serving on the boards of public bodies sponsored by our Department. This equates to 20% of the total number of board members. Fifteen of these board members are paid (18.75% of the total) and one is unpaid (1.25%).

Sustainable Development Champions Group

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the recommendations made by the Sustainable Development Champions Group in relation to energy vires.

(AQW 11254/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have referred the recommendations of the Sustainable Development Champions Group to the Executive for consideration.

Victims’ Forum

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps have been taken in relation to the establishment of a Victims Forum by the Victims Commissioners, including details of the application and selection process and the criteria set for appointments.

(AQW 11385/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The establishment of the Forum is a statutory responsibility of the Commission for Victims and Survivors and as a result neither Ministers nor officials were involved in the selection process.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Social Investment Fund.
(AQO 1874/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We appreciate the continued interest in the Social Investment Fund.

Given the complexities of the issues we are trying to tackle, we have taken time to fully analyse the consultation responses and prepare final operating proposals.

The composition of the zones is one of the key issues emerging from the consultation.

Despite the draft proposals allowing flexibility in relation to the geography of the zones, some areas felt that they were not at the starting point

We have taken account of this in considering the final proposals by balancing the desire to be inclusive with the requirement to target resources where there is objective evidenced need.

Our officials have continued to engage with key stakeholders on the ground, to identify examples of best practice, and to explore opportunities to integrate and align SIF with other initiatives.

We intend to bring our final proposals to Executive colleagues in the coming weeks. Following this, we will form the steering groups.

Victims and Survivors: Debilitating Conditions

Mr G Robinson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what provision has been made for victims and survivors of the troubles who have hidden debilitating conditions such as severe depression.
(AQO 1872/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Every year we provide millions of pounds of funding to groups and organisations providing services to meet the identified needs of victims and survivors, including those suffering from the conditions you have outlined. Over the last 2 years, £13.7 million of funding has been allocated through the Community Relations Council and a further £7.3 million has been allocated for this financial year. A significant and important aspect of this funding is focused on addressing the mental health and well-being needs of these individuals.

In addition, over the last two years £7.3 million of funding has been channelled through the NI Memorial Fund providing direct financial assistance to individual victims and survivors including those suffering from psychological injury. A further amount of £3.4 million has been awarded for this financial year.

We recognise that many victims and survivors are still dealing with the impacts of the past; for some their needs are physical for others they are psychological. Other people are dealing with family and social impacts. We also recognise that some individuals may find it hard to reach out and ask for help, or to know which service would best suit their circumstances.

The new Victims and Survivors Service which opened in April was established to help Victims and Survivors by assessing their individual needs and signposting them to the services in the statutory, community and voluntary sectors that can help them.

Another important aspect of the Service will be to work with existing providers to ensure that any services provided by them are carried out in line with good practice and meet the required standards. This will particularly assist those who have hidden debilitating conditions by ensuring that practitioners have the appropriate skills and knowledge to properly assess need and propose the right response.

Legislative Programme

Mr Byrne asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when a Legislative Programme will be published.
(AQO 1873/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We intend to publish a legislative programme for 2012-13 Assembly session before the end of June.

Childcare Strategy

Mrs Cochrane asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given the forthcoming Welfare Reform, when the Childcare Strategy will be introduced to alleviate some of the rising pressures on working parents.
(AQO 1875/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Programme for Government sets out our commitment to publish and implement a Childcare Strategy with key actions to provide good quality, integrated, accessible and affordable childcare.

The strategic framework is an important part of our work to tackle disadvantage and improve wellbeing.

A consultation process on the draft Strategy will be launched in the summer when all interested parties will have an opportunity to input their views. The responses to the consultation will help to shape a strategic framework and key actions which we aim to agree and publish before the end of 2012.

Social Investment Fund: South Antrim

Mr Clarke asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether South Antrim will be included in one of the geographical zones under the Social Investment Fund.

(AQO 1876/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Social Investment Fund seeks to address poverty and deprivation in areas where there is objective evidenced need.

This need is to be identified, evidenced, and prioritised by local communities, and associated interventions proposed, for inclusion in a strategic area plan.

It is intended that the plan will be co-ordinated by an established Steering Group within each zone made up of Voluntary and Community, Business, Statutory and Political representation.

If an area can provide objective and evidenced need, and present a solution which is prioritised for inclusion in an area plan, then it can and should benefit from SIF if this is endorsed by the community. This is therefore the basis on which the South Antrim area should be looking to proceed.

However, we do acknowledge that the fund is intended to operate across a series of designated zones, as outlined in the consultation document. Furthermore, we appreciate the concerns from some areas which deemed themselves not to be within a proposed zone from the offset. This was evident in the consultation. This is a matter currently under final consideration prior to seeking Executive agreement on the way forward in the next couple of weeks.

Joint Ministerial Working Group on Rebalancing the Economy

Mr Hamilton asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether a date has been set for the next meeting of the Joint Ministerial Working Group on Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy.

(AQO 1879/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A meeting of the Joint Ministerial Working Group on Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy has been scheduled for late June.

Impact of Welfare Reform on Child Poverty

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the recent research produced by the Commissioner for Children and Young People on the impact of Welfare Reform on child poverty.

(AQO 1880/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We note the production of the recent research reports commissioned by the Commissioner for Children and Young People on the potential impact of welfare reform on children.

These reports contribute to our ongoing consideration of welfare reform.

Freedom of Information Requests

Mrs Overend asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of their Department's performance in answering Freedom of Information requests within the statutory time limit.

(AQO 1881/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We refer the Member to the answer we gave to AQO 1522/11-15 on 12 March 2012.

Draft Disability Strategy 2012-15

Ms Brown asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the aims of the draft Disability Strategy 2012-15.

(AQO 1938/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our draft Disability Strategy aims to make sure all persons with disabilities enjoy equal rights and that their opportunities are not limited by disability.

The Strategy is intended to cover all types of disability. It is relevant to children, young people and adults, whilst taking into consideration the needs of families and carers of people with disabilities.

The document sets out its vision as a future where disabled people contribute to and benefit from our cultural, social, political and economic life equally.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Wind Farms: Forest Service Land

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what consideration has she given to the establishment of partnerships between Government, the private sector and the community sector to develop and maximise the benefit of wind farms on Forest Service land.

(AQW 10596/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I am currently looking at options for different types of business partnerships between the public and private sectors. I personally favour models that deliver community benefits.

I also received a report from the Fermanagh trust on 29 February 2012 called "Maximising Community Outcomes from Wind Energy Developments". This presents a number of models for engaging with the Community sector. I will consider this along with the business options in developing policy for community benefits from wind farms and forest service lands.

Legislation

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) what proposals for legislation, subject to Executive approval, she has introduced or intends to introduce between April 2012 and March 2015; (ii) the anticipated timescale for the introduction of each Bill; and (iii) the intention of each Bill.

(AQW 10651/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: It is my intention, subject to Executive approval, to introduce a Reservoirs Bill in early 2013. Other requirements for primary legislation relating to my Department's responsibilities particularly in respect of sea fisheries and implementation of the Floods Directive, may arise during this mandate and the position will be kept under review. Much of the burden of legislation in the relevant period for my Department will be aimed at implementing reforms under the Common Agricultural and Common Fisheries Policies; this will take the form of subordinate legislation made under the European Communities Act 1972.

The purpose of the Reservoirs Bill is to introduce a legal and administrative framework for the management and regulation of reservoir safety for reservoirs that can hold 10,000 cubic metres or more of water. The aim is to minimise the risk of flooding due to an uncontrolled release of water resulting from total dam failure and thereby protecting human life, the environment, cultural heritage and economic activity.

Bovine TB

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why, in 2011, departmental vets were 2.16 times more likely to classify a herd with a bovine TB breakdown than a private vet.

(AQW 10920/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: To date it has not been possible to identify a particular reason for the detection rate difference.

Comparisons are complicated because there are so many factors involved with complex statistical adjustments required. For example we currently contract with some 80 veterinary practices involving some 300 individual private vets. This compares to our affordable complement of 27 DARD testing vets (TVOs and VOTs) at April 2012.

Since 2009 my officials and representatives of the two veterinary associations have worked hard together in a spirit of partnership to resolve any statistical differences. The emphasis has been on providing better feedback on performance to practices; training and development; and enhanced supervision arrangements of both private and DARD testing staff.

Work towards a resolution will continue in partnership with the veterinary associations.

Destroying Sick Livestock in a Humane Manner

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers, livestock owners, or breeders have been prosecuted for failing to destroy sick livestock in a humane manner, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 11061/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: No farmers, livestock owners, or breeders have been prosecuted for failing to destroy sick livestock in a humane manner, in each of the last five years.

North/South Ministerial Council Joint Communiqué

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the North South Ministerial Council Joint Communiqué of 27 April 2012, highlighting that the North West had been allocated £18.5m under Axis 3 of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme, to detail the corresponding allocations to other regions.

(AQW 11157/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In the assembly on 9 June 2008 my predecessor announced the Axis 3 first tranche allocation for each of the seven clusters.

On 23rd January 2009 the outcome of the second tranche was announced during a visit to the Rural Area Partnership in Derry and provided the final allocation to each of the Axis 3 clusters.

These allocations remain unchanged and are as provided for you in response to recent questions AQW 8570/11-15 and AQW 9443/11-15. The allocations are as follows:-

Cluster	Allocation
GROW	8,890,899
NER	13,181,300
LRP	8,691,556
DRAP	13,498,066
SOAR	16,731,839
ARC	18,484,112
SWARD	20,522,227
Total	99,999,999

Cross Erected on Slievemartin, Rostrevor

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why the cross which was erected before Easter 2012 on Slievemartin, Rostrevor, has been removed by her Department.

(AQW 11247/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My officials in Forest Service became aware on Monday 2 April 2012 that a large metal structure in the shape of a cross had been erected without permission on a hilltop at Rostrevor forest. A site investigation found the structure to be unstable and a health and safety risk. The structure was taken down and the site made safe.

Farm Maps: Accuracy

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the accuracy of the new farm maps; and if she can confirm that their usage will not be subject to penalties by her Department.

(AQW 11248/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The maps which my Department supplied to farmers to support their 2012 Single Application Form are a very significant enhancement on the maps farmers received in early 2011 in that they also reflect ineligible areas which have been identified by the remapping project.

Given the complexity and scale of this work, with almost 750,000 fields to be assessed, it was not possible to complete all of the work in early 2012. So there is further improvement ahead. We have already gathered over 1 million pieces of information concerning ineligible areas and it was important that this was provided to farmers to assist them to make accurate claims. It remains vital, however, that claimants make their own assessment of conditions on the ground when deciding on the detail of their claim. The maps reflect what is visible from ortho-photography at a certain point in time and will never therefore accurately reflect the eligible area precisely in every instance.

This message has been reinforced in Departmental guidance and in a number of public events to which farmers were invited.

It is the farmer's responsibility to make sure he or she claims only for eligible land. If farmers ignore the advice provided and claim on areas which are ineligible, the Department has to consider whether penalties should be applied in line with EU rules. We have told farmers that we will consider applying intentional over declaration penalties if they claim on ineligible areas which were shown as ineligible in the information we provided. This could mean that farmers would lose all of their payment for 2012 and their payments in future years could also be affected.

Fallen Animals: Policy for Collection

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what policy is in place regarding the permitted timescale between when a fallen animal is reported for collection and the actual time the animal is collected; and how this process is monitored. **(AQW 11250/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: The general disposal requirements for fallen animal carcasses are set down in EU Control Regulation 1069/2009 and EU Implementing Regulation 142/2011, which are enforced here by the Animal By-Products (Enforcement) Regulations (NI) 2011.

The legislation requires fallen stock to be collected, identified and transported without 'undue delay'. Undue delay is not defined in the EU Control Regulation, but is taken to mean as soon as reasonably practicable taking account of individual circumstances e.g. the availability of a collection service, the storage temperature of the fallen stock (for example carcasses stored at ambient temperatures should be disposed of more quickly than those kept chilled or frozen) and any extenuating circumstances such as poor weather or ill-health. Normally, this is within 3-4 days of death of the animal. Pending consignment, the carcass must be stored in such a way that animals and birds do not have access to it.

The activities of hauliers are monitored on a regular basis by my Department. This includes a record check and a visual assessment of the contents to ensure that excessive decomposition has not occurred.

Schedule 2 Part 1 of the Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies Regulations (NI) 2010 places further requirements with regards to fallen bovines over 48 months and fallen goats over 18 months. As these must be tested for TSE, they must be notified to one of three approved TSE sampling/rendering plants within 24 hours to make arrangements so that the test can be carried out.

Monitoring of the disposal timescales for TSE sampling is carried out by my officials. Where non-compliance with the legislation is identified, these are investigated and if necessary, enforcement action is taken.

Rural Development Community Service

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 9294/11-15, AQW 9296/11-15 and AQW 9298/11-15, to provide a working example of how the figures provided by the NI Statistics and Research Agency were used to determine the allocation of funding for the Rural Development Community Service. **(AQW 11314/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: In order to assist with the evaluation of resources to deliver the Rural Community Development Service the NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) were asked to undertake some analysis of rural income deprivation by local government district. The local government districts were taken from the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner for Northern Ireland 'Review of NI Local Government Boundaries Final Recommendations Report'. Taking the rural wards of Antrim and Newtownabbey District; and Mid and East Antrim District as an example, the figures at Annex A provide a basic indication of rural poverty, which when combined with front line delivery requirements led to an estimate of £100k per annum as the necessary resource investment in this particular District.

Number of people and income deprived people living in rural Output Areas, by Local Government District

LGD Code	LGD Name	Approx. number of income deprived people living in rural OAs	LGD share of rural income deprived people (%)
95AA	Antrim	2,922	2.3
95DD	Ballymena	4,690	3.7
95HH	Carrickfergus	778	0.6
95QQ	Larne	1,788	1.4
95WW	Newtownabbey	889	0.7
NI	Northern Ireland	126,940	100

Breaking the Silence, Shoulder to Shoulder with the Community

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, what funding her Department provided for the conference 'Breaking the Silence, Shoulder to Shoulder with the Community' which was organised by the Niamh Louise Foundation.
(AQW 11352/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Niamh Louise Foundation is a charitable organisation that provides an invaluable service on suicide awareness, prevention, intervention and postvention services particularly in rural areas of the North.

I have agreed to open this conference aimed at highlighting the impact that suicide has on families and communities. This is an important issue that touches all of us and we all need to work together to tackle suicide and promote awareness of the support available from bodies like the Niamh Louise Foundation.

Although my Department has not provided any direct funding to the Foundation for the conference, it has assisted by providing the venue together with refreshments for participants attending the conference.

Wood: Purchase from the Northern Ireland Forest Service

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what tender arrangements are in place for the purchase of wood from the Northern Ireland Forest Service.
(AQW 11370/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The majority of Forest Service timber is sold to customers through Long Term Contract (LTC) arrangements. An open market tender competition was held in 2009 which resulted in customers securing current LTC arrangements.

Forest Service offers the remaining timber available for sale on a quarterly basis to cater for customers who wish to purchase smaller or infrequent quantities outside LTC arrangements.

Quarterly sales follow a competitive formal tender procedure. Tender details are sent out to all prospective customers whose details are held on a mailing list maintained and updated by Forest Service.

Prospective customers who have in the past either bought timber or who have expressed an interest in receiving tender details are included in the mailing list.

Rural Community Development Programme

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the Rural Community Development Programme which ended on 31 March 2012 (i) why a new programme did not start on 1 April 2012; (ii) whether she can offer an assurance to people on the funding waiting list that their applications will be successful; (iii) how her Department intends to compensate people on the waiting list; and (iv) why the initial programme was not extended, as happened with the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme.
(AQW 11395/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: (i) Unfortunately there has been a delay in the commencement of the new community development service due to procurement procedures however the new contracts for successful suppliers will be operational from 1 April 2012. It is hoped that Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) will be in a position to advise bidders on the outcome of the competition by 18 May; (ii) as procurement for this service is by way of an open tender process no assurance of success can be given to applicants; (iii) because of the nature of an open tender process no compensation can be provided to unsuccessful applicants, and the instructions to tenders issued by CPD at the outset clearly stated that there was no obligation to accept the lowest or any tender; (iv) as the previous community development support contract which ended on 31 March was with a consortium comprising of the Rural Community Network, NI Rural Women's Network and 9 Rural Support Networks; to support both regional and local community development, it was not possible to extend the contract for only the local community development element of this support to individual consortium members from 1 April 2012 onward.

Measuring Wheels: Testing

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to her Department's testing of measuring wheels, on hard and prepared grass surfaces, how many of the wheels were found to be outside the 1 percent tolerance level.
(AQW 11484/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: None of the Department's measuring wheels were found to be outside the 1 percent tolerance level in tests on hard and grass surfaces.

Countryside Management Scheme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many of the successful applicants to the next round of the Countryside Management Scheme have accepted the offer made under the Scheme.
(AQW 11486/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At the 10 May 2012, my Department had issued 717 new agreements for the NI Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) of which 389 had been signed and returned. This means that these applicants have been accepted into the Scheme.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Irish Language Act

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she is still committed to the drafting and implementation of an Irish Language Act.

(AQW 11125/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): My officials are working on the nature and scope of draft legislative proposals for an Act and I intend to bring forward proposals for an Irish Language Bill to the Executive Legislative Programme 2011 – 2015.

Irish Language Act

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of whether the implementation of an Irish Language Act is part of the Belfast Agreement.

(AQW 11126/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Under the Belfast Agreement, and the European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages, a commitment was made to protect and develop the Irish language.

The St Andrews Agreement of October 2006 committed the British Government to introduce an Irish Language Act based on the experience of Wales and Ireland; and to work with the incoming Executive to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language.

I intend to bring forward proposals for an Irish Language Bill to the Executive Legislative Programme 2011 – 2015.

Irish Language: Provisions in the Belfast Agreement

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of whether the provisions for the Irish Language, in the Belfast Agreement, have been actioned.

(AQW 11127/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Belfast Agreement made a commitment to take resolute action to promote the Irish language.

The St Andrews Agreement of October 2006 committed the British Government to introduce an Irish Language Act based on the experience of Wales and Ireland; and to work with the incoming Executive to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language.

I regard an Irish Language Act as essential to protect and promote Irish in the North.

I intend to bring forward proposals for an Irish Language Bill to the Executive Legislative Programme 2011 – 2015.

Irish Language: Provisions in the Belfast Agreement

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what provisions for the Irish Language, in the Belfast Agreement, are still to be implemented.

(AQW 11128/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Belfast Agreement made a commitment to take resolute action to promote the Irish language.

The St Andrews Agreement of October 2006 committed the British Government to introduce an Irish Language Act based on the experience of Wales and Ireland; and to work with the incoming Executive to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language.

I regard an Irish Language Act as essential to protect and promote Irish in the North.

I intend to bring forward proposals for an Irish Language Bill to the Executive Legislative Programme 2011 – 2015.

Ulster Scots Act

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of whether the implementation of an Ulster Scots Act is part of the Belfast Agreement.

(AQW 11129/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Belfast Agreement recognises the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to Ulster-Scots.

Following the Agreement at St Andrews the British Government passed legislation at Westminster to amend the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Section 28D(2) of this Act is now as follows:

"The Executive Committee shall adopt a Strategy setting out how it proposes to enhance and develop the Ulster Scots language, heritage and culture."

The Executive's Programme for Government 2011-2015 includes a Strategy for the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture as part of Priority 4 "Building a Strong and Shared Community".

Irish Language Strategy

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the Irish-Language Strategy; and whether she will make a statement to the Assembly on the matter.

(AQW 11189/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: At DCAL oral questions on the 17 April I informed the Assembly of my intention that an initial Strategy paper will be brought to the Executive shortly and it will go to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure for consultation thereafter.

I am committed to taking the Strategy forward in line with the 1998 Act and the Executive's 2011-15 Programme for Government.

Ulster Scots Bill

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she plans to introduce an Ulster Scots Bill; and, if so, how does she propose it will differ from an Irish Language Bill.

(AQW 11216/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Belfast Agreement recognises the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to Ulster-Scots.

Following the Agreement at St Andrews the British Government passed legislation at Westminster to amend the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Section 28D(2) of this Act is now as follows:

"The Executive Committee shall adopt a Strategy setting out how it proposes to enhance and develop the Ulster Scots language, heritage and culture."

The Executive's Programme for Government 2011-2015 includes a Strategy for the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture as part of Priority 4 "Building a Strong and Shared Community".

Irish Language Act

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her intentions in relation to the implementation of an Irish Language Act.

(AQW 11218/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am committed to bringing forward legislative proposals for an Act and I intend to bring forward proposals for an Irish Language Bill to the Executive Legislative Programme 2011- 2015.

Ulster Canal: Redevelopment

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the redevelopment of the Ulster Canal.

(AQW 11318/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Ulster Canal project is progressing through a number of incremental steps. The Planning applications were lodged by Waterways Ireland with Monaghan County Council, Clones Town Council and Cavan County Council on 25 October 2011 and with the Department of the Environment Planning Service NI on 28 October 2011. I have been informed that Cavan County Council has granted planning permission and that Monaghan County Council and Clones Town Council requested additional information which was provided on 25 April 2012.

I understand from the Minister for Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht that, towards the end of last year, he met with senior officials of Monaghan County Council, Fermanagh District Council and Waterways Ireland to discuss approaches to setting up an inter-agency group that could examine ways in helping to advance the Ulster Canal project. Officials of his Department are currently finalising the terms of reference for the inter-agency group. I look forward to that work continuing in the period ahead.

NI Screen: Funding

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department allocated to NI Screen for the installation of captioning and audio description equipment in cinemas; and (ii) what audits were carried out to assess that the funding was used by each cinema for such use.

(AQW 11332/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Cinema Access Programme received approximately £30,000 from my Department.

There was an official launch of the programme at each of the venues in receipt of funding and each was required to screen a film on launch night using the equipment.

Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many times she has met with the Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment.

(AQW 11358/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I met with the Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment (the MAG) on one occasion which was 12 December 2011.

I also met the Chair Arthur Acheson on 27 June 2011.

My officials provide a support and secretariat function for the MAG and its Chair and I am kept informed of all relevant issues and developments.

Northern Visions: Funding

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how the decision to withdraw core funding from Northern Vision complements the commitment in the Economic Strategy to 'promote innovation and grow the creative industries and a broader culture of creativity and design thinking'.

(AQW 11390/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department's funding in support of the arts and the creative industries is primarily distributed through arms-length bodies such as the Arts Council and NI Screen. Such investment now takes place within a challenging fiscal environment where, unfortunately, not all desirable activity can be supported.

NI Screen has received a small increase to its budget for this year which, in keeping with the organisation's existing assessment and prioritisation decisions, will subsequently allow it to provide support to Northern Visions. This will safeguard Northern Visions' immediate future and its ability to more fully consider long term planning and sustainable income streams.

Northern Visions: Achievements

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of Northern Visions' achievements over the past 30 years, with particular reference to the organisation's effectiveness in improving cross-community relations.

(AQW 11391/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Northern Visions is an effective and hardworking community outreach organisation with links to many groups across the city and has equally good relations in all parts of society in the North of Ireland.

In a more favourable funding climate, its funding would not have been cut.

I am pleased to advise that NI Screen has received a small increase to its budget for this year which, in keeping with the organisation's existing assessment and prioritisation decisions, will subsequently allow NI Screen to provide support to Northern Visions. This will safeguard its immediate future enabling it to more fully consider long term planning and sustainable income streams.

GAA Congress: Decision on Mouth Guards

Mr Chris Hazzard asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in light of the recent GAA Congress decision that all players have to wear mouth-guards when playing or training, and the rising cost of protective sports equipment, what funding is available through her Department, or its arm's-length bodies, to assist (i) individual players; and (ii) sports organisations.

(AQW 11399/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is responsible for the distribution of funding for sport in the north of Ireland. At present, Sport NI has no funding programmes open to which individual players or sports organisations can apply for assistance towards protective sports equipment.

The cost of protective sports equipment including mouthguards, should be seen in the context of the wider costs of participation, including playing and training in sport. Neither DCAL nor Sport NI is aware of any evidence to suggest that the cost of such equipment is a significant barrier to playing or training in sports.

'The Ulster Scot'

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) to outline the current position relating to the publication of 'The Ulster Scot'; (ii) what was the closing date for tenders; (iii) how many applied for the tender; and (iv) who was successful.

(AQW 11402/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL was not involved in this tender process, which was administered by the Ulster-Scots Agency.

The tender process for publication of the Ulster-Scot was opened on 9th February 2012 and closed on 23rd March 2012. The contract is for two years with an option to extend for three further periods of 12 months.

Five tenders were received and the process was run by the Civil Service Central Procurement Division (CPD).

The Ulster-Scots Agency assessment panel has met with CPD and scored the tender submissions and identified a preferred supplier. CPD are to notify respondents of the outcome and wait the 10 day appeal period ending before engaging the provider. The Agency has not yet been advised formally of the successful future provider.

Jetty at Garvary: Lower Lough Erne

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when anglers will be able to use the jetty at Garvary on the Lower Lough Erne, following the on-going dispute between her Department and landowners over right of way.
(AQW 11529/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am currently unable to confirm when anglers will be able to use the jetty at Garvary on Lower Lough Erne, as the matter has been referred to the Departmental Solicitors Office.

Shared Sports Stadium, North Belfast

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on any discussions her Department has had with interested parties regarding a shared sports stadium in North Belfast.
(AQW 11568/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I met with officials from Crusaders FC and other relevant partners and investors, on 2nd February 2012, to discuss proposals for the development of a Sport, Educational and Media Village at Giants Park in North Belfast.

In addition, DCAL officials met with Belfast City Council officers in April 2012 to discuss the position on the completion of a due diligence exercise on the proposal. As a result of that meeting, I understand Belfast City Council has decided to continue to pursue the necessary due diligence information.

DCAL, in the meantime, has agreed initially to host a further meeting later this month with Belfast City Council and potential Government interests. The purpose of this meeting will be to receive an update on the latest position from Belfast City Council and to consider what assistance, if any, can be provided at this stage.

Shared Sports Stadium, North Belfast

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what assistance her Department has offered towards the construction of a shared sports stadium in North Belfast.
(AQW 11570/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have indicated that I have no objection, in principle, to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) acting as a lead Department for the development of a proposed sports, education and media village in North Belfast which includes a possible shared sports stadium. This, however, remains subject to the outcome of a due diligence exercise on the proposal being undertaken by Belfast City Council and receipt of full information on the specific Government inputs required. My officials are in discussion with Belfast City Council with regard to progress on the due diligence exercise and have arranged a round table meeting later this month with the Council and potential Government interests in order to discuss what assistance, if any, can be offered at this stage.

Department of Education

Preschools: First-Preference Choice

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the current number of children who have not received their first preference choice of pre-school provision, broken down by Education and Library board area.
(AQW 10400/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The information sought is in relation to the Pre-School Admissions Process for the 2012/13 academic year. This is a 2 stage process which will not complete until 1 June 2012 and therefore final figures in relation to the number of children in their final pre-school year offered a place during the process will not be available until after that date. However, as I indicated in the Assembly on 23 April, at the end of Stage 1 of the Process some 84% had secured a place in their first preference choice of setting and overall 94% of those who had made application had been offered a place. The parents/guardians of the 1,429 children who were unplaced were invited to submit further preferences for the 1,742 places which remained available.

Community Voluntary Preschool Playgroup Places

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many community voluntary pre-school playgroup places were available in each of the last five years; and (ii) the average annual cost of a child attending a community voluntary pre-school playgroup, broken down by Education and Library Board area.
(AQW 10682/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below details the number of children in funded places in voluntary and private settings at the time of the School Census in each of the last 5 years broken down by education and library board:-

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
BELB	530	484	523	614	650
WELB	1206	1210	1225	1321	1338
NEELB	1633	1645	1696	1903	2140
SEELB	1407	1402	1372	1652	1781
SELB	1759	1888	1928	2109	2240
Total	6535	6629	6744	7599	8149

Funded places in all voluntary and private settings are funded at a flat rate. The funding rates for the past 5 academic years are detailed in the table below:-

Academic year	Per place funding rate
2007/08	£1,405
2008/09	£1,445
2009/10	£1,485
2010/11	£1,525
2011/12	£1,565

Special Educational Needs System: Review

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Education whether he will ensure that any review of the Special Educational Needs system will (i) retain clear rights for children and parents; and (ii) ensure that parents are equal partners in the system.

(AQW 10735/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am currently finalising a policy paper in regard to the SEN review. Once my deliberations are complete I will be in a better position to answer this question.

However, my approach to SEN has and will be based on children's rights and equality.

Funded Preschool Places: Bangor Area

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of nursery and pre-school places available; and (ii) the number of applications received for funded places in the Bangor area in each of the last five years.

(AQW 10763/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of nursery and pre-school places available in the Bangor area and the number of 1st preference applications which each setting received in each of the last five years is detailed in the table below.

	2008/09		2009/10		2010/11		2011/12		2012/13	
	No. of places	No. of 1st pref	No. of places	No. of 1st pref	No. of places	No. of 1st pref	No. of places	No. of 1st pref	No. of places	No. of 1st pref
Statutory nursery provision										
Bangor Nursery School	78	93	78	77	78	77	78	64	78	85
Bloomfield Road Nursery Unit	52	37	52	45	52	49	52	57	52	65
Kilcooley Nursery Unit	26	20	26	32	26	23	26	28	26	23
Kilmaine Nursery Unit	52	68	52	91	52	100	52	69	52	84

	2008/09		2009/10		2010/11		2011/12		2012/13	
	No. of places	No. of 1st pref	No. of places	No. of 1st pref	No. of places	No. of 1st pref	No. of places	No. of 1st pref	No. of places	No. of 1st pref
Rathmore Nursery Unit	52	58	52	48	52	46	52	69	52	64
St Malachy's Nursery Unit	52	29	52	35	52	41	52	54	52	51
Towerview Nursery Unit	52	25	52	39	52	52	52	56	52	59
Trinity Nursery School	52	65	52	72	52	88	52	88	52	89
Voluntary/private provision										
Ballycrochan Playgroup	26	42	26	34	26	35	38	46	38	36
Ballyholme Playgroup	24	15	24	25	25	29	25	18	25	31
Bangor Abbey Playgroup	14	11	14	5	15	6	26	11	26	3
Bangor West Nursery Playgroup	19	23	20	18	19	14	26	21	26	24
Bo-Peep Corner Pre-school	18	12	18	7	18	12	26	9	26	6
Bright Sparks Pre-School	-	-	-	-	24	24	20	20	16	27
Crawfordsburn Playgroup	15	14	18	14	14	10	18	6	16	10
Early Days Playgroup	24	21	24	19	24	31	24	25	24	27
Groomsport Playgroup	8	13	12	9	20	13	26	10	26	15
Little Acorns Playgroup	34	21	32	25	30	19	33	31	33	18
Little Bears Day Nursery	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	4
St Comgall's Playgroup	24	24	24	15	24	37	24	38	24	27
Tiddliwinks Playgroup	24	24	24	19	26	17	24	25	24	20
Total	646	615	652	629	681	723	726	745	740	768

Post-Primary Schools: North Eastern Education and Library Board

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education how many post-primary schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area, that sought temporary accommodation in the last three years, also applied for an increase to their approved enrolment number in the past five years.

(AQW 10990/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Eight post primary schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board sought temporary accommodation over the past three years. Of these temporary variations were sought as follows; 3 in 07/08, 4 in 08/09, 4 in 09/10, 4 in 10/11 and 5 in 11/12.

Arm's-Length Bodies

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many of his Department's arm's-length bodies have been advised that they are to become a non-departmental public body.

(AQW 11134/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Following a classification exercised undertaken by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) in 2011, in addition to the Department's ten existing Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), four arm's-lengths bodies have been advised that they are NDPBs. These are:

- Middletown Centre for Autism
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
- Exceptional Circumstances Body

Reclassifying an Arm's-Length Body as a Non-Departmental Public Body

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to outline the rationale for changing an arm's-length body to a non-departmental public body.

(AQW 11135/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: When new arm's-length bodies (ALBs) are established, Departments are required to engage with the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) to ensure that they are classified correctly.

If DFP has not been involved in the establishment of a new ALB, or where circumstances change since the initial set-up of the ALB, then this could lead to a reclassification.

Consultation Prior to Reclassifying an Arm's-Length Body as a Non-Departmental Public Body

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what consultation must take place prior to any decision to change an arm's-length body to a non-departmental public body.

(AQW 11136/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Office of National Statistics (ONS) determines sector classification. When ONS determine that a body falls within the definition of Central Government, the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) are responsible for determining the appropriate category of public body, within the North of Ireland. This is determined using Cabinet Office guidance and the information provided to DFP by the relevant Sponsor Department. The ONS is not required to undertake any consultation in reaching sector classification.

Children Resident in the Republic of Ireland Attending Schools

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of children resident in the Republic of Ireland who are attending (a) primary schools; (b) post-primary schools; and (c) pre-school providers in Northern Ireland; and (ii) the total amount contributed by the parents, or the Government of the Republic of Ireland, for each of these.[R]

(AQW 11139/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of children resident in the south attending primary and post primary schools and pre-school providers in the north are shown in the table below. This is reflective of the way people in border areas live and avail of services including education.

Grant-aided Schools	Total Pupils ¹ resident in south of Ireland
Nursery schools and units	5
Primary (Year 1 – 7)	145
Post primary ²	256
Total in grant-aided schools	406

Source: NI school census 2011/12

	Total Pupils resident in south of Ireland
Voluntary and private pre-school centres	11

Source: Western Education & Library Board

Note:

1 Figures include boarders. Boarders do not receive grant-aid funding.

2 Figures for post-primary include fewer than 5 children of that age in a special school setting.

All schools are able to seek voluntary contributions. The Department does not hold information on such contributions. There are reciprocal arrangements for pupils from the south being educated in the north, and those from the north being educated in the south. No funding is provided or sought from the respective education Departments.

Nursery Provision: Portadown Area

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposals to address the shortage of nursery provision in the Portadown area.

(AQW 11148/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department is currently considering four Development Proposals for new/additional statutory nursery provision in the Portadown area at Bocombra PS, Edenderry NS, Portadown Integrated PS and Seagoe PS.

I hope to make a decision on these in the near future.

Education and Library Board: Departmental Approval

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many requests for departmental approval have been received from each Education and Library Board, under article 12 (1) (b) of the Education NI Order 1996, to name an educational setting other than statutory provision, in each year since 2007.

(AQW 11153/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of such requests by each Education and Library Board is as follows:

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
BELB	8	15	50	10	18
NEELB	10	5	11	10	10
SEELB	17	17	19	15	14

The position in the Southern and the Western Education and Library Board is that Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) is funded and managed centrally through a range of Board provision. Any placement of a Statemented pupil in EOTAS provision is organised through the Boards' Special Education sections based on the child's assessed need and is reflected in their Statement of Special Educational Needs. Such arrangements are in partnership with the child's main school in which they continue to be registered. Within this context, no formal approval has been sought from the Department of Education.

Preparatory Schools Funding: Equality Impact Assessment

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education whether the Equality Impact Assessment on preparatory schools funding has been published; and to explain the reason for any delay.

(AQW 11155/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The final stages of the EQIA report are nearing completion with some presentational issues still outstanding. These are in the process of being finalised with a view to publishing the EQIA report on the Department's website as soon as possible thereafter.

Preschool Place: Statutory Right

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of establishing the statutory right of a child to a pre-school place.

(AQW 11195/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As indicated in the outcome of the Review of Pre-School Admissions Arrangements published in January 2012, the Department will not seek to place its existing policy on pre-school on a statutory basis at this time. It is not possible, therefore, to determine the cost of such a measure.

Preschool Provision: Community and Voluntary Sector

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what role he has in establishing and approving additional pre-school provision in the community and voluntary sector.

(AQW 11196/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Voluntary and private pre-school providers are independent of government and are not established by DE. The Health and Social Care Trusts, on behalf of the Health & Social Care Board, are responsible for the registration, regulation and inspection of all voluntary/ private sector playgroups and day care settings.

My Department retains policy and budgetary responsibility for the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme, under which pre-school places are funded in voluntary and private settings. However, planning and implementation of the Programme at local

level is the responsibility of the Pre-School Education Advisory Groups (PEAGs) within each Education and Library Board. Thus the allocation of places to individual settings is a matter for the Boards, based on local knowledge of need and capacity.

Early Years Provision: Sharing of Education and Health Data

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what steps his Department has taken to improve the sharing of education and health data, with a view to developing more effective early years provision.

(AQW 11197/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy contains an objective to encourage greater collaboration among key partners to promote greater integration in service delivery, which includes actions relating to the evaluation and sharing of data between partner organisations, where this is possible within the parameters of data protection.

An example of how early years provision is enhanced through utilisation of health data is the Sure Start programme, which follows an outcomes focussed approach to the planning and delivery of services and targeting of key beneficiaries such as hard to reach families, based on the six high level outcomes adopted under the OFMDFM 10 year strategy for Children and Young People (Our Children, Our Pledge).

This enables the projects to ensure the ongoing review and evaluation of services, structures and staffing to demonstrate maximum impact and meet local need. Many projects utilise statistics drawn from the Child Health System database to obtain baseline information and in the monitoring of progress against their stated objectives in ensuring that the high level outcomes for children are met. No confidential data is accessed.

EU School Milk Scheme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of schools which (i) are eligible to participate in the EU School Milk Scheme; and (ii) currently participate in the EU School Milk Scheme, broken down by (a) Education and Library Board area; and (b) sector.

(AQW 11198/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is as follows:

School Sector	BELB		NEELB		SEELB		SELB		WELB		Total	
	(i)	(ii)	(i)	(ii)	(i)	(ii)	(i)	(ii)	(i)	(ii)	(i)	(ii)
Nursery	32	32	15	13	19	4	20	16	12	11	98	76
Primary	92	60	211	166	156	88	222	142	182	160	863	616
Special	10	10	9	9	10	7	5	5	7	7	41	38
Post-Primary	35	0	49	0	37	0	52	0	44	0	217	0
Total	169	102	284	188	222	99	299	163	245	178	1,219	730

Source:

(i) NI School Census 2010/11; (ii) Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Figures at Summer Term 2011

Home Schooling

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children receiving home schooling in each Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 11214/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Parents can choose to home educate and there is no legal requirement for them to advise their Education and Library Board (ELB) or the Department of their decision. The information in the following table has been provided by the Boards and is based on notifications received that a child is being home educated. These notifications may have been made by parents, a child's previous school, a Board's Transfer Department or its Education Welfare Service. The numbers being home educated fluctuate during the course of a year. Therefore, the figures provided by the ELBs reflect a snapshot in time on the date on which a request is made.

BELB	10
NEELB	47
SEELB	47
SELB	28
WELB	36
TOTAL	168

Education Other Than At School: Transport

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of transporting children to Education Other Than At School projects in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area in the 2011/12 academic year.

(AQW 11215/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board informs me that the costs for transporting pupils to Education Other Than At School projects for the financial year April to March 2011/2012 are:

Translink	£11,941.46
Private Hire	£61,156.00
Total Cost	£73,097.46

Education Other Than At School: Travel Warrants

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of travel warrants issued to children who were sent home from Education Other Than At School projects, during the school day, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 11221/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been informed by the Belfast, North Eastern, Southern and Western Education and Library Boards that they have not issued any travel warrants in the past three years. The South Eastern Board issued 51 travel warrants in 2011/12, 102 in 2010/11, and 66 in 2009/10.

Education Other Than At School: Transport

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many complaints the South Eastern Education and Library Board has received about transport to Education Other Than At School projects in each of the last three years.

(AQW 11222/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board informs me that it has received one formal written complaint about transport to Education Other Than At School projects in the last three years.

Moderate Learning Difficulty Schools

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Education why some moderate learning difficulty schools provide post-16 education and others do not.

(AQW 11225/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There is no legislative requirement to provide post-16 education in moderate learning difficulty (MLD) schools and it is therefore for each education and library board to determine provision in their area. The majority of MLD pupils either leave school at 16 or move onto an appropriate vocational course in further education. It is for this reason that not all MLD schools provide post-16 education.

Moderate Learning Difficulty Schools

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Education what funding is available for moderate learning difficulty schools to provide post-16 education.

(AQW 11226/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The statutory responsibility for securing provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) rests with both schools and the 5 education and library boards (ELBs) who are responsible under special education legislation for identifying, assessing and, in appropriate cases, making provision for children with SEN in their areas.

The majority of funding for the education of children with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) who access post-16 education comes from each ELB's block grant. For those pupils with a Statement of Special Education Need the relevant Board centrally funds the teaching and non-teaching costs that may be required to meet the young person's needs post -16.

In recent years some special schools for pupils with MLD have also accessed funding through the Entitlement Framework which has enabled post-16 provision to be accessed in partnership with colleagues in Area Learning Communities, including those from Further Education.

Republic of Ireland Residents Availing of Education Facilities

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education what system is in place to ensure that a financial contribution is made by the Government or residents of the Republic of Ireland when availing of education facilities in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 11281/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of children resident in the south attending primary and post primary schools and pre-school providers in the north are shown in the table below. This is reflective of the way people in border areas live and avail of services including education.

Grant-aided Schools	Total Pupils ¹ resident in south of Ireland
Nursery schools and units	5
Primary (Year 1 – 7)	145
Post primary ²	256
Total in grant-aided schools	406

Source: NI school census 2011/12

	Total Pupils resident in south of Ireland
Voluntary and private pre-school centres	11

Source: Western Education & Library Board

Note:

3 Figures include boarders. Boarders do not receive grant-aid funding.

4 Figures for post-primary include fewer than 5 children of that age in a special school setting.

All schools are able to seek voluntary contributions. The Department does not hold information on such contributions. There are reciprocal arrangements for pupils from the south being educated in the north, and those from the north being educated in the south. No funding is provided or sought from the respective education Departments.

Substitute Teachers: Cost

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of supplying substitute teachers in the Southern Education and Library Board area, broken down by (i) school; and (ii) for the 2009/10; 2010/11; and 2011/12 academic years.

(AQW 11285/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below. For the current academic year, information is provided from September 2011 to April 2012.

SOUTHERN EDUCATION & LIBRARY BOARD AREA - SUBSTITUTION COSTS

DENI Ref.No.	School Name	September 2009 - August 2010	September 2010 - August 2011	September 2011 - April 2012
5010909	Foley County P S	14,046.09	15,507.91	856.29
5010992	Lurgan Model P S	31,830.46	32,882.12	4,550.50
5011019	Mullaghglass P S	8,490.67	13,042.60	10,141.38
5011034	Aghavilly P S	1,173.74	983.34	-
5011095	Mullavilly P S	8,697.26	9,800.72	3,311.88
5011112	Hardy Memorial P S	51,535.80	30,381.22	15,621.01
5011115	Armstrong P S	40,771.71	58,607.68	23,617.51
5011116	Tandragee P S	62,965.84	48,192.92	35,778.76
5011117	Drumsallen P S	10,523.65	2,352.46	613.40
5011119	Darkley P S	14,245.94	19,218.40	6,590.79
5011124	King's Park P S Lurgan	81,317.94	30,053.54	59,990.25
5011127	Carrick P S	78,581.37	79,171.06	76,892.65
5011129	Hart Memorial P S	80,457.74	54,921.59	51,787.83
5011132	Killylea P S	15,250.05	46,359.25	16,710.73
5011137	Newtownhamilton P S	15,400.03	3,623.18	3,704.51

DENI Ref.No.	School Name	September 2009 - August 2010	September 2010 - August 2011	September 2011 - April 2012
5011142	Clare P S	31,534.04	36,887.46	15,640.58
5011152	Kingsmills P S	1,914.18	1,595.18	11,872.99
5011153	Lisnadill P S	4,144.59	2,558.86	1,714.79
5011157	Derryhale P S	31,052.55	29,505.69	16,011.69
5011161	Mountnorris P S	53,585.00	28,719.69	34,738.49
5011165	Rich Mount P S	7,945.35	7,229.99	2,180.77
5011174	Birches P S	8,051.11	31,877.61	3,843.93
5011175	Cortamlet P S	11,286.85	37,351.70	18,155.53
5011179	Bessbrook P S	32,331.27	23,384.44	29,913.15
5011189	Edenderry P S Craigavon	29,030.62	69,048.71	17,718.09
5011190	Tullygally P S	35,207.11	39,226.57	18,791.92
5011520	Dromore Road P S	46,632.58	56,591.30	14,095.16
5011575	Dromore Central P S	59,086.18	51,068.58	63,289.85
5011594	Abercorn P S	36,588.83	67,765.27	16,834.29
5011596	Craigavon P S	23,525.21	25,027.72	30,425.02
5011598	Waringstown P S	21,068.62	52,632.58	25,907.71
5011602	Bleary P S	82,227.86	69,432.83	30,135.48
5011611	Iveagh P S	17,997.99	15,411.06	6,257.08
5011617	Ballydown P S	57,301.51	7,699.17	5,512.89
5011649	Kilkeel P S	50,231.31	13,396.79	16,399.14
5011651	Milltown P S	38,108.42	13,644.37	11,724.48
5011664	Scarva P S	368.50	1,235.99	-
5011684	Annalong P S	9,378.95	14,375.61	12,215.70
5011687	Maralin Village P S	40,144.60	94,039.19	43,785.25
5012280	Moneymore P S	11,683.57	24,251.50	3,684.32
5012538	Churchill P S	30,742.63	8,070.17	2,517.44
5012611	Lisferty P S	5,519.68	4,776.90	4,557.12
5012615	Ballytrea P S	6,348.29	4,044.42	2,016.62
5012621	Aughnacloy P S	19,761.94	10,804.56	17,933.53
5012632	Donaghmore P S	36,489.49	17,441.90	17,729.65
5012635	Augher Central P S	18,640.34	7,349.43	10,819.20
5012636	Moy Regional P S	34,816.05	52,648.78	42,116.21
5012643	Stewartstown P S	15,808.12	35,349.21	32,665.32
5012646	Howard P S	19,619.65	17,990.59	3,592.68
5012649	Coagh P S	19,173.01	23,256.97	25,344.46
5012657	Walker Memorial P S	5,572.90	31,124.87	36,637.61
5012659	Clogher Regional P S	26,578.01	8,704.79	-

DENI Ref.No.	School Name	September 2009 - August 2010	September 2010 - August 2011	September 2011 - April 2012
5012696	Carntall P S	25,742.37	34,460.18	34,007.01
5012719	Newmills P S	2,622.82	24,457.46	1,677.76
5012720	Dungannon P S	57,873.60	86,911.07	36,043.30
5012726	Cookstown P S	43,684.01	64,060.10	44,441.22
5013019	Edenderry P S Banbridge	91,336.34	81,060.10	48,164.23
5013702	Woods P S	5,962.32	12,953.09	18,046.73
5016007	Millington P S	71,038.21	63,553.35	46,678.71
5016027	Drumhillery P S	41,884.84	6,635.66	28,756.90
5016028	Keady P S	2,192.61	871.53	129.07
5016065	Dickson P S	30,481.18	17,091.88	29,376.00
5016078	Poyntzpass P S	11,624.89	11,341.51	4,820.33
5016079	The Cope P S	27,041.80	21,585.91	972.93
5016080	Drumgor P S	24,711.58	19,518.37	33,057.66
5016088	Fivemiletown P S	12,435.42	26,198.72	24,577.55
5016098	Brackenagh West P S	44,344.56	56,388.33	32,976.10
5016117	Ballyoran P S	21,252.56	56,633.51	49,860.55
5016138	Bocombra P S	9,104.69	35,545.61	5,188.10
5016141	Churchtown P S	184.25	110.71	5,987.04
5016178	Donacloney P S	15,541.28	45,791.77	34,846.16
5016179	Hamiltonsbawn P S	27,809.36	8,114.49	2,295.80
5016200	Queen Elizabeth li P S Pomeroy	3,357.84	2,114.14	788.34
5016221	Orritor P S	29,882.22	7,168.77	18,396.80
5016224	Donaghey P S	37,178.57	48,290.79	1,779.89
5016391	Bush P S	21,697.02	27,995.19	11,065.76
5016436	Markethill P S	24,990.63	17,842.99	49,663.49
5016451	Windsor Hill P S	29,835.40	28,522.55	14,125.50
5016543	Moyallon P S	8,216.16	6,788.40	2,187.35
5016599	Fair Hill P S	50,081.95	31,317.90	21,559.53
5016612	Bronte P S	14,046.05	11,127.99	22,248.36
5016616	Drumadonnell P S	17,907.57	19,084.18	12,425.50
5016643	Richmond P S	22,446.27	8,643.70	13,709.84
5016658	Orchard County P S	25,383.17	10,368.81	3,383.00
5016680	Killyman Ps	29,539.80	54,802.65	53,075.96
5030958	St John's Eglis(1) P S	5,084.52	4,290.37	2,494.06
5030972	St Oliver Plunkett P S Forkhill	55,894.74	42,008.68	16,687.09

DENI Ref.No.	School Name	September 2009 - August 2010	September 2010 - August 2011	September 2011 - April 2012
5030975	St Malachy's P S Whitecross	32,621.51	33,498.49	16,735.21
5031070	St Michael's P S Newry	12,633.15	17,641.71	1,296.56
5031080	Clintyclay P S	32,122.02	13,829.56	7,542.09
5031086	Clonalig P S	18,689.35	28,783.30	30,455.23
5031088	Dromintee P S	52,539.86	41,885.80	24,870.90
5031103	Tannaghmore P S	91,148.71	124,505.30	65,500.20
5031107	St Teresa's P S Mountnorris	37,006.45	43,062.83	11,404.81
5031108	Clea P S	13,780.79	38,864.50	10,239.51
5031110	Christian Brothers' P S	56,561.80	47,694.15	20,000.66
5031126	Mount St Catherine's P S	32,272.60	43,766.33	26,180.44
5031130	Cloughoge P S	46,702.45	119,051.18	30,684.84
5031133	St Malachy's P S Armagh	25,750.09	35,518.97	17,757.54
5031135	St Oliver's P S Carrickrovaddy	53,217.81	17,584.07	2,142.41
5031138	St Joseph's P S Armagh	24,089.14	37,787.86	2,013.33
5031146	Anamar P S	4,555.82	8,364.76	1,549.93
5031148	St Patrick's P S Crossmaglen	50,220.44	103,312.39	30,605.35
5031154	Killeen P S	28,698.24	36,938.06	33,826.05
5031158	St Patrick's P S Newry	119,595.80	71,796.00	66,082.69
5031160	St Teresa's P S Lurgan	56,777.98	9,764.55	18,185.25
5031163	St Brigid's P S Crossmaglen	16,933.06	7,214.17	6,378.75
5031164	St Mary's P S Maghery	44,966.26	28,468.59	22,954.51
5031166	St Michael's P S Armagh	8,443.91	7,503.27	4,466.31
5031167	St James' P S Armagh	8,592.44	7,808.85	27,152.81
5031168	St Patrick's P S Craigavon	7,840.30	2,228.60	14,620.69
5031169	St Brigid's (Drumilly) P S	44,653.02	61,836.74	11,571.11
5031172	St Mary's P S Armagh	37,624.10	20,525.23	17,739.52
5031176	St Peter's P S Bessbrook	85,630.46	66,741.68	70,566.35
5031183	St Patrick's P S Armagh	28,052.86	82,448.53	8,271.08
5031184	St Anthony's P S Craigavon	130,146.81	164,316.53	56,629.36
5031188	St Joseph's P S Killeavy	70,751.12	110,651.52	78,052.66
5031213	St Clare's Convent P S	33,720.72	34,401.21	8,952.72
5031301	Clontifleece P S	11,279.23	5,021.31	8,965.82
5031318	Killowen P S Newry	19,322.39	30,913.61	28,604.94
5031325	St Joseph's P S Kilkeel	67,881.87	24,196.68	21,286.61

DENI Ref.No.	School Name	September 2009 - August 2010	September 2010 - August 2011	September 2011 - April 2012
5031340	St Joseph's Convent P S	157,996.24	174,219.17	110,720.28
5031516	Moneydarragh P S	35,896.38	30,579.23	24,690.47
5031558	Ballyholland P S	29,239.81	35,345.02	25,131.25
5031576	St Colman's Abbey P S	28,970.25	45,098.59	9,432.16
5031589	Grange P S	27,806.82	65,614.71	17,354.96
5031609	Carrick P S	35,173.17	62,448.41	51,005.81
5031653	St Matthew's P S Magheramayo	49,563.04	6,344.17	2,246.35
5031658	St John's P S Newry	13,086.57	-	-
5031667	St Patrick's P S Magheralin	30,066.60	18,136.68	43,331.81
5031669	St John's P S Craigavon	31,872.02	44,603.34	41,290.72
5031694	Holy Cross P S	16,172.06	13,298.00	29,479.01
5031695	St Mary's P S Jerrettspass	86,126.26	103,498.99	37,030.30
5031697	St Patrick's P S Mayobridge	30,290.56	25,955.42	22,973.85
5032208	Ballylifford P S	23,027.53	4,035.29	7,281.30
5032262	Lissan (1) P S	31,416.18	8,170.53	2,733.66
5032306	St Malachy's P S Glencull	16,275.88	31,418.62	10,532.96
5032387	Derrylatinee P S	50,774.67	23,617.21	4,347.79
5032463	Blessed Patrick O'loughran P S	23,559.34	53,226.10	17,377.10
5032558	Laghey P S	7,541.08	3,415.19	36,361.70
5032585	Edendork P S	61,544.90	34,044.02	19,840.05
5032591	Roan St Patrick's P S	4,914.54	37,342.87	18,364.15
5032592	St Mary's P S Lisbuoy	26,350.76	37,170.45	16,036.94
5032624	St Macartan's P S Clogher	23,405.31	19,922.05	996.39
5032678	St Patrick's P S Donaghmore	26,929.05	48,981.63	19,769.20
5032692	St Mary's P S Stewartstown	21,435.13	46,273.65	50,923.30
5032693	Crievagh P S	3,843.16	5,446.95	21,020.58
5032697	St Patrick's P S Augher	24,728.42	28,204.47	20,360.11
5032698	St Brigid's P S Coalisland	28,795.80	17,682.36	4,481.70
5032699	St Mary's P S Cookstown	5,399.30	62,891.69	2,202.32
5032703	St Peter's P S Cookstown	56,309.31	73,542.37	18,482.65
5032713	Derrychrin P S	7,258.79	17,222.15	12,771.08
5032714	Aughamullan P S	8,417.44	6,352.65	2,165.12
5032715	St John's P S Dungannon	40,971.62	39,505.19	16,829.15

DENI Ref.No.	School Name	September 2009 - August 2010	September 2010 - August 2011	September 2011 - April 2012
5032717	St Patrick's P S Mullinahoe	54,786.10	52,387.31	49,840.21
5032727	St Brigid's P S Augher	11,293.74	15,781.67	19,321.66
5032729	St John's P S Dungannon	20,752.57	25,644.73	17,801.53
5032734	St Mary's P S Cabra	31,781.42	52,513.54	3,079.26
5032735	St Mary's P S Ballygawley	15,549.37	30,552.09	15,960.36
5032736	St Mary's P S Fivemiletown	3,571.24	2,144.63	1,589.68
5033003	St Paul's P S Cabra	19,702.72	31,679.03	18,845.08
5033004	St Mary's P S Rathfriland	33,087.17	24,011.59	24,997.28
5033006	St Michael's P S Finnis	8,182.05	9,486.46	5,646.57
5033011	St Marys P S Dechomet	15,204.31	24,513.25	8,503.86
5033025	St Patrick's P S Hilltown	36,726.50	49,143.49	26,082.41
5033324	St Patrick's P S Aughagallon	9,148.08	37,739.61	19,289.21
5036000	St Colman's P S Dromore	10,780.21	20,897.77	9,307.18
5036001	St Mary's P S Annalong	38,451.97	19,490.20	13,527.37
5036006	St Mary's P S Derrymore	32,535.44	82,725.20	12,295.99
5036009	St Mary's P S Derrytrasna	14,474.29	15,726.70	26,262.57
5036031	St Patrick's P S Loup	28,597.98	42,120.78	8,038.50
5036033	St Joseph's P S Dungannon	3,335.06	6,089.11	4,243.15
5036043	St Mary's P S Banbridge	154,229.90	132,820.17	70,358.93
5036047	St Patrick's P S Coalisland	62,517.36	49,979.22	37,603.00
5036057	St Malachy's P S Magherafelt	25,205.01	53,886.33	12,244.32
5036061	St Colman's P S Banbridge	41,369.94	35,334.63	44,411.11
5036064	St Malachy's P S Camlough	71,982.17	81,277.68	45,624.54
5036087	St Mary's P S Mullaghbawn	69,280.15	53,471.33	7,733.28
5036099	St Patrick's P S Cullyhanna	27,849.60	94,370.85	45,816.93
5036101	St Brendan's P S	71,658.18	97,486.67	52,728.90
5036108	St Joseph's P S Cookstown	24,764.39	28,769.13	19,200.74
5036110	St Joseph's P S Newry	50,303.09	82,224.18	16,308.71
5036118	St Mary's P S Dungannon	17,643.90	32,415.21	34,370.91
5036120	St Patrick's P S Moneymore	23,441.52	8,167.86	24,330.64
5036121	St Jarlath's P S	56,065.73	61,904.96	16,381.75
5036122	Jonesborough P S	27,464.67	42,150.07	44,185.12

DENI Ref.No.	School Name	September 2009 - August 2010	September 2010 - August 2011	September 2011 - April 2012
5036130	St Laurence O'toole's P S	47,340.68	51,670.43	27,985.19
5036136	Sacred Heart P S Dungannon	9,017.09	13,189.74	10,749.54
5036173	St John The Baptist P S Craigavon	91,011.44	87,925.83	38,032.44
5036180	St Oliver Plunkett P S Loughall	13,638.25	4,067.32	2,719.28
5036363	St Mary's P S Aughnacloy	37,009.44	11,446.25	21,557.85
5036400	St Colman's (Bann) P S	20,065.82	32,538.39	17,132.62
5036409	St Ronan's P S Newry	78,214.43	91,814.32	49,638.21
5036433	St Malachy's P S Carnagat	25,943.92	42,329.55	46,273.87
5036457	St Francis P S Aghhderg	8,873.84	35,738.37	2,535.72
5036463	St Joseph's P S Caledon	23,047.70	23,703.52	12,146.18
5036504	St Patrick's P S Dungannon	165,930.39	244,356.66	108,566.02
5036545	St Colman's P S Newry (Kilkeel)	17,902.83	17,509.44	6,811.94
5036567	Holy Trinity P S Cookstown	120,840.77	96,428.35	16,599.93
5036572	St Colman's P S Newry (Saval)	27,955.51	41,758.02	2,422.63
5036583	St Dallan's P S	87,645.83	140,497.37	74,995.85
5036586	Presentation P S	29,717.56	15,899.30	17,559.92
5036590	Primate Dixon P S	44,153.28	108,550.86	73,201.09
5036595	St Peter's P S Moy	56,327.11	9,700.27	42,005.42
5036598	Our Lady's P S	30,354.40	42,415.56	40,667.47
5036605	St Patrick's P S Rathfriland	12,947.78	12,071.41	7,110.79
5036610	St Francis Of Assisi P S	28,928.47	28,712.36	31,060.04
5036622	St Johns P S	23,101.04	22,319.27	17,876.61
5036633	St Francis P S Lurgan	116,155.17	106,387.74	108,816.58
5036639	Our Lady's And St Mochua's P S	32,631.76	12,886.76	5,608.86
5036673	St Bronagh's P S	18,588.09	81,997.25	25,193.53
5036675	St Josephs And St James P S	12,276.82	10,607.47	12,748.43
5046137	Seagoe P S	38,054.54	45,398.54	48,091.16
5046241	Drelincourt Infants School	1,842.50	188.49	-
5046597	Bunscoil An Iuir	12,224.03	16,975.54	24,482.05
5046637	Gaelscoil Ui Neill	58,305.77	57,047.51	34,264.30
5056013	Kilbroney Integrated P S	6,076.00	5,107.22	4,222.74
5066540	Bridge Integrated P S	104,789.63	55,633.15	39,086.90

DENI Ref.No.	School Name	September 2009 - August 2010	September 2010 - August 2011	September 2011 - April 2012
5066553	Portadown Integrated P S	19,437.60	46,972.57	19,039.85
5066554	Windmill Integrated P S	61,259.21	44,559.15	28,759.55
5066578	Saints & Scholars Int P S	10,279.80	36,008.62	5,338.81
5066657	Phoenix Integrated P S	20,606.63	66,135.50	8,680.74
5110017	Armagh N S	2,590.84	4,359.72	588.53
5110021	Edenderry N S Portadown	15,062.22	9,730.55	1,871.89
5116112	Ashgrove N S Newry	1,226.13	1,185.00	6,297.93
5116189	Millington N S	7,154.64	24,767.11	20,673.57
5116190	Harrison N S	4,661.62	5,016.00	1,831.88
5116197	Kilkeel N S	6,297.30	15,951.63	2,874.63
5116198	Fivemiletown N S	108.22	366.12	2,497.00
5116223	The Grove N S	4,205.05	14,013.47	286.00
5116236	Dungannon N S	4,514.88	4,171.03	2,799.12
5116237	Cookstown N S	5,862.21	3,771.53	4,053.48
5116238	Banbridge N S	7,337.27	809.05	8,292.60
5116256	Downshire N S	1,413.01	73.29	994.26
5116625	Dromore N S	27,653.94	17,164.22	4,873.45
5116640	Tandragee N S	5,460.25	4,843.94	25,712.30
5136217	St John The Baptist Nursery	8,347.72	26,104.18	11,907.74
5136342	St Malachy's N S	11,727.56	29,358.15	6,180.52
5136607	College Farm N S	19,591.61	25,141.79	1,439.23
5136627	Little Flower N S	3,756.88	23,717.19	896.53
5136629	Seaview N S	5,418.21	4,438.16	13,035.97
5136631	Drumnamoe N S	10,151.05	12,713.06	24,348.76
5210016	Kilkeel H S	132,622.83	145,156.46	79,682.95
5210025	Newtownhamilton H S	48,181.28	102,247.34	9,109.85
5210043	Clounagh Junior H S	62,760.11	147,879.74	91,183.02
5210047	Banbridge H S	95,608.19	121,601.75	59,691.75
5210054	Killicomaine Junior H S	11,166.11	55,026.26	34,176.18
5210064	Dromore H S	112,919.53	118,377.15	106,862.95
5210083	Markethill H S	35,186.30	46,344.31	37,441.36
5210097	Fivemiletown College	164,266.97	159,578.43	96,061.91
5210121	City Armagh H S	53,742.64	101,521.19	51,762.91
5210127	Rathfriland H S	81,504.67	112,067.41	25,280.12
5210143	Tandragee Junior H S	46,994.29	75,772.46	25,388.15
5210153	Aughnacloy H S	66,438.50	79,793.98	43,142.26

DENI Ref.No.	School Name	September 2009 - August 2010	September 2010 - August 2011	September 2011 - April 2012
5210186	Newry H S	95,239.99	104,340.75	80,178.48
5210230	Cookstown H S	108,833.98	212,271.85	102,937.20
5210231	Drumglass H S	166,214.72	187,748.41	90,419.20
5210271	Lurgan Junior High	95,090.58	154,801.74	74,405.04
5210282	Craigavon Senior H S	156,662.49	138,299.57	73,781.53
5230056	St Joseph's Boys' H S	108,163.03	70,791.18	52,853.22
5230059	St Columban's College	46,188.07	35,488.74	11,211.87
5230070	St Mary's H S Craigavon	157,384.40	173,202.71	100,759.14
5230076	St Patrick's H S Banbridge	121,347.36	167,973.76	121,357.68
5230088	St Paul's Junior H S	97,634.70	150,101.39	102,188.30
5230108	St Mary's H S Newry	152,953.28	223,186.41	116,941.24
5230135	St Mark's H S	137,666.65	207,069.54	108,079.02
5230152	St Ciaran's H S	230,804.33	197,650.20	107,487.78
5230157	St Paul's H S	305,600.67	417,491.60	219,675.36
5230160	St Brigid's H S	36,276.60	88,976.09	33,344.35
5230167	St Joseph's College Newry	95,582.92	81,733.74	83,985.90
5230187	St Patrick's H S Keady	198,380.91	304,107.51	184,065.39
5230192	St Joseph's College Dungannon	173,396.30	115,103.80	30,742.19
5230213	Lismore Comprehensive School	210,686.96	199,474.03	128,336.97
5230218	St Catherine's College	360,082.38	334,777.89	162,416.38
5230256	Drumcree College	103,185.89	90,855.76	23,333.84
5230278	Holy Trinity College	153,258.57	130,742.21	119,352.98
5230293	St Patrick's College Dungannon	174,822.43	279,499.75	153,102.34
5250216	Brownlow Int College	48,607.35	47,796.37	39,493.12
5260285	New-Bridge Integrated College	125,135.71	75,466.79	18,613.36
5260286	Integrated College Dungannon	105,193.59	173,583.81	69,086.09
5316519	Rathore School	95,026.35	151,232.17	64,473.15
5316520	Donard Sp S	21,436.51	9,832.81	9,542.30
5316521	Ceara Sp S	157,382.27	214,258.87	114,797.11
5316523	Sperrinview Sp S	80,048.15	103,769.47	53,544.35
5316577	Lisanally Sp S	73,209.02	125,976.32	76,970.67
5410013	Banbridge Academy	146,188.71	228,268.48	67,584.70
5410057	Lurgan College	37,772.32	38,996.27	28,743.55
5410067	Portadown College	99,617.76	89,760.48	51,535.07

DENI Ref.No.	School Name	September 2009 - August 2010	September 2010 - August 2011	September 2011 - April 2012
5819995	Southern Peripatetic Service	207,819.08	204,958.69	172,584.07
5990400	Kinnego Centre	13,498.01	22,240.26	24,880.45
5992986	Selb Peripatetic-Eotas-Lrn Ctr Tamnamore	6,712.19	29,310.13	7,805.68
5992987	Primary-Lough Road Learning Centre	65,538.38	82,390.49	56,791.60
5992988	Ks4-Lough Road Learning Centre	59,763.45	31,277.06	323.61
5992992	Jnr Eotas-Lough Road Learning Centre	1,281.95	32,778.81	23,938.65
5992993	Eotas Learning Centre Newry	51,385.22	59,516.74	-
5992994	Selb Peripatetic - Eotas-Indiv Learning	-	8,477.35	23,872.88
5993003	Autism Advisory & Intervention Serv	8,831.49	27,242.82	22,995.21
Overall Totals		13,485,244.06	15,699,140.44	9,000,972.39

Substitute Teachers Register

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of administering the Northern Ireland Substitute Teachers Register in each of the last five years.

(AQW 11286/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The cost of administering the Substitute Teacher Register in each of the last 5 years is detailed in the table below:

Financial Year	Cost
2006/07	£226k
2007/08	£231k
2008/09	£237k
2009/10	£244k
2010/11	£270k

Substitute Teachers Register

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what criteria his Department uses to measure the effectiveness of the Northern Ireland Substitute Teachers Register.

(AQW 11287/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Substitute Teachers Register (NISTR) helps to ensure a consistent approach to substitution across the north of Ireland and the provision of accurate management information on cost, absence levels and patterns in temporary employment. NISTR has helped to maintain a low level of unqualified teachers filling temporary vacancies, provides child protection assurances to schools employing substitute teachers, and allows schools to identify teachers who are prematurely retired. NISTR also provides information on work experience, areas of educational expertise and references.

My Department monitors NISTR usage on a monthly basis and measures its effectiveness by reference to the percentage of the total of substitution cover booked via the Register. For the 2011-12 financial year uptake has been at an average of 99%.

Newly Qualified Teachers

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact of the amendments to the common funding formula in encouraging schools to employ newly qualified teachers.

(AQW 11288/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am satisfied that the range of measures which my Department put in place from 1 September 2011 have helped both to encourage schools to employ newly and recently qualified teachers and also to limit the incidence of re-employment of prematurely retired teachers.

The table below shows the number of teachers on the lowest three points of the Main Scale providing substitution cover between September 2011 and March 2012 and in the corresponding period for the previous year.

Main Scale Point	Teachers providing substitution cover September 2010 – March 2011	Teachers providing substitution cover September 2011 – March 2012	% increase
1	907	945*	4.2
2	559	577	3.2
3	428	463	8.2
Total	1894	1985	4.8

* excludes prematurely retired teachers.

Health and Safety Training: Technology Teachers and Technicians

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what procedures are in place to provide statutory health and safety training for technology teachers and technicians.

(AQW 11289/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The provision of continuing professional development for teachers and other staff is currently the responsibility of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) through their respective Curriculum Advisory Support Service. All ELBs undertake, on an annual basis, a needs analysis of the training required by schools in the forthcoming academic year. School principals are responsible for determining the training needs of their teachers and other staff and they can avail of the wide range of courses, including health and safety training, offered by Boards.

In addition, employers should ensure that a teacher is suitably trained for the required phase and subject which they are to teach, especially in practical and physical subjects where there is a potential health and safety risk. Suitable qualifications which are acceptable to teach technology and design (T&D) are detailed in the Department's Circular 2007/22. These include the City & Guilds (C&G) 6131 Workshop Competency Certificate which ensures that teachers of T&D in our schools can competently and safely use the basic hand tools required to deliver the practical aspects of the Revised Curriculum. The Belfast and South Eastern Education and Library Boards are accredited providers of the C&G 6131 course.

STEM Subjects: Implementation

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the resources provided in each Education and Library Board area to support the implementation of STEM subjects in each of the last three years.

(AQW 11290/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since the publication of the Report of the STEM Review, my Department has commissioned and is supporting a wide range of additional initiatives beyond the delivery of the statutory curriculum, aimed at encouraging an increase in the uptake of STEM subjects in schools here.

As well as the funding that has been provided directly to schools through the Common Funding Formula to support implementation of all aspects of the revised curriculum, which includes STEM, the table below details funding provided to the Education and Library Boards over the past three years to support the implementation of STEM subjects:

2009/10	SEELB	NEELB	WELB	SELB	BELB
STEM/CEIAG programme	£160,000	£160,000	£160,000	£161,000	£159,000
STEM CPD programme	£68,000	£117,000	£96,000	£96,000	£123,000
STEM Specialist Schools	£0	£66,000	£288,000	£373,000	£75,000
STEM Truck	£0	£361,000	£0	£0	£0

2009/10	SEELB	NEELB	WELB	SELB	BELB
2010/11					
STEM/CEIAG programme	£160,000	£160,000	£160,000	£161,000	£161,000
STEM CPD programme	£63,000	£95,000	£83,000	£80,000	£85,000
STEM Specialist Schools	£59,000	£224,000	£140,000	£350,000	£86,000
STEM Truck	£0	£236,000	£0	£0	£0
2011/12					
STEM/CEIAG programme	£18,000	£9,000	£28,000	£26,000	£28,000
STEM CPD programme	£51,000	£44,000	£42,000	£60,000	£44,000
STEM Specialist Schools	£0	£94,000	£58,000	£169,000	£36,000
STEM Truck	£0	£273,000	£0	£0	£0

NB:

The figures provided do not include the costs associated with CASS Officer input to and management of the STEM programmes;

The STEM/CEIAG (careers education, information, advice and guidance) programme is administrated by the SEELB;

The STEM CPD (teachers continued professional development) programme was administrated by the NEELB in 2009/10 and by the SEELB in subsequent years;

The STEM Specialist schools totals detail the funding provided to all STEM specialist schools by ELB area;

The STEM Truck is managed by the NEELB on behalf of all five boards.

Education Other Than At School Projects

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education whether all looked after children, including those at Education Other Than At School projects, have personal education plans in place in line with his Department's guidance.

(AQW 11323/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As the DE Circular to schools advises, the introduction of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) for all Looked After Children (LAC) is being rolled out in a phased approach. Roll -out began on 1 December 2011, commencing with those children who are entering care for the first time. Schools only complete the PEP when requested to do so by the social worker and do not initiate the process.

The Health and Social Care Board has agreed a timetable for progressing PEPs for all looked after children and schools were notified of this in April 2012. The timetable is set out below for your information.

Date	Process
01.12.2011	All new LAC cases to be commenced with a PEP following the 2 week LAC Review and completed by the 3 month LAC Review if the child remains looked after.
01.04.2012	All current LAC cases in the court system require a PEP to be commenced – it is important to advise in the court report and legal representation that the PEP is in progress and to include a timeframe for completion.
25.04.2012	All LAC in Year 7 have a PEP commenced in preparation for transition planning. All stages of the PEP to be completed by 29.06.2012
01.09.2012	The remaining LAC require a PEP to be commenced.
01.06.2013	All LAC children and young people have a PEP in place.

Foster Carers

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the position of foster carers in relation to the provision of education for young people placed in their care.

(AQW 11324/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The introduction of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) for looked after children will ensure that all parties involved in their care have an opportunity to input to the education element of the formal Looked After Child (LAC) review process. The child/young person's Social Worker who initiates the process will send Section 5 of the PEP to the Carer or Residential Social Worker for completion. The roll out of PEPs began on 1 December 2011 and a PEP should be in place for every Looked After Child of compulsory school age by June 2013.

The Minister for Health, Edwin Poots, has advised my Department that in February 2010, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) issued guidance which all Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts are required to follow in considering the delegation of authority to foster carers. This includes kinship and respite carers. For the provision of education, HSC Trusts may delegate authority to foster carers in relation to: school day trips; trips abroad; post primary transition; change of school in other circumstances; meetings with school staff; accessing educational initiatives; and sports activities/organisations.

DHSSPS also supports the Fostering Achievement Scheme, which was established in 2006 and is delivered by the Health and Social Care Board through Fostering Network NI. The primary focus of the scheme is to give foster carers opportunities to secure educational and development support for the children they foster, based on the needs identified by the carer.

Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) Subjects at GCSE and A Level

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage increase in the uptake of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects at GCSE and A Level since the introduction of the STEM Action Plan.

(AQW 11356/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The draft Government STEM strategy, 'Success Through STEM', was published in August 2010. Following a period of public consultation, the strategy was approved by the Executive in March 2011. The strategy sets out specific actions to be taken forward by my Department that include a clear focus on promoting the relevance of STEM-related subjects and courses.

Uptake of STEM subjects is measured using examination entries. Between 2009/10 and 2010/11, the proportion of GCSE entries in STEM subjects increased by 0.3 percentage points. Over the same time period, the proportion of entries in STEM A Level subjects increased by 0.5 percentage points.

It is of course important to point out that examination entries in 2010-11 will generally reflect subject choices made by pupils that pre-dated the introduction of the STEM strategy.

Common Funding Formula: Review

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education whether the proposed review of the Common Funding Formula will take account of the recent developments in funding arrangements in other parts of the United Kingdom.

(AQW 11359/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have commissioned a wide ranging review to ensure that the Common Funding Scheme is fit for purpose, sufficiently targets social needs and is consistent with, and supports, Departmental policy objectives.

The review will consider evidence from a wide range of sources and will analyse best practice examples from other jurisdictions.

Common Funding Formula: Review

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education whether the proposed review of the Common Funding Formula will examine the possibility of excluding teacher costs from the formula.

(AQW 11360/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have commissioned a wide ranging review to ensure that the Common Funding Scheme is fit for purpose, sufficiently targets social needs and is consistent with, and supports, Departmental policy objectives.

The review will consider evidence from a wide range of sources and will analyse best practice examples from other jurisdictions.

Enrolment Numbers

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education, for each of the last five years, to detail the enrolment figures at (a) Ballymagee Primary School; (b) Kilmaine Primary School; (c) Ballyholme Primary School; (d) Towerview Primary School; (e) Bloomfield Road Primary School; and (f) Central Integrated Primary School in Bangor.

(AQW 11426/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Enrolments in primary schools in the Bangor area, 2007/08 – 2011/12

School name	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Ballyholme Primary School	600	598	584	593	618
Ballymagee Primary School	404	404	411	409	405
Bangor Central Primary School	562	558	563	572	577
Bloomfield Primary School	307	327	326	332	371
Kilmaine Primary School	654	661	664	670	667
Towerview Primary School	385	391	379	369	389

Source: School census

Note:

1 Figures include children in nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes, where applicable.

Enrolment Numbers

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the role of (i) a school; (ii) an Education and Library Board; and (iii) his Department when setting a cap on the enrolment number for a primary school.

(AQW 11428/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: When setting the admissions and enrolment numbers of a primary school, the role of the school, Education and Library Board and the Department of Education are as set out in articles 11 and 12 of the Education (NI) Order 1997. Namely that the Department will determine the admissions and/or enrolment number of the school having regard to directions under Article 18 of the Education (NI) Order 1986 (the conditions of the school premises) and the accommodation available for use by the pupils at the school. The Department may also vary the admission and/or enrolment number of the school at any time. Before either setting the numbers or varying them the Department must consult with the Board of Governors of the school, the relevant Education and Library Board, and, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools where appropriate. Where a request to vary the numbers has come from the school itself this constitutes consultation and therefore the Department is not required to consult with the school a second time. Ultimately, after any such consultation has taken place, it is the Department's legal duty to set the school's numbers as it deems to be appropriate.

Irish Language

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 10831/11-15, what contact his Department has had, or plans to have, with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools in relation to such protocols being introduced in primary schools.

(AQW 11432/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has not had any formal contact with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools about developing protocols for Irish medium Units and Streams. It will be for Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta to liaise with the school managing authorities when bringing forward Development proposals for new Irish medium provision.

Joint Food in Schools Policy

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education when the Joint Food in Schools Policy will be published.

(AQW 11437/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As this is a joint policy with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the Executive's approval will be required before it can be published.

I intend, along with the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, to seek Executive agreement on the policy as soon as possible. Subject to that agreement, it is intended to publish the policy early in the next school year.

Unhealthy Packed Lunches

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education whether any schools have made interventions, similar to those highlighted in the case study of Langford Primary School, London, to address the issue of unhealthy packed lunches.

(AQW 11438/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department is not aware of any schools that have undertaken initiatives such as that introduced by Langford Primary School in London.

The current arrangements require school authorities here to provide, in relation to nursery and primary schools, school dinners on every school day for day pupils who wish such provision and, in postprimary schools, dinners for those pupils entitled to free meals. Therefore, a school cannot compel children to take school lunches.

You may be interested to note that the School Food: The Essential Guide resource, published by the Public Health Agency (PHA), contains a series of practical guidance booklets designed to help schools improve pupils' nutrition and implement healthier eating and drinking practices. The section on healthier lunch boxes provides a step by step guide to how schools can support healthier food and drink choices by those children who choose to bring a packed lunch. A leaflet for parents of primary school children has also been produced by the PHA. It contains practical tips for parents, carers and children on how to pack an appetising, healthy lunchbox.

Mobile Classrooms

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 10523/11-15, to which schools the mobile classrooms were provided. **(AQW 11439/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below:

Financial Year	Additional Mobiles	Primary School
2008-09	2	Ballymena
2009-10	1	Clough
	2	Glenravel
2010-11	0	-
2011-12	1	St Brigids

Nursery School Places: First Preferences

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many children in the Derry City Council area did not receive their first preference nursery school place, in the first round, for the 2012/13 academic year; and (ii) how many places are still available, broken down by electoral ward area.

(AQW 11447/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I refer the Member to my answer to his earlier question, AQW 10490/11-15, which was published in the Official Report on 27 April 2012.

C2k Services

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what is the projected timescale for introducing C2k into nursery schools.

(AQW 11452/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: C2k provides digital managed services for grant-aided primary, post primary and special schools. The digital services assist schools with their administration, management, learning and teaching and both teachers and pupils have access to various services. The latest C2k contract relates to grant-aided schools and there is no flexibility to extend the contract to the Nursery Sector.

However, I am aware that Nursery settings may benefit from access to certain C2k services. Scoping the need, producing a statement of requirements, approval of business cases, budgetary cover and procurement are all necessary steps in the process. In the current difficult financial climate I am unable to commit at this stage to a definite timescale.

Viability Audits: Benchmark of Seven GCSEs for Selective Schools

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education why he has used the benchmark of seven GCSEs for selective schools in the viability audits, when he intends to end this target under the new regulations for target setting for schools.

(AQW 11455/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The viability audits carried out by the Education and Library Boards used criteria agreed by them for benchmarking purposes. The educational criteria were based on Public Service Agreement targets, with additional attainment levels for grammar schools. I am content that they did so, since I believe that schools which operate academic selection should be judged against a higher standard than those which do not. I should add that, in current legislation, the seven GCSEs are not a target – rather, grammar schools must report on the percentage of their pupils who achieve Grades A* - C in seven or more GCSEs.

My Department is currently consulting on proposed new regulations relating to target setting, school information and prospectuses and pupil records and reporting. The consultation is due to end on 21 September 2012. The final decision on which targets will be set and what information schools will be required to publish will be taken following an analysis of the responses to the consultation.

The proposed changes to the Regulations will ensure that the information schools are required to publish fully support and align with the Departments' policy direction, in particular the targets published in the Programme for Government, raising standards in schools and improving outcomes in literacy and numeracy. The proposed changes will also ensure consistency of reporting making it easier for parents to compare performance across all post primary schools and reduce the burden on schools by specifying the minimum requirements to be published.

It is important to emphasize that schools can continue to set and publish other performance indicators if they wish to do so.

Enrolment Numbers

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 10997/11-15, to detail the schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area that exceeded their approved enrolment number without following the legally required steps; and what sanctions were applied.

(AQW 11456/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The following schools exceeded their approved enrolment number without following the legally required steps.

School Year	School Name	Reason for Exceeding
2009/10	Ballymena Academy	Accepted 2 additional pupils into sixth form.
	Edmund Rice College	Lawfully accepted 1 pupil into Year 8 within the school's approved admissions number, however, a temporary variation to the school's enrolment number should have been sought. Accepted 3 additional pupils into sixth form.
	Magherafelt High School	Accepted 19 pupils following the closure of Maghera High School. There was no alternative provision in the controlled sector in the area.
2010/11	Dominican College, Portstewart	Accepted 2 additional pupils into sixth form.

Where a school is found to have exceeded its approved enrolment number without the Department's prior approval, the Department will seek an explanation from the school concerned and consider each case on its merits before deciding whether the imposition of sanctions is appropriate. In these cases the Department took the view that no sanction should be imposed.

It is Departmental policy to support the increasing numbers of children wishing to undertake sixth form studies. For the 2011/12 school year the Department introduced revised procedures for admission to sixth form. In future, any school found to have admitted pupils to sixth form without the Department's prior approval will expect to have sanctions imposed.

Garvagh High School, Coleraine

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education what was the change in the number of pupils attending Garvagh High School, Coleraine between 1 September 2011 and 1 May 2012.

(AQW 11459/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Figures provided by Garvagh High School indicate that the enrolment dropped from 93 on 1st September 2011 to 60 pupils on 1st May 2012.

Admissions Levels for Primary Schools

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Education whether his Department altered the approved admissions level for any primary schools for the September 2012 intake.

(AQW 11460/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Under Article 12 of the Education (NI) Order 1997 the Department may determine, and at any time vary (know as a temporary variation), a school's admissions number. The purpose of a temporary variation is to enable the Department to respond to particular demographic pressures in an area in any particular year, for example, where there are insufficient places in all schools within a particular education sector in an area to meet demand. Each year there will be demographic pressures in some areas but not in others, therefore, for each school year, including for admissions in the 2012/13 school year, the Department will have approved a limited number of temporary variations.

Education Other Than At School

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the progression statistics to further education colleges and higher education institutes for pupils who completed Year 12 and Year 14 in the Education Other Than At School System in each of the last three academic years.

(AQW 11465/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is not currently available. As part of the 2010/11 School Leaver data, which collects the qualifications and destinations of pupils leaving grant aided post primary schools, the Department is piloting the receipt of a variable which indicates whether pupils enrolled at grant aided post primary schools are in Education Other Than at School. It is intended that this will become part of the School Leavers Survey data collection exercise in the future.

Shared Education Advisory Group

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to detail the dates of all the meetings he has held in the last year in relation to establishing the Shared Education Advisory Group; and with whom these meetings were held.

(AQW 11542/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am currently finalising the membership of the group, and I intend to establish it in the coming weeks.

Accommodation Fund for the Irish-Medium Sector

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the Accommodation Fund for the Irish-medium sector, including the overall budget and spend so far; and (ii) whether such a fund is available for the integrated sector.

(AQW 11543/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has provided a capital grant of £2m to Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta (InaG) for the purpose of improving sub standard accommodation in the Irish medium sector. This funding has been provided specifically to provide modular accommodation for developing schools in the Irish Medium sector which have not yet met the criteria to qualify for capital funding from the Department. To date the Department has approved spending from the fund amounting to £712,264.

A similar fund is not available to the integrated sector as there are only two schools in this sector which would be classed as developing schools which are currently housed in temporary accommodation. Schools in the integrated sector were provided with accommodation by the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) in the early stages of their development using a Club Bank arrangement. The Department had provided The Integrated Education Fund with funding to enable it to enter into arrangements with the banks to borrow the money necessary to provide accommodation for developing schools in the sector. Most of these schools have since proved viability and been vested in the schools estate.

Mobile Classrooms

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Education how many mobile classrooms have been provided to (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools in (a) Banbridge; (b) Lurgan; and (c) Portadown in each of the last five years.

(AQW 11552/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below:

Financial Year	Banbridge		Lurgan		Portadown	
	Primary	Post Primary	Primary	Post Primary	Primary	Post Primary
2007-08						
2008-09					1	
2009-10	1	1			1	
2010-11						
2011-12	2		1	2 double (i.e 4 rooms)	3	2

Listed Properties

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Education to detail listed properties that are owned by his Department.

(AQW 11556/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not own any properties that are listed.

Relationship and Sexuality Education in Schools

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW10553/11-15, whether the flexibility that is referred to in his answer, allows schools, because of their religious ethos, to regard homosexuality as being sinful, and to exclude the subject from their teaching on Relationships and Sexuality Education.

(AQW 11624/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Revised Curriculum taught to all pupils of compulsory school age in grant-aided schools does provide teachers with the flexibility to use their professional judgement, across all curricular areas, to tailor their teaching to meet the needs of their pupils. All schools should have a Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy, setting out how the school will address RSE. They should consult on the content of the policy with pupils and parents and it should be endorsed by their Board of Governors. This means that whole school planning is vital to ensure RSE is taught appropriately within a meaningful context.

RSE is an important element within the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (primary) and Learning for Life and Work (post-primary) areas of learning in the revised curriculum. At primary level the focus is primarily on enabling pupils to understand how to sustain their health and develop their self esteem and self confidence. At post-primary level Personal Health and Relationships are two strands within the Learning for Life and Work area of learning. At Key Stage 4 the Personal Development strand of Learning for Life and Work aims to enable pupils to develop their understanding of relationships and sexuality and the responsibilities of healthy relationships.

Schools teach within that framework and the Department has made them aware of guidance produced by the Equality Commission on Eliminating Sexual Orientation Discrimination. All students/pupils have the right to learn in a safe environment, to be treated with respect and dignity and not be treated any less favourably on grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation. This guidance relates to the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2006, therefore in developing or reviewing their RSE policy, schools should take account of the Equality Commission's Guidance.

Schools: Asbestos

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to outline his Department's policy on asbestos in school buildings and the extent to which this has been implemented by the Education and Library Boards.

(AQO 1956/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Following the introduction of the control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (NI) 2003 and the Control of Asbestos (NI Order) 2007 the Education and Library Boards arranged for asbestos assessments to be carried out across the schools' estate to ascertain the extent of asbestos containing materials present.

Any asbestos containing materials that were identified during assessments as being 'High Risk' were removed following the assessment.

Government policy is that provided asbestos is in good condition and is unlikely to be disturbed, it is better managed for the remaining life of the school rather than to disturb it. Asbestos is however removed if it is likely to be disturbed as a result of refurbishments or other work carried out at a school.

All schools in the estate are required to have an asbestos register that is available for inspection by anyone carrying out work at the school or for information purposes.

Ministerial Advisory Group on Shared Education

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Education when he intends to launch the Ministerial Advisory Group on Shared Education.

(AQO 1947/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am currently considering terms of reference and potential membership with a view to establishing the Ministerial Advisory Group on advancing shared education in the coming weeks.

Schools: Autism

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Education what support his Department provides for children with autism.

(AQO 1948/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My priority is to ensure that every child, including those with autism, receives a high quality education and to that end I am continuing to put in place a range of policies aimed at raising standards for all pupils, including the school improvement policy and the Review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion.

The Review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion prioritises the focus on early identification of needs and early intervention by schools, supported by the Education and Library Boards, and improved collaboration between health and education bodies to support schools in meeting the needs of their pupils.

Education and Library Boards have dedicated Autistic Spectrum Disorder Support Teams providing tailored support to match the individual needs of each child in order to ensure that each child can reach his or her full potential;

There has been significant investment by my Department in support for those with autism since the publication of the Task Group Report on Autism in 2002 including a range of autism resources to schools.

In addition the new Autism Act places a statutory duty on the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to prepare an autism strategy in conjunction with all other Departments. My officials are working closely with DHSSPS officials in developing this strategy

Furthermore the Middletown Centre for Autism continues to provide support to schools, families and educational professionals.

Teachers: Employment

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Education what measures he will take to reduce the volume of supply staff and open up more permanent positions, given that less than 10 percent of newly qualified teachers, who registered with the General Teaching Council in 2010/11, secured permanent employment

(AQO 1949/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am keen to ensure that newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are afforded every opportunity to obtain full-time positions.

The number and type of vacancies for which NQTs may be eligible to apply is primarily influenced by decisions made by schools on the basis of the funding they receive under the Local Management of Schools' (LMS) Common Funding Formula arrangements.

Data from the General Teaching at January 2012 shows that 70% of teachers who graduated here in 2007 have gained a permanent or a significant temporary teaching post (ie employment for one term or more and not including substitute /supply teachers).

However, my Department has taken measures to maximise the employment opportunities for NQTs including:

- reducing intakes to courses of initial teacher education by 25% since 2004/05; and
- discouraging the re-employment of prematurely retired teachers through provision of employer guidance, and changes to pay, premature retirement, and LMS funding arrangements.

I am currently finalising, in liaison with Stephen Farry, a draft strategy for the way forward for teacher education.

Primary Schools: Area Planning

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Education whether each Education and Library Board is working towards the same deadline for primary schools to submit their responses to the Primary Area Planning Consultation.

(AQO 1950/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Terms of Reference for Area Planning indicate that area plans for primary schools should be submitted to my Department by the end of June 2012.

As part of the planning process, the Boards are expected to actively engage with schools, boards of governors and all other educational interests.

It will be a matter for each Board to manage the process to secure stakeholder views and ideas which will inform the development of the area plans. This includes setting the timetable for such submissions.

It is important to note that area planning is not a one off exercise but an ongoing process. I will seek to ensure that there will be ample opportunity throughout the process for interested parties to make their views known, including through formal consultation.

Strabane Academy

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education where the Strabane Academy Campus new build project lies within his list of priorities.

(AQO 1951/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am not currently in a position to comment on any specific school, or potential project that may be considered for capital investment.

I have previously stated that no school will be looked at in isolation but must be considered in the context of the wider area.

The work on area planning is being taken forward at this time and will in due course identify priorities for capital investment.

However, in the interim there is a need to ensure capital funding is utilised to improve the schools estate.

Therefore I have asked my officials to consider an interim process for the identification of major school projects, which are consistent with and supportive of the Area Planning work and in which capital investment can be made in the coming period.

Schools: Unused Buildings

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education how many school buildings belonging to the Education and Library Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools are currently not in use.

(AQO 1953/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department can only provide information on those schools belonging to the Education and Library Boards that are currently not in use. At present there are 21 completely vacant schools in the Board areas.

Schools in the maintained sector are owned by the Trustees and my Department does not hold information on the number or use of vacant schools in this sector.

Schools: Admissions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education if he has discussed, with Executive colleagues, the removal of the legislative protection requiring that Northern Ireland schools give priority to pupils who are resident in Northern Ireland.

(AQO 1954/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am studying the residency criteria. The current residency criterion may not be in keeping with current concepts of mobility and cross border flexibility and are unsympathetic to the way families in the border area live their lives and access services, including education.

The residency policy may also be contrary to EU obligations under the Treaty on the Functioning of Europe (TFEU) and also with relevant provisions of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union such as Article 14 (right to education) and Article 24 (rights of the child).

It would therefore be my intention to bring forward proposals in due course to amend the relevant legislative to remove any such barriers.

Capital Budget 2012-13

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Education how he intends to spend his capital budget for 2012-13 in light of the Area Planning process.

(AQO 1955/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The total gross capital budget for the Department in 2012/13 is £104.1m, and is required to cover investment in transport, ICT, youth, early years, minor works and committed major works, as well a number of other capital requirements.

The work on area planning is being taken forward at this time and will in due course identify priorities for capital investment. However, in the interim there is a need to ensure capital funding is utilised to improve the schools estate.

Therefore I have asked my officials to consider an interim process for the identification of major school projects, which are consistent with and supportive of the Area Planning work and in which capital investment can be made in the coming period.

I will announce further details in due course.

Department for Employment and Learning

Scottish Meat Training Qualifications

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 10392/11-15, why the contract with the Food and Drink Council was withdrawn in May 2010.

(AQW 10977/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The contract to deliver ApprenticeshipsNI was withdrawn from the Food and Drink Training Council on 28 May 2010 due to poor quality delivery and results.

School-Leavers: South Belfast Area

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what provision is in place for school-leavers in the South Belfast area who wish to train in the construction trade.

(AQW 11091/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Training for Success programme provides a guaranteed training place for all eligible unemployed young people aged 16 and 17 (or up to age 24 for those with extended eligibility) in an occupational area of their choice. This includes a Programme-Led Apprenticeship training opportunity which allows the young person to gain an industry recognised apprenticeship framework at Level 2 in a chosen skill area and then to progress to a Level 3 apprenticeship on securing employment.

ApprenticeshipsNI is an employer-led training programme for those in employment. The programme offers a training opportunity for apprentices to equip them with the knowledge, understanding and competence to work at a high level in their chosen occupation and fulfil the requirements of an industry recognised apprenticeship framework. The programme is open to those who have reached school leaving age, are either entering or already in employment and contracted to work a minimum of 21 hours per week.

Construction apprenticeships are offered in a range of skill areas, encompassing the general building sector, civil engineering, construction specialist sector, plumbing, electrical and heating/ventilation.

There are currently 86 participants, with addresses in the South Belfast area, undertaking apprenticeship training via the programme-led apprenticeship and ApprenticeshipsNI programmes.

The Belfast Metropolitan College offers the following further education full-time courses:

- Level 2 Diploma in Wall and Floor Tiling;
- EDEXCEL Level 2 BTEC Diploma in Construction (Qualifications and Credit Framework); and
- EDEXCEL Level 3 BTEC Extended Diploma in Construction and the Built Environment (Qualifications and Credit Framework).

The college offers the following part-time provision through evening study:

- City & Guilds Level 2 Award in Computer-Aided Design and Manufacturing (Qualifications and Credit Framework).

University and Third-Level College Places in Scotland

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students (i) applied for; and (ii) secured places at universities and third level colleges in Scotland in each of the last three years.

(AQW 11223/11-15)

Dr Farry: Figures from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) for NI domiciled applicants and accepted applicants to institutions in Scotland, in each of the last 3 years, is detailed below: -

Academic Year	Applicants	Accepted Applicants
2009/10	5,131	1,071
2010/11	5,770	1,076
2011/12	6,165	1,073

Source: Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

Notes:

- 1 The latest available data for applicants and accepted applicants are for 2011/12.
- 2 Students can choose to apply for up to 5 courses throughout the UK via UCAS. Figures for applicants should therefore be approached with caution as applicants who have applied for a course in a particular country may accept a place in a different country.

Programmes to Help Ex-Members of the Security Forces Back into Employment

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he is aware of any programmes to help ex-members of the security forces to get back into employment.

(AQW 11238/11-15)

Dr Farry: While there are no programmes specifically to help ex-members of the security forces back into employment, ex regular members of HM forces and other security services personnel (including police officers and prison officers) have the opportunity for immediate access to all elements of the Steps to Work programme on becoming unemployed.

Normally eligibility to undertake the work experience, training and work related qualifications elements of the programme is restricted to those who have been claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for 13 weeks or more.

Deputy Principal Vacancies

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail whether there are any Deputy Principal vacancies in his Department in the North West region, including the location of each vacancy.

(AQW 11499/11-15)

Dr Farry: As of 11 May 2012, there are no Deputy Principal vacancies in the North West region within the Department for Employment and Learning.

Universities: Student Support

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what assistance is available for people to study university courses in Northern Ireland after they have raised a family.

(AQO 1964/11-15)

Dr Farry: Higher Education is available to all eligible Northern Ireland domiciled students and my Department recognises that lifelong learning is essential to meet the changing needs of society by means of a suitably skilled workforce and by allowing everyone to reach their full potential.

Mature students of any age can avail of a range of full-time, part-time and flexible distance-learning higher education courses which can often be tailored to meet their work/life commitments.

Mature students are regarded as a "priority group" for assistance from the Department's Support Funds. The Support Funds, which are administered and paid directly by the Northern Ireland universities, are aimed at those who are facing financial

hardship or are considering leaving their course due to financial difficulties. Similar funds are available at Higher Education Institutions in England, Scotland and Wales.

Further and Higher Education: Cross-border Links

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his Department will further enhance and develop cross-border linkages within Further and Higher Education.

(AQO 1965/11-15)

Dr Farry: In the recently published "Graduating to Success: A Higher Education Strategy for Northern Ireland" I have stated that my Department will work in partnership with the higher education institutions and the Irish Government to reduce the obstacles to student mobility between north and south and to implement the recommendations of the IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council report on undergraduate mobility.

My Department is actively involved in encouraging North-South links through:

- support and promotion of the European student mobility programme Erasmus; and
- financial assistance to the secretariat of Universities Ireland and to the prestigious Undergraduate Awards Ireland and Northern Ireland.

A North/South Framework Steering Group chaired by InterTradeIreland and including representation from my Department has been established to increase the number of North/South applications for the European Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7)

The potential for Framework applications involving North/South partners, and the potential opportunities for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), will be the subject of a major conference on European research funding to be held in Belfast in June. I expect this conference, entitled "Collaborate to Innovate – Research and Innovation Funding for SMEs", to involve Commission representation at the highest level.

When I met with my counterpart, Ruairi Quinn TD, in September 2011, we discussed the possibility of working collaboratively in border areas to promote and stimulate student mobility.

Republic of Ireland students make use of further education colleges in Northern Ireland, with almost 4,500 enrolments in the 2010/11 academic year.

FE colleges have developed links with Institutes of Technology in the South, through European Union (EU) funded programmes like INTERREG and the Lifelong Learning Programme.

Higher Education Achievement Awards

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether business leaders have endorsed the Higher Education Achievement Awards.

(AQO 1961/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Higher Education Achievement Report has been developed by a UK wide Steering Group, under the leadership of Sir Bob Burgess. In order to promote awareness the steering group engaged directly with business leaders and employers including the Council for Industry and Higher Education, Confederation of British Industry, Institute of Directors and the Federation of Small Businesses to promote awareness and use of the report. Consequently whilst formal endorsement has not yet been agreed, indications are that the sector is content with, and welcoming of the Higher Education Achievement Report.

The Department's Strategy for Higher Education, 'Graduating to Success' records my commitment to work with the sector to support the introduction of the Higher Education Achievement Report which will supplement the traditional degree classification.

Higher Education Strategy

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why the Higher Education Strategy has a bias in favour of all-Ireland promotions and no vision for East/West links.

(AQO 1966/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Higher Education Strategy does not have a bias in favour of all-Ireland promotions to the detriment of East/West Links. My Department has strong links at all levels with the other UK Devolved Administrations on higher education policy and the Strategy is set within the wider context of the United Kingdom higher education system. Northern Ireland's universities are also measured against their counterparts in the rest of the UK in terms of research, teaching quality and student satisfaction.

Around a quarter of Northern Ireland-domiciled students attend universities elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Indeed, there are proportionally fewer students from England, Scotland and Wales attending universities in Northern Ireland than vice versa. I have decided to make students from Great Britain exempt from the Maximum Student Number from September 2012, thus removing potential barriers to Northern Ireland's higher education institutions attracting such students.

I have also committed to providing full fee loans for Northern Ireland students who choose to study elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

However, it is important to maximise the choices available to our students and, therefore, it is appropriate that the Higher Education Strategy also promotes undergraduate mobility between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, which has the potential for growth.

Cost of Division

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of how the cost of a divided society impacts on his Department.

(AQO 1967/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have identified three areas within my Department where differential costs arise due to divisions in society.

Cost of division is a very real issue in relation to the Initial Teacher Education institutions. Stage One of the review of Initial Teacher Education is currently examining the sustainability of the two colleges. Stage Two, however, will consider the potential savings from alternative approaches. All proposals at that time will be subject to shared future policy proofing.

There are two separate employment tribunals in Northern Ireland: the Fair Employment Tribunal and Industrial Tribunals. My Department has taken a number of steps to minimise the impact of having two separate tribunals. For example, they are subject to shared management and administration arrangements, and the Fair Employment Tribunal can now deal with cases incorporating matters which previously would have required separate proceedings to be taken before an industrial tribunal. The administration of the tribunals is due to transfer later this year to the Courts and Tribunals Service.

My Department has a network of 35 Jobs and Benefits Offices/JobCentres which deliver frontline employment and careers services. When planning for future development of the local office estate, cost of division issues will be factored in to considerations.

Graduate Employment

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what schemes are currently available to find students employment after they finish university.

(AQO 1968/11-15)

Dr Farry: Through the work of my Careers Service and the Careers Service in the universities, most graduates secure employment quickly after graduation. However, since the economic downturn it is more difficult for all to find employment. For those who do not, the Graduate Acceleration Programme is available. It was introduced in January 2010 as part of my Department's Steps to Work programme, was developed to help unemployed or economically inactive graduates overcome the difficulties they are experiencing in trying to find employment in the current economic downturn. The Graduate Acceleration Programme gives participants the opportunity to undertake a 26 week work experience placement specifically designed to enhance their job prospects. Whilst on this provision, participants also undertake a vocational qualification aimed at improving their employability skills.

In addition, my Department's INTRO programme, delivered by Parity Solutions Ltd, is a 24 week management programme for 100 graduates each year, from all degree and Higher National Diplomas. Participants are employed by their host companies and work on a specific business improvement project while also receiving intensive management training leading to an Advanced Diploma in Management.

Higher Education: Rural Areas

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his Department intends to improve access to higher education for people in rural areas.

(AQO 1969/11-15)

Dr Farry: I am committed to ensuring that higher education and the opportunities that it brings should be available to all of those who have the ability to benefit from it, regardless of their background or location.

The recently published Higher Education Strategy, 'Graduating to Success' details my Department's intention, in co-operation with the higher and further education sectors, to develop a pilot scheme for the creation of university bases at the further education colleges as a means of making higher education more accessible to those in rural areas.

The pilot scheme will provide the opportunity for higher education students to undertake distance learning at the further education colleges, with access to the university materials and resources they need on a planned basis.

It is intended that the pilot will take place at one of the further education colleges in the 2013/14 academic year. The pilot will be reviewed in academic year 2014/15 and, subject to the outcome of the review, identified further education colleges will provide access to university resources in subsequent years.

Apprenticeships: Upper Bann

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on apprenticeship provision in the Upper Bann constituency.

(AQO 1970/11-15)

Dr Farry: There are currently 11,331 apprentices, 221 who are undertaking training with suppliers in the Upper Bann constituency.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Tourism Products and Facilities: Promotion

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the amount spent by her Department and its arm's-length 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 (iii) what the spend on Fermanagh represents as a percentage of the total spend on promoting tourism products and facilities in each year.

(AQW 10675/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Table A details the amount invested by NITB for the promotion of tourism products and facilities over the last 7 financial years. Due to NITB financial records disposal schedule records can only be extracted for this period.

Table A:

Year	Total Investment £
2005/2006	1,142,000
2006/2007	1,425,146
2007/2008	976,751
2008/2009	4,186,000*
2009/2010	3,829,000
2010/2011	4,148,012
2011/2012	4,690,000

* Total spend for autumn08/spring 09 campaigns =£3,213,609.29

Table B details the amount allocated to Tourism Ireland from the NI Executive over the last 5 years. Tourism Ireland's expenditure on the promotion of Northern Ireland overseas cannot be broken down on a county-by-county basis.

Table B

	NI Executive Allocation
2008/09	£16.42M
2009/10	£15.75M
2010/11	£15.79M
2011/12	£15.32M plus an additional £1.5M to boost Tourism Ireland's promotion of Northern Ireland in the Great Britain market.
2012/13	£14.85M plus an additional £4.7M to boost Tourism Ireland's ni2012-specific promotional activity.

Table C details the amount NITB has invested in the promotion of Fermanagh since autumn 2008. Records are only available from Autumn 2008 on the investment levels by region, as the agency contracted by NITB prior to 2008 is no longer in existence. For this reason the 2008/2009 figure only includes the autumn08/spring 09 expenditure and not full year costs.

Table C:

Year	Total Investment £
Autumn 2008/09	440,036.81

Year	Total Investment £
2009/10	339,535.24
2010/11	504,406.34
2011/12	498,583.02

Tourism Ireland's expenditure on the promotion of Northern Ireland overseas cannot be broken down on a county-by-county basis.

Table D shows investment levels promoting Fermanagh in each of the years for which financial records and media information is available. Records are only available from autumn 2008 for reasons outlined at (ii) above.

Table D:

Year	Total Investment £
Autumn 2008/2009	13.69%
2009/10	8.87%
2010/11	12.16%
2011/12	10.63%

Tourism Ireland's expenditure on the promotion of Northern Ireland overseas cannot be broken down on a county-by-county basis.

Enterprise Northern Ireland and Invest NI: Legal Action

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what is the estimated total cost to the public purse of the legal action over procurement between Enterprise Northern Ireland and InvestNI; (ii) why InvestNI did not concede at an earlier stage that the procurement process at issue was flawed; and (iii) what are the budgetary implications of this degree of spend on legal fees.

(AQW 10746/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's legal costs are estimated to be approximately £90,000 - £95,000 plus VAT. In addition, as part of the settlement reached between both parties, it was agreed that a contribution towards ENI's legal costs would be made. Invest NI's proportion of that contribution is £14,000.

Invest NI does not accept that the procurement process was flawed. During the first four days of the recent hearings, ENI made some extremely strong and, in some instances, personalised allegations against Invest NI which the organization, rightly, felt compelled to address in public before any decision on the future direction of the case could be taken.

Invest NI recognised that the legal challenge and trial were taking much longer than anticipated and this was continuing to impact adversely on the provision of a full business start support programme for those members of the public who may be interested in starting a business. As the proposed contract under scrutiny would only run until September 2013, any further delays would have a detrimental impact on the logistics of organising and introducing a new service of this type.

On this basis, the Parties, whilst continuing to differ in their views in relation to the issues raised in the litigation, agreed that Invest NI would terminate the current procurement process, and that the legal action would end, on the basis that Invest NI will be going back out to the market with a revised proposal for the provision of a business start service.

The legal fees incurred are contained within Invest NI's overall budget.

Tourism Potential of Carlingford Lough, the Mourne Mountain Range and the Cooley Mountain Range

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the attractiveness and the tourism potential of Carlingford Lough, the Mourne Mountain range and the Cooley Mountain range, whether she will consider promoting this area as a single tourism destination for overseas and domestic visitors.

(AQW 10908/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The consultation with the industry around a Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland led to the identification of 9 key tourism destinations across Northern Ireland including the Mournes. NITB has worked with the local councils in each area and a Destination Plan is in place and a Destination Forum established for the Mournes area.

The Mourne and Carlingford regions feature in Tourism Ireland's set of "Go" films, a series of short films which feature real local characters introducing their favourite 'hidden gems'. The films feature on Tourism Ireland's suite of 42 websites and have been used extensively as part of Tourism Ireland's promotional campaigns in key overseas markets and have been viewed by over 1.3 million people worldwide.

Tourism Ireland, working closely with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Fáilte Ireland, invites and flies in overseas travel and lifestyle media and travel trade representatives to visit a range of attractions in the Mourne and Carlingford regions. Tourism

industry partners from the Carlingford and Mourne regions also joined Tourism Ireland at consumer and trade promotions overseas and also submit special offers to Tourism Ireland for inclusion in its special offers campaign on discoverireland.com.

Social Entrepreneurship Programme

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to the Social Entrepreneurship Programme which ended on 31 March 2012, to detail (i) her Department's assessment of the success of the programme; and (ii) when a replacement programme will be in place.

(AQW 10919/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's Social Entrepreneurship Programme (SEP) was operational between June 2009 and March 2012. As part of its programme protocol, Invest NI commissioned an independent evaluation which was completed in February 2012. In three years the programme supported 136 new start-ups with 426 jobs created. Additionally £280,000 of grant assistance helped new social enterprises leverage £8.4million from other funding sources. Economic benefits have included new social enterprises creating £6.3million in revenue including an average of £300,000 annually in export sales.

Work is underway on an appraisal of a new programme and subject to internal Invest NI approval; this is likely to be tendered in late June and operational in September.

Business Start-Up Programme

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to the Business Start-Up Programme and the completion of the legal action between Enterprise NI and InvestNI, when a new business start-up programme will be (i) tendered; and (ii) operational.

(AQW 10923/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI is currently finalising internal approvals for future start up provision and is working with Central Procurement Directorate to finalise the terms of reference for a new tender process. The tender is expected to be issued in May 2012.

The tender will be required to be published in the Official Journal of the European Community (OJEC) and potential bidders will have 40 days from the date of publication to submit their tenders. Invest NI will then assess the tenders with an award decision anticipated to be communicated in July 2012 and a new contract for delivery is expected to commence as soon as practicable thereafter.

Small and Medium-Sized Businesses: Bank Lending

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) what improvements have been made to banks lending money to small and medium-sized businesses in each of the last two years; and (ii) what improvements are still required.

(AQW 10930/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A stable and competitive banking sector that meets the needs of businesses and individuals is vital for economic recovery in Northern Ireland. This is reflected in the Executive's Economic Strategy which was published in March. While DETI has no statutory control of the banking sector, I have met with representatives of the main banks in Northern Ireland to emphasise the importance of supporting business development and growth. In addition, the Finance Minister has been liaising with representatives from local banks, the British Bankers Association (BBA), the Bank of England, and UK and Irish Governments to ensure local SMEs have reliable and fair access to finance.

In particular, Minister Wilson has been pressing to ensure that the 17 recommendations contained within the BBA Business Finance Taskforce report are implemented by local banks in Northern Ireland. These recommendations are aimed at improving access to finance and general relationships between banks and customers, and have led to a number of improvements being implemented to date, including:

- 1 an independent appeals process for businesses that have been denied access to bank credit. This was formally launched in November 2011 and it is encouraging that the four main local Northern Ireland banks have implemented the new independent appeals process. It is hoped that this will lead to a more fair and transparent banking sector;
- 2 banks are now required to provide signposting to alternative sources of finance. Successful implementation will ensure customers receive information and advice if their loan application is declined and banks will also raise awareness about the financial solutions customers could consider;
- 3 a business mentoring scheme has also been launched as part of the Better Business Finance initiative. The mentors who have joined the scheme all have experience in the banking industry and will be able to assist local SMEs in sourcing appropriate forms of business finance.

While BBA lending data suggest that loan approval rates are holding consistent at around 90%, new lending is still declining and there are suggestions that the cost and conditions attached to credit remain significant issues. Access to suitable and sufficient finance remains vital to our economic recovery and both I and the Finance Minister continue to monitor this situation closely and will engage with all relevant stakeholders to this end.

Indeed, I recently announced that the Economic Advisory Group, chaired by Kate Barker, will be undertaking a focused and short term exercise to examine if there are any gaps in the provision of finance and what might be done differently by the Executive

to ensure our SMEs have the necessary access to finance for them to start and grow their businesses. I look forward to seeing what recommendations they bring forward as a result of that review.

InterTradeIreland: FUSION Programme

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list the companies or third level partnerships that have been established on the island of Ireland through InterTradeIreland's FUSION Programme.

(AQW 10931/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The purpose of the FUSION Programme is to assist existing businesses in becoming more competitive through developing new products and processes, or through developing and implementing new technologies through a three way partnership. This includes a host company and a third level research institute, one from each jurisdiction, together with a high calibre science or technology graduate.

The names of the companies who have completed and benefited from the successful FUSION Programme are as follows:-

- Abbey Training Services
- Actovation Ltd
- Appletree Press
- B9 Energy (O&M) Ltd
- Biocolor Ltd
- Bio-Kinetic Europe Ltd
- Biznet IIS Ltd
- Blaney Motor Company
- Blast & Quarry Surveys
- BMF Business Services
- Breezemount Electrical & Hydraulics Ltd
- Creative Composites Ltd
- Delta Print and Packaging Ltd
- Devenish Nutrition
- Digestors, Silos and Tanks T/a Silotank Ltd
- Etain Ltd
- Fast Engineering Ltd
- GRP Systems
- Intelliden
- Kelvatech
- Meridio Holdings Ltd
- Mindmill formerly Laing Consulting Ltd
- Mobile Cohesions Ltd
- Mooney's Bakery
- Moorings Mediquip
- New Media Warehouse Ltd T/a Synergy Learning Ltd
- Patterson Protective Coatings Ltd
- Pure Marine Gen Ltd
- Redbay Boats Ltd
- Sensor Technology and Devices Ltd
- Steves Cakes Ltd
- Stiona Software Ltd
- W.G. Buchanan & Son Ltd
- XenoSense Ltd
- Clarehill Plastics Ltd
- Evron Foods Ltd
- Initiative Economic Development Ltd
- Island Salads
- John Woods Ltd
- Kitchen Bakes Ltd
- McElmeel Mobility Services
- Reflex Mouldings Ltd
- Fusion Antibodies
- Adesco Nutricines Ltd
- BMA Geoservices Ltd
- Deycom Computer Services
- Pressure Hydraulics Ltd
- TE Laboratories Ltd
- Aine's Chocolates
- Carlton Cake Company Ltd
- Kenny Informations Systems
- Vellum Gold Ltd
- ABC Nutrition Ltd
- Advanced Technology Management Services
- ASA Marketing Group
- Clinical Conduct Associates Ltd
- Coolmore Fresh Foods Ltd
- CyberColloids Ltd
- Enbio Ltd
- Fastnet Mussels Ltd
- Glantreo Ltd
- Globe Technical Services Ltd
- Kedco Group Ltd
- Marigot Ltd
- Nautical Enterprise Centre Ltd
- Reproduc Ltd
- Solvotrin Therapeutics Ltd
- 360 Production Ltd
- Foyle P.A.C. Ltd
- Foyle Technologies Ltd
- Limavady Gear Co. Ltd
- Milgro
- Millar Savoury Foods Ltd
- Opt2vote Ltd
- Scott McClelland t/a North West Electronics
- Specialist Joinery Fittings Ltd
- Andronics Ltd
- E&I Engineering
- Sperrin Metal Products Ltd
- Barry Electronics Ltd
- Bluestack Brewing Ltd
- Carberry Holiday Parks Ltd

- Claddagh Resources Ltd
- Donegal Harvest Ltd
- Donegal HealthCare Ltd
- Fleming Engineering Ltd
- Fluid Controls Ltd
- Inishowen Engineering
- Instinct Technology
- Masol Ireland Ltd
- Nvolve Ltd
- R A Pacaisti Teoranta
- Rockall Marine Ltd
- Trinity Innovations Ltd
- Wiss Medi Teo
- Atlanfish Ltd
- Around Noon Sandwiches Ltd
- Crossgar Meats Ltd
- DJV Insulations
- Herron Engineering
- ITS New Media Ltd
- J & P Best
- Media Lightbox Ltd
- Orchard Fresh Foods Ltd
- Quality Timber Frames Ltd
- ReGen Waste Ltd
- S.K. Electrical Services
- Sembarc Ltd
- Abba Employment Agency t/a Action Recruitment
- Agricultural Trust Ltd
- Aircraft Mgment Technologies Ltd
- AllinAll Ingredients Ltd
- Authentik Language Learning Ltd
- Big River Ltd
- Celtic Catalysts Ltd
- CFMA Holding Ltd
- Country Crest Ltd
- Eberts Ltd
- Impedans Ltd
- James Hackett (Ireland) Ltd
- Leap Broadband
- Leo Fashions Ltd
- Occidental Tourist Ltd
- Real Time Technologies Ltd
- Renley Ltd
- Sigmoid Pharma Ltd
- SNC Engineering
- Sonidel Ltd
- SOTA Orthopaedics Ltd
- SysXNet Ltd
- Taltech Engineering Holdings Ltd
- Vigitrust Ltd
- Voicesage Ltd
- Archaeological Development Services (ADS) Ltd
- Greyhound Waste Disposal Company Ltd
- Reduce, Reuse & Recycle Ltd
- Bite Snack Foods Ltd
- Erne Concrete Pumping
- Jak-A-Box Ltd
- Teemore Engineering Ltd
- The Print Factory
- Clada Mineral Water Company Ltd
- Creganna Ltd
- Crospon Ltd
- Fintrax
- Foireann BDS
- Irish Composites
- JFC Plastics
- Marcon Computations International Ltd
- MBCS Ltd T/a Cut-E Consulting
- Oasis Information Systems Ltd
- Outsource Technical Concepts
- PPA Teo
- Roche Manufacturing Ltd
- Sheridan's Cheesemongers
- Synecco Ltd
- Topform Ltd
- Vivasure Medical Ltd
- Window & Roofing Concepts
- BioAtlantis Ltd
- Ash Technologies Ltd
- Enviritech Engineering
- Goldreed Holdings Ltd
- Imperative Energy Ltd
- Killarney Telecommunications Ltd
- Patrick Cahill (Graiguenamanagh) Ltd T/a Cahill Truck Bodies
- Prochem Engineering Ltd
- Refrigeration Engineering Ltd
- C.J. Sheeran Ltd
- Fingleton White & Co Ltd
- Breffni (Ireland) Ltd
- Cora Systems Ltd
- Country Cooking Co Ltd
- TMC Engineering
- Vistamed Ltd
- Almir Business Ltd
- Bright Solutions Ltd
- ClarePak Ltd
- PLC Ingredients Ltd
- Shannon Minerals Ltd
- TRUpour Ltd
- Anord Control Systems Ltd
- Aptec Business Systems Ltd
- Brandt Translations Ltd
- Caffrey Monumental Works Ltd
- Cleanroom Equipment Ltd
- Dunraven Systems Ltd

- Farrell Bros Ltd
- Horseware Products Ltd
- Irish Breeze Ltd
- Keen-M Imports Ltd
- Microclean Environmental Ltd
- Mor Solutions
- Nature's Best Ltd
- Optimum Results Ltd
- Ovelle Ltd
- Seafood Processors Ltd (Ocean Fresh)
- Smarthomes Ltd
- Suretank Ltd
- The Real Irish Food Company
- TSM Control Systems Ltd
- AnaCores Ltd
- Killala Precision Components Ltd
- Sheila's Mayo
- BMCC Energy Ltd T/a Enersol
- Clonarn Clover Ltd
- Dromone Engineering Ltd
- Faughan Foods Ltd
- Garlester
- Green Farm Foods Ltd
- JM Foods Ltd
- Royal Masterpeace Ltd
- Securicabin Ltd
- Castlecoole Ltd
- Combi-Lift Ltd
- Essexford Joinery Ltd
- Greenfield Foods Ltd
- IGWT Poultry Services Ltd
- Kelly Brothers Ltd
- McAree Engineering Ltd
- McNally & Finlay Ltd t/a Rossmore Furniture
- Sillis Green Veg Ltd
- The Real Meal Company Ltd
- Tru Wood Ltd
- Ward Industries Ltd
- Wright Quarry Products Ltd
- Harney Enterprises (Tullamore) Ltd
- O Donohue's Bakery Ltd
- Romaquip Ltd
- Wilker Auto Conversion Ltd
- 3touch Ltd
- DunCarrig Spring Ltd
- System Label Ltd
- Hookablemedia Ltd
- Lotus Technical Services
- O'Hara Gutters Ltd
- JF Walsh (Roscrea) Ltd
- Kingmore Ltd
- Champion Concrete Products Ltd
- A.N. Irwin & Son Ltd
- Augher Co-Op
- Axon Power & Control Ltd
- Carmac Waste Handling Ltd
- CDE Ireland Ltd
- CK International Ltd
- Cloughbane Farm Foods
- General Cabins & Engineering Ltd
- Good4U Food & Drink Co. Ltd
- Hegarty's Fitted Furniture Ltd
- Keystone Lintels Ltd
- KMC Engineering Ltd
- Mallaghan Ltd
- Nugent Coachworks
- Portapig Ltd
- Rocwell Water Ltd
- Visual Edge Ltd
- Broadway Bagels Ltd
- Castit Ltd
- Eirgen Pharma
- Fastform Research Ltd
- Nutri Science Ltd
- Tegan Innovations Ltd
- Polywood Ltd
- Quality Irish Foods Ltd
- Atto Abrasives Ltd
- Lodgewood Engineering Ltd
- Mann Engineering Ltd
- Tara Hill National Park
- Wexford Viking Glass Ltd
- Astron Engineering Ltd
- CP Community Publishing Ltd
- Weatherglaze Systems Ltd

Small Business Finance Directory

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to promote initiatives, such as the Small Business Finance Directory, to help businesses to find alternative forms of finance.

(AQW 10976/11-15)

Mrs Foster: At present my Department does not promote the Small Business Finance Directory. This is a commercially run website which lists sources of commercial finance for small businesses. My Department however is promoting grants, equity and debt finance options open to small business in Northern Ireland through a number of Government funded and managed websites, including www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk

Tourism Strategy

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when she will publish the Tourism Strategy.
(AQW 10996/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The consultation on a tourism strategy document enabled us to garner the views of the industry and ensured we set meaningful and challenging tourism targets and commitments within the Programme for Government and the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy.

However, it is accepted that time has moved on and work has been ongoing to develop the Strategy document's high level Action Plan into key priorities for action linked to the PfG commitments and the Economic Strategy themes. This has also allowed us to reflect on our experience of new marketing strategies for ni2012 and visitor projections for major projects/events coming on stream in 2012 and 2013. We have also taken account of the impact of the downturn in global tourism, to revise key targets on visitor numbers and tourist revenue to 2014 in light of reducing baselines in some markets.

I intend to finalise a 'Priorities for Action' Plan for tourism to ensure that tourism commitments in the Programme for Government are delivered and I intend to take the Plan to the Executive for endorsement in due course.

Financial Assistance Provided by Invest NI

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the financial assistance provided by InvestNI to companies during the 2011/12 financial year, broken down by constituency; and what each amount represents as a percentage of the total financial assistance provided by InvestNI during this period.

(AQW 11020/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information requested is not yet available due to an ongoing data verification exercise by Invest NI following its financial year end. I have asked Invest NI to make this information available to the member once this process has been completed, which should not be later than the end of May.

Jobs Created by Invest NI

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of new jobs created from inward investment projects supported by InvestNI during the 2011/12 financial year, broken down by constituency; and what each figure represents as a percentage of the total amount of new jobs created by inward investment projects during that period.

(AQW 11021/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information requested is not yet available due to an ongoing data verification exercise by Invest NI following its financial year end. I have asked Invest NI to make this information available to the member once this process has been completed, which should not be later than the end of May.

Jobs Created by Invest NI

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of new jobs created from first time international investors that were supported by InvestNI during the 2011/12 financial year, broken down by constituency; and what each figure represents as a percentage of the total amount of new jobs created by first time international investors during that period.

(AQW 11022/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information requested is not yet available due to an ongoing data verification exercise by Invest NI following its financial year end. I have asked Invest NI to make this information available to the member once this process has been completed, which should not be later than the end of May.

Jobs Created by Invest NI

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many of the jobs created by InvestNI in each constituency during the 2011/12 financial year offer a salary of (i) above, but less than 25 percent above; and (ii) 25 percent or more above' the average private sector wage, expressed as a number and a percentage of all the new jobs created by inward investment projects during this period.

(AQW 11023/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information requested is not yet available due to an ongoing data verification exercise by Invest NI following its financial year end. I have asked Invest NI to make this information available to the member once this process has been completed, which should not be later than the end of May.

Renewables Obligations Certificates

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) for her assessment of the ongoing operation of the Renewables Obligations Certificates; (ii) to detail (a) the current Renewables Obligation banding levels; and (b) any proposed new

levels for the next two years; and (iii) when she will introduce the Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012.

(AQW 11046/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) Since its introduction in 2005, the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO) has been instrumental on increasing levels of renewable electricity generation from 3% in 2005 to the current 14% and Renewables Obligation Certificate (ROC) levels have been adjusted over time to reflect changes in technology costs and deployment levels.
- (ii) (a) and (b) In October 2011, DETI consulted on changes to ROC levels for introduction in April 2013 as part of a wider review of ROC banding levels across the United Kingdom. Table 1 details the current and proposed ROC banding levels for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2017. However, it is important to note that ROC banding levels can be adjusted during this time if changes in technology costs could lead to over or under compensation.
- (iii) It is anticipated that the Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 will be laid in the Assembly before the summer recess.

Table 1

Renewable electricity technologies	Current support, ROCs/MWh	Proposed ROC support/MWh1 1 Years refer to obligation periods under the NIRO. For example, 2013/14 refers to the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.
Advanced gasification	2	2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15; 1.9 in 2015/16 and 1.8 in 2016/17 Call for evidence
Advanced pyrolysis	2	2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15; 1.9 in 2015/16 and 1.8 in 2016/17 Call for evidence
Anaerobic digestion	4 (up to 500kW) 3 (>500kW – 5MW) 2 (above 5MW)	No change to 5MW Above 5MW: 2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15; 1.9 in 2015/16 and 1.8 in 2016/17
Biomass conversion	No current band	1
Co-firing of biomass	0.5	0.5
Co-firing of biomass (enhanced)	No current band	1
Co-firing of biomass with CHP	1	1
Co-firing of energy crops	1	1

Renewable electricity technologies	Current support, ROCs/MWh	Proposed ROC support/MWh1 1 Years refer to obligation periods under the NIRO. For example, 2013/14 refers to the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.
Energy from waste with CHP	1	0.5
Geothermal	2	2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15; 1.9 in 2015/16 and 1.8 in 2016/17
Geopressure	1	1
Hydro-electric	4 (up to 20kW) 3 (>20kW – 250kW) 2 (>250kW – 1MW) 1 (>1MW)	No change up to 5MW Above 5MW: 0.5
Landfill gas	1	1 in 2013/14 and 2014/15

Renewable electricity technologies	Current support, ROCs/MWh	Proposed ROC support/MWh1 1 Years refer to obligation periods under the NIRO. For example, 2013/14 refers to the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.
Onshore wind	4 (up to 250kW) 1 (>250kW)	No change up to 5MW Above 5MW: 0.9
Offshore wind	2	2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15; 1.9 in 2015/16 and 1.8 in 2016/17
Sewage gas	0.5	0.5
Solar photovoltaic	4 (up to 50kW) 2 (>50kW)	5 (up to 10kW) 4 (>10kW to 50kW) 2 (>50kW to 5MW) Above 5MW: 2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15; 1.9 in 2015/16 and 1.8 in 2016/17
Standard gasification	1	0.5 Call for evidence
Standard pyrolysis	1	0.5 Call for evidence
Tidal impoundment – tidal barrage (<1GW)	2	2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15; 1.9 in 2015/16 and 1.8 in 2016/17
Tidal impoundment – tidal lagoon (<1GW)	2	2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15; 1.9 in 2015/16 and 1.8 in 2016/17
Tidal stream	2	5 (moving to 2 after 30MW project cap)
Wave	2	5 (moving to 2 after 30MW project cap)

Renewables Obligation

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the proposed changes to the Renewables Obligation that are planned for the next two years; and the reasons for each of the changes.

(AQW 11047/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Proposed changes to Renewables Obligation Certificate banding levels from 1 April 2013 are set out in Table 1. Further detail on the changes can be read in the consultation document 'Proposed Changes to the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation' which was published in October 2011 and can be read on the DETI website at www.energy.deti.gov.uk.

Table 1

Renewable electricity technologies	Current support, ROCs/MWh	Proposed ROC support/MWh1 1Years refer to obligation periods under the NIRO. For example, 2013/14 refers to the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.
Advanced gasification	2	2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15; 1.9 in 2015/16 and 1.8 in 2016/17 Call for evidence
Advanced pyrolysis	2	2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15; 1.9 in 2015/16 and 1.8 in 2016/17 Call for evidence

Renewable electricity technologies	Current support, ROCs/MWh	Proposed ROC support/MWh1 1Years refer to obligation periods under the NIRO. For example, 2013/14 refers to the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.
Anaerobic digestion	4 (up to 500kW) 3 (>500kW – 5MW) 2 (above 5MW)	No change to 5MW Above 5MW: 2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15; 1.9 in 2015/16 and 1.8 in 2016/17
Biomass conversion	No current band	1
Co-firing of biomass	0.5	0.5
Co-firing of biomass (enhanced)	No current band	1
Co-firing of biomass with CHP	1	1
Co-firing of energy crops	1	1
Co-firing of energy crops with CHP	1.5	1.5
Dedicated biomass	1.5	1.5
Dedicated energy crops	2	2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15; 1.9 in 2015/16 and 1.8 in 2016/17
Dedicated biomass with CHP	2	2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15
Dedicated energy crops with CHP	2	2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15
Energy from waste with CHP	1	0.5
Geothermal	2	2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15; 1.9 in 2015/16 and 1.8 in 2016/17
Geopressure	1	1
Hydro-electric	4 (up to 20kW) 3 (>20kW – 250kW) 2 (>250kW – 1MW) 1 (>1MW)	No change up to 5MW Above 5MW: 0.5
Landfill gas	1	1 in 2013/14 and 2014/15
Onshore wind	4 (up to 250kW) 1 (>250kW)	No change up to 5MW Above 5MW: 0.9
Offshore wind	2	2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15; 1.9 in 2015/16 and 1.8 in 2016/17
Sewage gas	0.5	0.5
Solar photovoltaic	4 (up to 50kW) 2 (>50kW)	5 (up to 10kW) 4 (>10kW to 50kW) 2 (>50kW to 5MW) Above 5MW: 2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15; 1.9 in 2015/16 and 1.8 in 2016/17
Standard gasification	1	0.5 Call for evidence
Standard pyrolysis	1	0.5 Call for evidence

Renewable electricity technologies	Current support, ROCs/MWh	Proposed ROC support/MWh1 1Years refer to obligation periods under the NIRO. For example, 2013/14 refers to the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.
Tidal impoundment – tidal barrage (<1GW)	2	2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15; 1.9 in 2015/16 and 1.8 in 2016/17
Tidal impoundment – tidal lagoon (<1GW)	2	2 in 2013/14 and 2014/15; 1.9 in 2015/16 and 1.8 in 2016/17
Tidal stream	2	5 (moving to 2 after 30MW project cap)
Wave	2	5 (moving to 2 after 30MW project cap)

Tourism Strategy

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the Causeway Coast and the Glens of Antrim will be listed as one of the nine destinations in the Tourism Strategy; and to list the groups in these areas that were consulted on the Tourism Strategy and the dates on which they were consulted.

(AQW 11050/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I can confirm that the Causeway Coast and Glens is one of the proposed 'key tourism areas/destinations' identified in the Draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020.

Annex A provides a list of those invited by letter, in March 2010, to comment on the consultation document on a Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 and to attend one of the 7 regional consultation events held.

Annex B gives a list of groups (not included in Annex A) which were represented at the regional consultation event held in Ballymena on 13 April 2010.

Annex A

- Antrim Borough Council
- Antrim Tourist Information Centre
- Ballycastle Tourist Information Centre
- Ballymena Borough Council
- Ballymena Tourist Information Centre
- Ballymena Town Centre Management
- Ballymoney Borough Council
- Ballymoney Tourist Information Centre
- Belfast International Airport
- Carrickfergus Borough Council
- Carrickfergus Tourist Information Centre
- Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust
- Causeway Coast & Glens Regional Tourism Partnership
- Causeway Cottages
- Causeway Enterprise Agency Ltd
- Coleraine Borough Council
- Coleraine Chamber of Commerce
- Coleraine Tourist Information Centre
- Coleraine Town Centre Management
- Dunluce Centre
- Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre
- Hostelling International
- Larne Borough Council
- Larne Development Forum
- Larne Tourist Information Centre
- Larne Town Development Management
- Limavady Borough Council
- Limavady Tourist Information Centre
- Moyle District Council
- Newtownabbey Borough Council
- Newtownabbey Tourism Information Centre
- Norfolk Irish Sea Ferries
- North Antrim Business Agency
- P&O Ferries
- Port of Larne
- Portrush Seasonal Office
- Ramada Portrush
- Society of Local Authority Chief Executives
- Stena Line
- University of Ulster at Coleraine
- Whitepark Bay Youth Hostel
- Whiterock Bay B&B

Annex B

- Aqua Sports
- Ballycastle Holiday Homes
- Brook Lodge Guesthouse
- Carrageenan B&B
- Cherith House
- Crosskeys Inn
- Dunboe Enterprises Ltd
- Edenvale Holiday Cottages

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| ■ Federation of the Retail Licensed Trade NI | ■ Lurig Holiday Cottages |
| ■ Glenariff Teahouse | ■ Neelsgrove Farm |
| ■ Glenarm Village Committee | ■ Old Bushmills Distillery |
| ■ Glenluce Guesthouse & Corratavey B&B | ■ RSPB |
| ■ Hastings Ballygally Castle Hotel | ■ Sperrin Business Park |
| ■ Houston's Mill, Broughshane | ■ Town Centre Solutions |

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland's assessment of the maximum depth of any aquifer in the area where Tamboran Resources is planning to conduct hydraulic fracturing.
(AQW 11104/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Tamboran Resources have not yet submitted any applications to carry out hydraulic fracturing in Fermanagh and before they do so they intend to carry out additional geological and geophysical data acquisition. The Geological Survey of Northern Ireland will integrate any additional information thus acquired with the existing well and seismic data into any assessments it makes of the maximum depths of the aquifers in the area.

Health and Safety Compliance on Building Sites

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what powers local authorities have now, and will have after the Reform of Public Administration, to ensure health and safety compliance on building sites.
(AQW 11106/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Local authorities have no powers to ensure health and safety compliance on building sites; this currently rests with the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland. There are no plans to devolve such powers to local authorities.

Caravan Parks Owned by Coleraine Borough Council

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in relation to the two Coleraine Borough Council-owned caravan parks, separated by half a mile, whether it is appropriate, under the Caravans Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, to form an association between the two sites.
(AQW 11133/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The provisions in the Caravans Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 dealing with occupiers' associations were not drafted with a view to providing for the situation where one occupiers' association would wish to represent more than one site operated by the same owner. However, the provisions of the Act would not prevent Coleraine Borough Council recognising one occupiers' association representing both of its sites if this was what the occupiers on both sites wished. This arrangement would however lie outside the provisions and jurisdiction of the Act.

Wind Farm Projects

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much financial support InvestNI has given to wind farm projects in each of the last five years, broken down by project.
(AQW 11173/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has not provided any financial support to wind farm projects directly in the past five years as these are associated with energy infrastructure development. Invest NI has provided assistance of £1.48million to manufacturing and tradable service companies capable of providing components and services to assist such companies target this sector.

In addition Invest NI has also provided circa £830,000 to assist companies investigate and deploy wind energy as a renewable source for their business operations.

Ultra-Fast Broadband for Belfast

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department proposes to make use of the £13.7m, announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the budget, to provide ultra-fast broadband for Belfast and to improve mobile coverage along the A2 coast road and A29 Coleraine-Armagh road.
(AQW 11183/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Neither of these matters fall within my Department's responsibility. Under the Chancellor of the Exchequer's £100million "Super-Connected City" initiative, an initial, indicative allocation of £6million has been made to Belfast City Council which leads on this matter. This may rise to a maximum of £13.7million when final allocations are announced later this year.

Improvement of mobile coverage on the A2 and A29 roads falls within the UK Government's £150million Mobile Infrastructure Project. This is led by the Department for Culture Media and Sports and I understand that the procurement of a solution will be undertaken at national level to include Northern Ireland.

Visitors to Northern Ireland

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many visitors to Northern Ireland were from other parts of the UK in each of the last five years.

(AQW 11219/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The number of visitors to Northern Ireland from other parts of the UK in each of the last five years are set out below.

Year	Visitors (000s)
2007	1,285
2008	1,202
2009	1,017
2010*	969
2011*	969

Source:

NI Passenger Survey (NITB), NI Passenger Survey (NISRA), Survey of Overseas Travellers (Failte Ireland), Country of Residence Survey (CSO)

* Following a review of the Northern Ireland Passenger Survey, the methodology was revised in 2010. Changes were made to the sampling frame, definitions, weighting and grossing, collection and production of survey estimates. These changes mean that it is not possible to directly compare visitor numbers for 2010 and 2011 to those collected using the previous methodology.

Internal UK Tourist Market

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the importance of the internal UK tourist market, compared with the tourist market outside the UK.

(AQW 11220/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The importance of the UK tourist market cannot be underestimated. 70% of overseas visitors to Northern Ireland come from Great Britain, making it our most important market. The revenue generated by visitors from Great Britain in 2011 increased by 17%.

With new product coming on line, such as the Giants Causeway Visitor Centre, the Irish Open and Londonderry being promoted as the UK City of Culture 2013, there will be more opportunities for visitors from GB to visit Northern Ireland.

In recognition of this, Tourism Ireland, which has responsibility for marketing Northern Ireland in Great Britain and overseas, has developed a dedicated Great Britain Marketing Strategy for Northern Ireland. It also received additional investment of £4.7m specifically for marketing ni2012, the majority of which will be spent in the Great Britain market.

Energy Bill

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the timeline up to, and including, the introduction of the Energy Bill.

(AQW 11245/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Subject to Executive approval, my Department plans to launch a public consultation on the Energy Bill in June 2012 ending in September 2012. Officials will then consider responses and work with the Office of Legislative Counsel to draft the primary legislation. It is anticipated that the Bill will be submitted for introduction to the Assembly in spring 2013. This timeline will be subject to the Department obtaining a number of necessary approvals throughout the process without delay.

Credit Unions

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister for his assessment of credit unions being unable to avail of government funding through modernisation programmes unlike their counterparts in other parts of the United Kingdom.

(AQW 11312/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The objective of the GB modernisation scheme is to improve the financial sustainability, delivery mechanisms, and customer support systems of GB credit unions, to enable these bodies to extend access to basic, appropriate financial services to people on lower incomes.

The credit union movement in Northern Ireland is considerably more mature than its GB counterparts, with significantly greater levels of community penetration and financial sustainability. On that basis, my assessment is that there is no requirement for a corresponding modernisation scheme in Northern Ireland.

I am acutely aware of the need for accessible financial services for lower income households. The credit union movement in Northern Ireland plays a vital role in this area, and has been a key player in the Affordable Credit pilots that have been led by

the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (CCNI) in Ballymena and Londonderry, together with the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland and the Ulster Bank. I recognise that the transfer of regulatory arrangements for Northern Ireland credit unions to the Financial Services Authority from my Department has presented challenges for some local credit unions in terms of changes required to systems and procedures. In recognition of this, I have requested my officials to consider options for providing support to the Northern Ireland credit union movement in the initial stages of the operation of the new regulatory arrangements.

Invest NI and Enterprise NI: Litigation

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the disclosure in full, during the recent litigation involving InvestNI and Enterprise NI, of the successful bid from the GO Group/KPMG gives Enterprise NI an unfair advantage in any proposed forthcoming tender process.

(AQW 11320/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Within the context of the legal challenge, a copy of the tender for delivery of the Business Start Programme from Go Group was furnished to the solicitors for Enterprise NI as required by a Court Order made on an application by them on behalf of ENI. It was a term of the Court Order that the tender documents would be held within a confidentiality ring, that the copy would not be released from the plaintiff's solicitors' office and that only the solicitors and counsel and 2 nominated people from Enterprise NI would have access to it.

Invest NI is currently finalising internal approvals for future start up provision and is working with CPD to finalise the terms of reference for a new tender process. The new tender process will proceed in line with the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 and CPD Guidance Notes and it is in this context that all considerations in respect of unfair advantage would be taken.

GO Group/KPMG

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the disclosure of the GO Group/KPMG bid to the unsuccessful bidders will result in the GO Group/KPMG being procedurally disadvantaged in the proposed tender process.

(AQW 11321/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Within the context of the legal challenge, a copy of the tender for delivery of the Business Start Programme from Go Group was furnished to the solicitors for Enterprise NI as required by a Court Order made on an application by them on behalf of ENI. It was a term of the Court Order that the tender documents would be held within a confidentiality ring, that the copy would not be released from the plaintiff's solicitors' office and that only the solicitors and counsel and 2 nominated people from Enterprise NI would have access to it.

Invest NI is currently finalising internal approvals for future start up provision and is working with CPD to finalise the terms of reference for a new tender process. The new tender process will proceed in line with the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 and CPD Guidance Notes and it is in this context that all considerations in respect of procedural disadvantage would be taken.

Electricity Produced by Wind Generators: Price

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why the price of electricity, which is produced by wind generators, rises when the price of gas rises.

(AQW 11366/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Single Electricity Market (SEM) is based on a 'Gross Mandatory Pool' which means that all generators of 10MW and above must sell their electricity through this pool and all suppliers buy from it. The most expensive generation unit that has to be run to meet demand then sets the 'System Marginal Price' (SMP), and all generators running in the market schedule get this price.

Wind generators are generally run whenever they are available, insofar as the transmission system can accommodate their output. At times of low demand the cheapest generators run in the market set the SEM price which is therefore low. But at times of higher demand more expensive generators have to be run and the SMP therefore rises.

Wind generators therefore receive the SMP applicable at a point in time, and this may be related to wind generation or may have been set by gas fired or other more expensive generators due to demand requirements.

This 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.

Electricity Generators

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why the most expensive electricity generator sets the price that is paid to all generators on the island of Ireland.

(AQW 11367/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Single Electricity Market (SEM) is based on a 'Gross Mandatory Pool', where all generators of 10MW and above must sell their electricity through this pool and all suppliers buy from it. The price the generators offer is closely regulated by the

SEM 'Bidding code of Practice'. The bid price of the most expensive unit that has to be run then sets the 'System Marginal Price' (SMP) and all generators running in the market schedule get this price.

At times of low demand the cheapest generators available set the price, but at times of higher demand more expensive generators have to be run in the market and the SMP therefore rises. Hence all generators are paid the price which is relevant to the level of demand at a particular time.

This 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. The main function of the SEM Committee's Market Monitoring Unit is to closely monitor the bid prices of generators.

Northern Ireland Events Company: Investigation

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an estimate of the final cost of her Department's investigation into the Northern Ireland Events Company; and the total cost to date.

(AQW 11388/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department appointed inspectors to the Northern Ireland Events Company Limited on 17 November 2008 under Article 452(2) and Article 425(2)(a) of the Companies (NI) Order 1986.

The target date for completion is 30 April 2013 and the final costs are estimated at £900,000. The costs incurred by DETI in the inspection to date are £781,457.

First Trust Bank

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on any discussions she has had with her counterparts in the Irish Republic in relation to ensuring that negotiations between union representatives, IBOA and Allied Irish Banks deliver reasonable outcomes for staff in the First Trust Bank.

(AQO 1981/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Banking is a reserved matter and, as such, my Department has no statutory oversight of the banking sector. I recognise, however, the importance of growing the financial sector in Northern Ireland.

I was concerned to learn of the recent announcements in relation to job losses in the banking sector here. I met with representatives from the Irish Bank Officials' Association, the Finance Union, on 27 March 2012 to discuss these developments. I emphasised how important it is that senior management in these banks are seen to be behaving in a responsible manner as they take forward staffing cuts.

Mobile Phone Coverage: Gortin Area of South Tyrone

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she will make representations to T-Mobile and its parent company, Everything Everywhere, about reinstating mobile phone coverage as soon as possible in the Gortin area of South Tyrone.

(AQW 11403/11-15)

Mrs Foster: This is an issue which is affecting a small number of customers in different parts of Northern Ireland. I have already raised the matter with representatives from Everything Everywhere, OFCOM and the Mobile Operators Association. I understand that the company has been in contact with affected customers with a view to resolving problems.

OFCOM takes a close interest in monitoring customer experiences and information provided by customers about service provider practices can lead to investigation by the Regulator. Details of complaints and alternative dispute resolution procedures are available from the OFCOM website <http://consumers.ofcom.org.uk/tell-us/telecoms/customer-services/customer-service/>

Phoenix Natural Gas: Referral of Price Control to the Competition Commission

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the organisations, and their representatives, that have contacted her regarding the referral of Phoenix Natural Gas price control to the Competition Commission; (ii) the issues that were raised in each correspondence; and (iii) the action she took as a result.

(AQW 11417/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In relation to the referral of the Phoenix Natural Gas price control to the Competition Commission, I have had correspondence with the Chairman of Phoenix Natural Gas and the Chairman of Phoenix Energy Holdings, and with the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation.

You will appreciate that the company and the Regulator hold different views in respect of the issues which resulted in the price control referral, and these were covered in the correspondence. As Energy Minister, I have no role in the process, and therefore have not taken any action in respect of the referral, other than to encourage both parties to reach agreement.

Broadband: Rural Access

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to ensure that rural areas have access to Broadband.

(AQW 11471/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Over the last eight years my Department has delivered a number of projects that have been either entirely or substantially aimed at increasing access to and quality of broadband services in rural areas. These include:

£9.23m Local Broadband Access Contract which provided access to entry-level broadband services to all premises across Northern Ireland;

£19.8m Next Generation Broadband Services Contract which has led to an overall investment of £51m in the roll out of the highest level of fibre-to-the-cabinet technology in the UK;

£1.9m Broadband Fund which has supported deployment of high-speed fixed-wireless and fibre broadband services; and

Contracts with Avanti Communications Plc and Onwave Ltd to provide high specification satellite broadband services region-wide.

Using a range of NI Executive, UK Government and European funding options our focus for 2011-2015 is to deliver broadband services of at least 2 Megabits per second to all premises across Northern Ireland and to improve access to mobile voice and data services.

Overseas Visitors

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of overseas visitors; and (ii) the yearly spend of overseas visitors in each of the last five years.

(AQW 11494/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The number of overseas (including GB) visitors and spend in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years is set out below.

Year	Overseas Visitors (000s)	Expenditure (£m)
2007	1,785	333
2008	1,709	346
2009	1,443	271
2010*	1,418	307
2011*	1,478	368

Source: NI Passenger Survey (2007-09 NITB, 2010-11 NISRA), Survey of Overseas Travellers (Fáilte Ireland), Country of Residence Survey (Central Statistics Office, Ireland)

* Provisional

Following a review of the Northern Ireland Passenger Survey, the methodology was revised in 2010.

Invest NI: Local Government

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans InvestNI has to support and work with the new Councils when they are formed under the Review of Public Administration.

(AQO 1978/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has been working closely with Councils, the Local Enterprise Development Forum, NILGA and SOLACE, to help all parties involved prepare for the eventual transfer of functions under the review of Public Administration.

This will help ensure a smooth transition from Invest NI to Councils of the proposed transfer of Local Economic Development functions which is likely to include business start, social enterprise, youth enterprise and neighbourhood renewal.

Invest NI is committed to continuing to work in close partnership with current Councils during this transition period and with the new Councils post review of Public Administration.

The European Regional Development Fund which has funded the Local Economic Development Measure has also been helpful in providing Councils and Invest NI with opportunities to work together on local enterprise initiatives.

BT Contact Centre

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people British Telecom plans to employ in Northern Ireland following the recent announcement about a new Contact Centre.

(AQO 1979/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The new project from BT will create 116 new jobs of which 16 will be at management level. These are multi-skilled positions that attract a median salary level of £22,619 gross.

BT is financially strong and has a long history of investing in Northern Ireland where it employs around 4,000 people in a range of disciplines servicing a global account base.

British Airways: Redundancies

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she is aware of any potential redundancies as a result of British Airways' integration proposals for BMI.

(AQO 1980/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Any redundancies at George Best Belfast City Airport are very regrettable. However, decisions regarding BMI staff at the airport are commercial matters for the International Airlines Group, the new owner of BMI.

BMI has been losing money for some time and it is my understanding that the situation at Belfast City Airport is reflective of a major UK wide cost cutting exercise by International Airlines Group.

Biotechnology and Pharmaceuticals

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her Department has to take advantage of the opportunities that exist within the biotechnology and pharmaceutical sectors.

(AQO 1982/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Economic Strategy recognises that to deliver economic growth we must target support at those sectors where we have existing strengths and which offer the greatest potential for new opportunities in the global economy.

Building on the work of MATRIX, Life and Health Sciences, which would include biotechnology and pharmaceuticals, is identified as one of our priority sectors within the NI Economic Strategy.

Economy

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the Northern Ireland economy.

(AQO 1983/11-15)

Mrs Foster: This will be another challenging year for Northern Ireland. The UK has re-entered recession and the Republic of Ireland continues to experience muted growth. With so many of our products headed for markets in GB, and the Republic, these difficulties will inevitably impact on our economy.

Independent forecasters predict growth of around 0.2% this year. Such modest growth would not create sufficient jobs to make inroads into our unemployment rate. Going forward the Economic Strategy sets out how we will rebuild and rebalance the economy through export led growth, with more emphasis on expanding into emerging markets.

HMS Caroline

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions her Department has had with the Ministry of Defence to ensure that HMS Caroline remains in Belfast.

(AQO 1984/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has been in communication with a number of key stakeholders regarding the possible retention of HMS Caroline in Belfast. She has been in Belfast since 1924, she is part of the city and we want her to stay. To help inform the department an independent study was carried out to look at options for the ship.

That work is complete and it has shown that there are benefits in keeping the ship in Belfast but there are funding challenges. We are working closely with the National Museum of the Royal Navy to find a suitable way forward, these conversations are ongoing.

Titanic Centenary

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the success of the recent Titanic commemorations and the benefits for East Belfast and Northern Ireland.

(AQO 1985/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The recent Titanic commemorations have been a great success and I believe East Belfast and Northern Ireland will reap the benefits for years to come. I think we struck the right balance between celebrating the opening of our new Titanic Belfast and commemorating the tragic loss of so many lives just over 100 years ago. Events such as the BBC Two live broadcast from the Waterfront Hall, East Belfast Partnership Offices' unveiling of the Yardmen Statue, a sculpture by Ross Wilson which can be viewed at Dr Pitt Memorial Park on the Newtownards Road, Belfast City Council's unveiling of the commemorative garden, the amazing light show and Titanic Belfast and the MTV concert all showed Northern Ireland at its best.

Public Sector Contracts

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department is encouraging and equipping local social enterprises to tender for and secure public sector contracts, in the absence of any region-specific procurement toolkit.
(AQO 1986/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Committee for Finance and Personnel's Inquiry into Public Procurement in Northern Ireland, published in February 2010, resulted in many recommendations to help small businesses and social enterprises access procurement opportunities.

Invest NI support includes a range of measures designed to help local companies access local and international contract opportunities including the following:

- Northern Ireland's Tenders Alert Service
- Local Tenders Alerting Service
- Business Information Centre
- Export Skills and Knowledge workshops
- Introduction to Tendering workshop
- Advanced Tendering workshop.

Department of the Environment

Convictions: Fuel Smuggling and Laundering

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the criticism from the NI Affairs Committee about the lack of convictions for fuel smuggling and laundering (i) for his assessment of whether this is due to the offenders' relationships with dissident republicans; and (ii) whether he intends to hold discussions with the Chief Constable and the Minister of Justice in relation to this matter.

(AQW 6832/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I believe that there can be a number of reasons why prosecution investigations and/or convictions do not arise in relation to fuel laundering and other criminal activity. These include lack of witness, forensic or admission evidence respectively. All of these factors will influence the (successful) prosecution of fuel laundering crime for self evident reasons. It is universally acknowledged that fuel laundering is carried out by organised criminals, some of whom are running sophisticated criminal businesses and the tackling of this offending will therefore always be challenging to the agencies involved. I acknowledge the role of the OCTF and the expert sub-group dealing with cross border fuel fraud and NIEA, part of DOE sits on this. All relevant agencies are involved via the OCTF.

I believe that it is likely that dissident republicans are involved in smuggling of various items and that there is an involvement of illegal groups with criminal and crime groups. The relevant authorities - police, justice (etc) - already meet and co-ordinate their work. I will write to Minister Ford to seek his views on the committee report and if there should be a Ministerial meeting or summit to further shape the response of agencies/governments. I shall keep the member informed.

Article 31 Planning Decisions

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment how many Article 31 planning decisions have been issued since he has come into office; and how many are outstanding.

(AQW 7704/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Since 5 May 2011 a final decision has been issued in relation to 8 Article 31 planning applications. There are 49 Article 31 applications currently being processed.

Used Tyres: Resale

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) what statutory protections are in place in relation to the resale of used tyres; and (ii) for his assessment of the level of monitoring of the trade.

(AQW 9217/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Statutory protection for the resale of used tyres is contained in the UK Motor Vehicle Tyres (Safety) Regulations 1994. Regulation 7 of those Regulations prohibits the supply of a part-worn tyre unless certain requirements relating to the condition and marking of the tyre are met. Such a tyre must also comply with the requirements of the Motor Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations (NI) 1999 in respect of on-road use and MOT testing.

The Regulations were made under the provisions of section 11 of the Consumer Protection Act 1987 and, under that Act, the role of enforcing the Regulations rests with the Environmental Health Officers of District Councils. In addition, the Trading Standards Service within DETI investigates any claims in relation to selling of tyres where there is specific evidence that they have been misdescribed. My Department is also progressing a range of work with regard to the disposal of used tyres when they are no

longer fit for use. This work has included establishing a Tyres Steering Group and developing a Tyres Action Plan, made up of five themes:

- Understanding the Scale of the Problem;
- Regulation and Enforcement;
- Exploring Alternative Uses;
- Policy Options: and
- Co-ordination and Communication.

Actions to date include the commissioning of a tyres survey. Contractors were engaged on 8 March 2012 to study management practices as regards used tyres across the island of Ireland. The study will use data from regulatory returns and enforcement activities and will gather information via a survey of regulated businesses. It will seek to quantify numbers of new and part worn tyres on the market, the numbers of used tyre (both domestic and commercial tyres) and verify the end uses and disposal routes. A draft report is expected to be completed in June 2012.

The Environment Agency is carrying out an audit exercise with the tyre retailer sector in relation to Duty of Care legislation, the use of registered waste carriers and final disposal routes for waste tyres. This work will provide Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) with valuable data and information in relation to the producers of waste tyres, collectors and licensed tyre recyclers

The Environment Committee of the Assembly is also currently conducting an inquiry into used tyre disposal and I understand that it intends publishing the report soon.

Environmental and Conservation Lobbies: Links

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what action the Environment Agency is taking to facilitate links between various organisations in the environmental and conservation lobbies to explore opportunities to access LIFE funding on a joint or consortia basis.

(AQW 9396/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I believe that more should have been achieved in accessing various EU funding streams. That is one of the reasons I visited Brussels on 8th and 9th March 2012 and intend to again meet EU officials soon. Moreover, I have asked my Permanent Secretary to ensure more resource is put into DOE efforts to access EU funding and am actively exploring how to develop opportunities in this regard.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has facilitated successful links and developed partnerships to increase the leverage of Life + and other funds with Councils, other environmental agencies and the NGO sector.

The Agency is currently engaging with Fermanagh District Council to consider a partnership bid to LIFE+ and, through its partnership with Northern Ireland Environment Link, publishes information on LIFE+ calls for conservation and environmental bodies.

NIEA has an External Funding Working Group which identifies financial support opportunities and works with key funding bodies, such as the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the Rural Development Programme team in DARD. The Agency has successfully worked with the Environment Agency for England and Wales over the last two years securing EU funds for two key programmes:

- EDOC – Electronic Duty of Care Project
- EQual - Ensuring Quality of waste derived products for resource efficiency

The EDOC and EQual projects are worth a total of €7.15 million (with 50% of funding from LIFE+), with the Environment Agency as the lead partner. NIEA meets with the Environment Agency and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency every six months to discuss EU projects and potential project proposals.

Planning Applications for Minerals Extraction or Minerals Plant/Machinery

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to planning applications for minerals extraction or minerals plant/machinery, to detail (i) how many of the planning applications currently being processed (a) are retrospective; (b) require an Environmental Statement; and (c) are awaiting the submission of environmental information; (ii) how many have been approved in the last ten years, and of these, how many were retrospective; and (iii) how many have been refused in the last 10 years, and of these, how many were retrospective.

(AQW 9851/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

(i) Currently the Department is processing 83 minerals planning applications.

Of these, (a) 40 are retrospective; (b) 11 are accompanied by an Environmental Statement; and (c) 6 of these are awaiting further environmental information.

With regard to parts (ii) and (iii) of the question the Department does not hold this information in a form that is readily available and could only be compiled at a disproportionate cost.

Tourist Initiatives: Historical Monuments

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has had any discussions with the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment to explore possible tourist initiatives around historical monuments, such as the Mound of Down, Downpatrick and the Navan Fort, Armagh.

(AQW 9934/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Staff within my Department have worked closely with officials from the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI), and also officials based in the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB, one of DETI's non-departmental public bodies), to progress a range of tourism initiatives across Northern Ireland.

Discussions with officials from DETI have focused on the delivery of a major conservation project at the Thompson Dock, the dry dock in which Titanic and her sister ships were fitted-out, and a key piece of Belfast's authentic, original maritime industrial heritage. The outcome of those discussions is the £1.5million capital works scheme presently underway that will safeguard that dock for the future and also enable it to be used as a key tourism asset: delivery of this scheme has been a direct result of the hard work and co-operation between DETI and my Department.

Discussions between officials in my Department, particularly those based in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and NITB in recent years have focused on the delivery of NITB's Key Signature Projects. In particular, there has been considerable progress in respect of the St Patrick/Christian Heritage and Causeway Coast and Glens Key Signature Projects.

Co-operative work, and joint funding between NIEA and NITB, has delivered new visitor exhibitions at Grey Abbey and Nendrum Monastic Site. In addition, new interpretive panels have been erected at both sites, as well as at Inch Abbey and Struell Wells, all of which are key sites in the St Patrick/Christian Heritage Project in County Down. Future projects currently with NITB for consideration include the further enhancement of other State Care Monuments, managed by NIEA, that are also included in the wider St Patrick/Christian Heritage trail. These include works at sites such as Movilla Abbey, the early Christian site at St John's Point (both of which are in County Down), and also at the Killeavy Churches (in County Armagh).

Similar co-operation and joint funding between NIEA and NITB have delivered enhanced visitor resources at Dunluce Castle, County Antrim, with improved exhibitions, audio-visual displays, and new interpretive material at the site. Dunluce Castle is a gem on our North Coast, and the continued enhancement of this site is a key priority for my Department.

The strategic importance of investment in our built and archaeological heritage cannot be over-emphasised. It is a unique, 'stand-out' part of our infrastructure that is essential to local communities, local character, our sense of history, and also our developing tourism economy. Visitors to Northern Ireland may not come for the weather, but they certainly come to explore our rich collections of historic monuments, buildings and landscapes.

Officials within my Department are currently developing projects that will embrace the Mound of Down within a wider package of sites connected to the St Patrick/Christian Heritage Key Signature Project, and which also overlap with the Mourne. A project is also being developed to improve access to, and information about, the wider Navan Landscape, including Navan Fort. Both the schemes at the Mound of Down and at Navan will require a broader partnership to include local councils, and I am advised that my staff are actively pursuing this. In the case of Navan, for example, Armagh City and District Council have been working closely with NIEA on the project, which will also include a significant refurbishment of the exhibition presently housed in the Council's Navan Centre. Similarly, work is ongoing with officials from Cookstown District Council to enhance Tullaghoge Fort, a key historic monument in Mid-Ulster.

In addition, this year officials in both NIEA and NITB have worked closely to improve their overall promotion of events, sites and properties. NIEA has transferred a lot of information to the NITB's website. DOE Communications will be promoting NIEA events, sites and properties that will take place at around the same time, or in the same geographical area, as the NITB 'Big 8' events planned for 2012. This sharing of promoting should enable a wider distribution of information, and also help ensure that, where possible, events are planned that will support one another.

Previous discussions between DETI and my Department have borne fruit on many tourism-related schemes across the North: I am keen to see these positive working relationships continuing, and would be pleased to see further progress on scheme such as those indicated above.

Multiagency Response Teams

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment what plans his Department has in place in relation to multi-agency response teams, particularly for flooding incidents.

(AQW 9936/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department's Major Emergency Response Plan (MERP) sets out the general response of the Department to a range of possible major emergencies. The MERP incorporates the protocols for Multi Agency Responses which were drawn up by the Civil Contingencies Group following the severe weather during Christmas and New Year 2010/11.

The local government sector undertakes a major role in responding to emergencies, particularly flooding incidents. District Councils have emergency response plans in place, which are controlled and activated by Council Chief Executives. In the event of an incident, the plans alert agencies of the facilities, resources and assistance a Council may provide in helping to address emergencies in its district, on a multi-agency basis. The assistance may be humanitarian aid, including the provision of buildings, plant and machinery to help in the overall response to an incident.

The UK has a National Contingency Plan (NCP) for Marine Pollution from Shipping and Offshore Installations. This has been developed by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), an Executive Agency of the UK Department of Transport. MCA is responsible for maritime safety, which is a reserved matter. However, any incident occurring within Northern Ireland's territorial waters, which extend to 12 nautical miles out to sea, is managed by both MCA and the Northern Ireland devolved administration. Under the UK National Contingency Plan, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has two primary roles. The first is co-ordinate shoreline response in the event of an oil or chemical spill, through a Shoreline Response Centre. The second is to lead the Environment Group which has representatives of all the statutory agencies with a role in the marine environment or public health. These include NIEA, DARD Fisheries Division and their science advisors, the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, Food Standards Agency and the Public Health Agency. NIEA holds the standing chairmanship of the Environment Group.

In relation to multi-agency onshore response to water pollution incidents, NIEA operates under Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's Inland Fisheries, HM Revenue & Customs and Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service and under a draft MOU with the Loughs Agency. Where the circumstances of a particular water pollution incident warrant, NIEA also has established contact mechanisms with Rivers Agency, District Councils, the Police Service for Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Water Ltd and a significant number of other potential stakeholders.

Planning Permission: Hydroelectric Scheme on the River Camowen

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Planning Service considered all environmental issues when granting planning permission to Omagh District Council for the hydroelectric scheme on the River Camowen.
(AQW 10003/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department fully considered all environmental issues when granting planning permission. The Department consulted with various bodies which, because of their specific environmental responsibilities had an interest in the project. These included NIEA – Natural Heritage and Water Management Unit, Loughs Agency and DARD Rivers Agency. None of these raised any objections to the proposal that could not be overcome by the use of planning conditions. In addition NIEA Natural Heritage carried out a Test of Likely Significance which concluded that the proposal was unlikely to have significant impact on the Foyle and Tributaries SAC. All letters of objection raising specific environmental concerns were copied to the consultees for consideration.

Permission was granted subject to a number of conditions. The decision notice and consultee responses can be viewed in the Western Area Planning Office, Omagh.

Freedom of Information Act: Westminster Justice Committee Review

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his Department's position in relation to the submission made by the Civil Service to the Westminster Justice Committee's review of the Freedom of Information Act.
(AQW 10046/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department contributed to the analysis contained in the Northern Ireland Civil Service Memorandum to the Westminster Justice Committee compiled by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMdfM). My officials were consulted by OFMdfM about the final draft of the memorandum before it was completed and indicated they were content with it. I shall forward a copy of DOE response to the member.

North Coast: Regeneration

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment why Ballycastle was excluded from the £405,000 funding for the regeneration of the North Coast.
(AQW 10344/11-15)

Mr Attwood: It is simply not the case and wrong to suggest that Ballycastle was excluded. Indeed, if this had been the case, then Cushendall, Cushendun, Coleraine and Limavady could all claim they were excluded, clearly not a sustainable assessment.

My intervention was directed towards the Portrush/Portstewart area because of the particular significance of the hosting of the Irish Open golf championship this summer. This event will result in greatly increased media and tourist interest, and I was pleased to be in a position to contribute to a programme of work to improve Portrush and Portstewart, with the aim that both towns can maximize the long-term benefits for the local economy. The work undertaken will help to reduce the potentially negative impact of the area's worst eyesores and usefully improve the experience of the area by residents and all visitors alike.

I would very much like to extend the principle of my Portrush/Portstewart intervention to other districts, such as Ballycastle, who are suffering similar problems. The principle of such intervention remains one in which I believe and a goal towards which I continue to work. However, such projects can only be tackled if supporting funding is available. One potential mechanism to take this type of initiative forward can be through in year monitoring rounds and I will be seeking additional financial support from the Executive in the June monitoring round to support further interventions. I look forward to hearing from places that believe they have an argument for funding.

North Coast: Regeneration

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the £405,000 funding for the regeneration of the North Coast, to outline the motivating factors for allocating funding to the Portstewart and Portrush areas and not to the Ballycastle area.
(AQW 10345/11-15)

Mr Attwood: It is simply not the case and wrong to suggest that Ballycastle was excluded. Indeed, if this had been the case, then Cushendall, Cushendun, Coleraine and Limavady could all claim they were excluded, clearly not a sustainable assessment.

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Ballycastle: Town Improvement Funding

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment what funding will be made available to improve Ballycastle town and to address dereliction in the area.

(AQW 10346/11-15)

Mr Attwood: It is simply not the case and wrong to suggest that Ballycastle was excluded. Indeed, if this had been the case, then Cushendall, Cushendun, Coleraine and Limavady could all claim they were excluded, clearly not a sustainable assessment.

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Crown Estate

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment to provide a breakdown of how much each council is currently paying the Crown Estate in rent or lease for facilities on the sea-bed or on land.

(AQW 10348/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The total amount spent by the councils in the 2011/2012 financial year on renting or leasing facilities from the Crown Estate is provided in the attached table.

Council	Amount Paid to the Crown Estate 2011/2012 £
Antrim	0
Ards	6,025
Armagh	0
Ballymena	0
Ballymoney	0
Banbridge	0
Belfast	0
Carrickfergus	45,480
Castlereagh	0
Coleraine	4,500
Cookstown	0

Council	Amount Paid to the Crown Estate 2011/2012 £
Craigavon	0
Derry	10,250
Down	6,000
Dungannon	0
Fermanagh	0
Larne	5,879
Limavady	1,940
Lisburn	0
Magherafelt	0
Moyle	11,295
Newry & Mourne	10,225
Newtownabbey	780
North Down	120,335
Omagh	0
Strabane	0
Total	222,709

Planning Applications

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment, for each of the last five years, to detail (i) how many planning applications were refused in the South Antrim constituency following advice from Belfast International Airport; and (ii) for what reason each application was refused.

(AQW 10421/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

- (i) In each of the last five years a total of three planning applications in the South Antrim constituency have been refused on the basis of advice from Belfast International Airport. The information provided is based on the most recent official statistics covering the period up to the end of December 2011 (third quarter of 2011/2012 business year).
- (ii) The planning applications and the reasons for refusals are listed in the attached table.

Application Reference	Description of Development	Date of Decision	Reasons for Refusal	PAC Decision
T/2004/0196/F	Installation of a Wind Powered Generator for the Production of Renewable Energy at Approx 400m South of 5 Carmavy Road, Crumlin	15/05/2006	<p>The proposed development is Contrary to Policy PSU 3 of the Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland as the site lies within the Inner Horizontal Surface of the Belfast International Airport and will prejudice the safe taking off and landing of aircraft in and from this airfield.</p> <p>The proposed development is Contrary to PSU 12 of the Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland in that if permitted the development would create an unacceptable visual impact in rural area.</p>	Appeal Allowed: 12/08/2008
T/2006/0124/F	Detached Storey And Half Dwelling And Garage at 350m South West Of 30 Straidhavern Road, Nutts Corner	31/08/2006	<p>The proposal is contrary to Policies SP6, HOU8 and DES6 of the Department's Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland in that the development when considered in the context of existing and approved development, would, if permitted, result in a detrimental change to the rural character of this area of countryside by reason of build up.</p> <p>The proposal is contrary to Policies SP6, HOU8 and DES5 of the Department's 'A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland' as the proposed access would if permitted have an adverse visual impact on the landscape due to its width and inadequate landscaping.</p> <p>The proposal is Contrary to PSU3 as the proposal goes into the Inner Horizontal Surface by 1.2m and would affect the safe taking off and landing of aircraft.</p>	Appeal Allowed 30/5/2008
T/2008/0661	Retrospective retention of 1 no. pigeon shed and 1 no. proposed pigeon shed at site adjacent to 35 Tullywest Road, Crumlin.	22/12/2008	This application, if allowed, would prejudice flight safety and as a result create a risk to human life in and around the Belfast International Airport.	

Gas Pads in County Fermanagh

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, in the event that 200 gas pads are constructed in Co Fermanagh, for his assessment of how frequently, on average, each pad would be inspected by Environment Agency regulators.

(AQW 10425/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I wish to stress again that there will be no rush to fracking. All relevant requirements will be upheld. The environmental regulation of fracking – if fracking should ever be approved - 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.

As such the number of inspections of such sites will be commensurate with the assessed risk posed in relation to the location of the installations, relative to sensitive environmental receptors, and in relation to the activities proposed at each site, eg abstractions, discharges, gas refinement, waste storage.

In summary, the number of inspections required at each site will be assessed on a case by case basis – however, it is reasonable to conclude that - if ever approved – the regulation, inspection and enforcement regime will be rigorous.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on his meeting regarding hydraulic fracturing with the Environmental Protection Agency in the United States during his trip to Washington DC.

(AQW 10434/11-15)

Mr Attwood: During my recent visit to Washington DC I received a presentation and briefing from the U.S Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Research and Development on the issue of hydraulic fracturing.

The presentation and briefing highlighted the work that the US EPA are doing, and their planned work, in relation to the environmental impact of hydraulic fracturing. In particular I was briefed on the US EPA's ongoing research programme on the potential impact of shale gas extraction on drinking water supplies, and also their work on potential technological and regulatory controls on gas emissions.

An Official from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency accompanied me on my visit in order to establish relevant contacts with technical staff in the U.S EPA and will maintain this relationship to ensure that Northern Ireland can benefit from the work of the U.S EPA in this area.

I believe that there must not be a headlong rush to fracking in Fermanagh. I will ensure all planning and environmental assessments will be conducted fully at all stages of this proposal. I shall also ensure that best science will inform the consideration.

Drilling Permission

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether a number of compositions of a core sample of a specific shale under investigation will be disclosed before any drilling permission is granted.

(AQW 10520/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In terms of any planning applications involving hydraulic fracturing I have made it clear that the applicant will be required to identify the risks to the environment associated with the process through the submission of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) detailing how they would propose to mitigate against a range of potential impacts. The composition of geological formations and any potential environmental impacts that may occur as a result of a proposed operation within those formations will be considered as part of the EIS which would be publically available as part of any planning application. The Department will liaise with Geological Survey of Northern Ireland in this regard in the determination of any planning application. The answer to the Member's question is, therefore, yes.

Tamboran Resources have been made aware that I expect the most rigorous Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) to accompany any applications they choose to submit. 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 Department's determination of and it must take account of all potential impacts on the environment and public health.

Naturally Occurring Radioactive Material Testing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether Naturally Occurring Radioactive Material testing will be required for all solid and liquid material leaving any gas wells.

(AQW 10521/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The processing and disposal routes for wastes containing naturally occurring radioactive material (NORM) resulting from oil and gas production vary according to the concentration of radioactivity they contain.

The Radioactive Substances Act 1993 (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 defines what is radioactive for the purpose of regulation. NORM waste may be "out of scope", "exempt" or "non exempt".

An Operator would be required to measure the levels of radioactivity in any NORM waste generated in order to determine the most appropriate method of disposal. If the levels of radioactivity found were above the limits specified in the legislation then a Certificate of Authorisation for the accumulation and disposal of radioactive waste would be required.

As part of the application for an Authorisation the applicant would be required to carry out a radiological impact assessment. NIEA would review the assessment with regard to environmental protection and public dose constraints as set out in the legislation and include in the Authorisation conditions relating to monitoring where appropriate.

Members can be reassured that the assessment in this and other regards will be robust and challenging.

Fracking

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for his Department's assessment of the claim that fracking is perfectly safe if properly regulated.

(AQW 10522/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Recent claims that fracking is perfectly safe if properly regulated relate to the investigation into the earth tremors caused by test fracking by Cuadrilla near Blackpool. This report relates only to the issue of earth tremors.

As I have made clear in previous answers and in my press release of 17 April 2012 all appropriate planning and environmental standards will strictly apply in terms of any proposals involving fracking. Any applicant will be required to identify all the potential risks to the environment associated with the process through the submission of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) detailing how they would propose to mitigate against a range of potential impacts.

Only when such environmental information is submitted as part of the planning application and environmental regulation process will the Department be in a position to fully assess all the potential risks.

I continue to work with the Dublin Government on the issue given that the Lough Allen basin is a shared cross border asset. I have also met Tamboran and made clear my approach.

There will not be a headlong rush to fracking. The assessment of proposals will be exhaustive. It will consider best advice and science - that undertaken with Dublin, the London methane study, ongoing EU assessments and the EPA work in the United States. It is in the context of a comprehensive process that claims, one way or other, on the safety of fracking can be judged.

Consultation Documents and Official Reports: Cost

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment what was the cost to his Department of producing (i) consultation documents; and (ii) official reports in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 10598/11-15)

Mr Attwood: It is not possible to separately identify the costs of producing consultation documents and official reports from the Department's accounting system without an intensive manual exercise. In the main the production costs of consultation documents and official reports are associated with printing. The figures in the table below have therefore been extracted from the accounting systems based on a review of printing costs.

Business Area	2010/11 £
Department (excluding agencies)	37,366
Northern Ireland Environment Agency	29,481
Planning Service	2,891
Driver and Vehicle Agency	6,914
Total	76,652

These figures are significant. As with car parking charges, conference costs, travel, accommodation (etc) I have asked for proposals to see a reduction in these costs.

Craigavon Borough Council: Allegations of Fraud

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 1338/11, in relation to the police investigation into allegations of fraud in Craigavon Borough Council, to detail (i) the outcome of the investigation; and (ii) whether any persons have been disciplined.

(AQW 10602/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I understand that the PSNI investigation into the alleged fraud is ongoing. An internal Council investigation led to disciplinary proceedings and three Council employees were dismissed.

I have asked for an update on the PSNI investigation, though this is entirely a matter for the police and an update on the clawback provisions under SEUPB funding in relation to the original grant.

Fixed Penalty Charge for Cutting Down or Disposing of a Tree

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will introduce a fixed penalty charge to cover the offence of when a person cuts down or disposes of a tree which is not on private land.

(AQW 10646/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department has existing powers to make Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs), if it is considered expedient, in the interests of amenity, to preserve trees, groups of trees or woodlands in any area. Provision is made in a TPO prohibiting the cutting down, topping, lopping, uprooting, wilful damage or wilful destruction of trees without consent. The designation of a conservation area also affords a degree of protection to trees within that area in that the Department must be notified of any intent to fell a tree.

Any person who contravenes a TPO by cutting down, uprooting or wilfully destroying a tree, or wilfully damaging, topping or lopping a tree is immediately guilty of an offence and, if found guilty, is liable on summary conviction to a fine of up to £100,000 or on conviction on indictment to an unlimited fine.

The Planning Act (NI) 2011, which will be commenced when powers transfer to local government, contains provisions for a fixed penalty scheme in respect of breaches of planning control relating to operational development which does not include the felling of trees. I am also introducing these fixed penalty provisions for use by the Department, in advance of powers transferring, through a new Planning Reform Bill. The current legislation provides useful powers to protect trees in the interest of amenity and to deal with breaches of such powers whether on public or private land and, as I see it, the issue is how, where and how often existing powers are used. I will consider further issue of fixed penalties.

Retrospective Planning Approval: Legitimate Requests

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) his understanding of the circumstances which would constitute legitimate requests for retrospective planning approval; and (ii) whether retrospective planning permission can be sought for works that have been constructed in the absence of, or in contravention of, an original planning application where it is apparent that permission would not have been granted if the works had been included in the original application.

(AQW 11252/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

- (i) It is unsatisfactory that development should be commenced that requires planning permission without first submitting a planning application and paying the appropriate fee. However, current planning legislation allows for retrospective planning applications to be made to the Department seeking planning permission for either development already carried out or for development which has not complied with the condition (s) of a previous planning approval.

The Department is legally obliged to accept and process all valid planning applications submitted to it, including retrospective applications.

- (ii) There is no legislative power to refuse to accept a valid planning application. Each application seeking planning permission for development, including a retrospective application, is determined on its own merits and the Department shall have regard to the development plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations, including planning history. Undertaking development without planning permission is at the risk of the developer and subject to enforcement action.

I take the enforcement of planning control seriously and that is why I am looking at ways to bring forward powers to strengthen enforcement, including this issue in relation to retrospective planning applications. A number of key reforms from The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 to strengthen and simplify the enforcement process have been brought forward to demonstrate this commitment.

I have made it clear to staff that more robust enforcement is an essential element of a balanced planning system – indeed robust enforcement is the flipside of good planning. I shall outline my further ambitions on enforcement in the near future.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Driving Licence Recognition

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will enter into negotiations with authorities in Alberta, Canada, to finalise a reciprocal agreement that would formally recognise Driver and Vehicle Agency driving licences.

(AQW 11416/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Since a change in the law in 2009 enabling the recognition of Canadian driver licences for exchange in Northern Ireland, my Department has been in negotiations with the ten provinces and three territories of Canada, each of which requires a separate reciprocal agreement to be in place before it will accept a Northern Ireland driver licence for exchange. Progress by the Canadian authorities has been very slow. However, agreements are now in place with seven of the provinces.

In August 2011, the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) provided information to the driver licensing authority in Alberta to assist in its drafting of a memorandum of understanding (MOU). This document, once finalised and signed, will facilitate the acceptance of Northern Ireland driving licences in Alberta. The MOU was referred to the Alberta authority's legal department, and is

awaiting clearance. The Department is willing to assist the Alberta authorities further if required, and continues to press for the completion of this process.

DVA accepts Canadian licences for exchange purposes irrespective of whether an MOU is required by the corresponding Canadian province or territory.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Traditional Confectionery, Tobacco and News Retailers

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the value of traditional confectionery, tobacco and news retailers.

(AQW 10354/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The UK Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) 2007 classifies businesses by the type of economic activity in which they are engaged. However, it is not possible to identify traditional confectionery, tobacco and news retailers separately in the classification as these are grouped with large retail chain stores in the 'Retail sale in non-specialised stores with food, beverages or tobacco predominating' sector (SIC code 47110). Turnover in this wider sector was valued at £5.1bn at January 2012, the latest month for which information is available on the Inter-Departmental Business Register. Micro businesses (0-9 employees) in this sector had an estimated turnover of £323m at January 2012.

Shared Services

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) how many shared services the Northern Ireland Department operate with the (a) Scottish Government; (b) the Welsh Assembly Government; and (c) the Government of the Republic of Ireland; and (ii) in each case, to provide an estimate of the efficiency savings made in financial and full-time equivalent staff terms, to date.

(AQW 10969/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Northern Ireland Departments do not operate any shared services in conjunction with the Scottish Government, the Welsh Assembly Government, or the Government of the Republic of Ireland.

Northern Ireland Net Fiscal Balance Report

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) how often his Department publishes the 'Northern Ireland Net Fiscal Balance Report'; and (ii) when the next report will be published

(AQW 11008/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In recent years my Department has produced the Northern Ireland Net Fiscal Balance Report on an annual basis, with the most recent report (relating to 2008-09) having been published in August 2011. While work has not yet commenced on the next Northern Ireland Net Fiscal Balance Report, it is anticipated that it will be published in the autumn.

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what measures are in place regarding Special Advisers to ensure that issues akin to those arising in respect of the Jeremy Hunt controversy could not arise in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 11015/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Special Advisers in the NICS are contractually bound by a Code of Conduct for Special Advisers, including the NICS Code of Ethics, as set out in Schedule 2 to the Model Contract for Employment for Special Advisers, a copy of which was placed in the Assembly library on 30 April 2012.

Irregular Procurement Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the parity of sanction applicable to (i) Departments and their arm's-length bodies; and (ii) voluntary groups, such as those striving to serve the victims sector, that are guilty of irregular procurement spend.

(AQW 11121/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Incurring irregular procurement expenditure is unacceptable whatever organisation may be involved. Should any body to which the Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy and the procurement legislation applies, be found to have incurred such irregular expenditure, it will be a matter for the Accounting Officer of the body to respond appropriately,

The sanctions that can be applied to public bodies and other organisations in receipt of public funding can vary, both in relation to the nature of the body and the circumstances relating to the irregular expenditure. In the case of departments and their agencies, where it is found that any expenditure, including procurement expenditure, has been incurred without approval - or in excess of approved levels - then this is reported immediately to the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO). The NIAO in turn will report on any such occurrences in the course of its annual audit of the relevant accounts. The department or agency found to

have incurred the irregular spend will then be required to explain the circumstances that gave rise to it and to provide satisfactory assurance that it has taken steps to avoid a recurrence.

In relation to arm's length bodies and voluntary groups, it will be the responsibility of the funding body to determine if and what sanctions are appropriate. In the case of a voluntary group which has received grant from a NI Department, and subsequently enters into a procurement exercise, both the department and the body have responsibilities to ensure that procurement best practice procedures are adhered to and that all legal and administrative requirements have been fulfilled.

Loft Insulation: Building Control Fees

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the rationale for introducing Building Control fees for loft insulations. (AQW 11164/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Building control fees were first introduced in 1983 to cover the cost of district councils carrying out certain statutory functions of the building regulations. Incorrect installation of loft insulation can lead to condensation, mould growth and potentially structural failure. Inspection by building control is to ensure correct installation.

There are no plans to amend the current relevant fee for loft insulation, which has been in operation since 1997 therefore no equality impact assessment has been carried out.

Loft Insulation: Building Control Fees

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether an equality impact assessment was carried out on the introduction of Building Control fees for loft insulations; and when it will be published. (AQW 11165/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Building control fees were first introduced in 1983 to cover the cost of district councils carrying out certain statutory functions of the building regulations. Incorrect installation of loft insulation can lead to condensation, mould growth and potentially structural failure. Inspection by building control is to ensure correct installation.

There are no plans to amend the current relevant fee for loft insulation, which has been in operation since 1997 therefore no equality impact assessment has been carried out.

Loft Insulation: Building Control Fees

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how households are made aware of the need to apply for Building Control approval and pay its fees when purchasing loft insulation materials. (AQW 11168/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Department undertakes public consultations on any proposals to amend Building Regulations and opinions received are taken into consideration. Following the making of any changes the Department hosts a series of public seminars to advise on content.

The Department also provides a website with details of current legislation.

District councils contribute to open fora to inform the public of the role and functions of Building Control, for example, at regular self-build and home improvement exhibitions.

Loft Insulation: Building Control Fees

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has any plans to waive the Building Control fees for loft insulations, given that households are under increasing financial pressures. (AQW 11171/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The current fees have been in place since 1997. It would be for individual district councils to make that decision.

Ex-Prisoners' Groups: Peace III Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 10359/11-15, whether the money was allocated to ex-prisoners groups as a target group under PEACE III, or whether it includes any funding awarded by the victims sector, and if so, how much arose from that source. (AQW 11227/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Both ex-prisoners and their families, and victims of the Troubles, are named beneficiary groups of the PEACE III Programme and can apply for funding under any of the Programme's Themes. All applications for PEACE III funding are assessed against the agreed selection criteria and those that meet the criteria are funded.

PEACE III Theme 1.2, Acknowledging and Dealing with the Past, with a budget of £43.5 million, has a particular focus on victims and survivors of the conflict. It aims to provide advice, counselling and support services for victims, families and those who care for them; to exchange different views of history, culture and identity; and to exchange different conflict and post-conflict

experiences amongst relevant groups and individuals. One project led by an ex-prisoners' organisation was awarded £460,124 under this Theme.

Domestic Ratepayers

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the total value of the discount given to domestic ratepayers for early payment in each of the last five financial years.

(AQW 11264/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Discount is available to both domestic and 'mixed' properties, which have both a domestic and non-domestic valuation, when the ratepayer pays in accordance with the relevant discount date. Therefore, the amount of discount given to domestic ratepayers only for early payment is unavailable. The table overleaf indicates the total value of discount given to properties for early payment in each of the last five financial years.

Financial Year	Discount for Early Payment
2007/08	£4.2M
2008/09	£3.8M
2009/10	£3.9M
2010/11	£4.2M
2011/12	£4.4M

Domestic Ratepayers

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) how many domestic ratepayers received a discount for early payment of their rates in each of the last five years; and (ii) what percentage of domestic ratepayers this represented each year.

(AQW 11265/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Discounts are available to eligible ratepayers who pay by the date specified on their rate bill for both domestic and 'mixed' properties (which have both a domestic and non-domestic valuation), and therefore the number of domestic ratepayers who received a discount for early payment is unavailable.

The following table provides (i) the total number of domestic and mixed properties which received a discount for early payment; and (ii) the percentage of domestic and mixed properties which received a discount for early payment as a percentage of the number of domestic and mixed properties for which a rates assessment was raised which could, potentially, qualify for a discount for early payment. Data is only available for the last three financial years.

Financial Year	Number of domestic and mixed properties which received a discount	Percentage of domestic and mixed properties which received a discount for early payment as a percentage of the number of domestic and mixed properties for which a rates assessment was raised which could, potentially, qualify for a discount for early payment
2009/10	118,716	21.3%
2010/11	122,467	22.0%
2011/12	122,864	22.1%

Rating: Empty Properties

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the adequacy of system in place for responding to applications for rates exemption, following the rating of empty properties.

(AQW 11311/11-15)

Mr Wilson: This answer assumes that the question seeks details of the system under the Rates Order (NI) 1977 for dealing with applications concerning the rateable valuation of properties following the recent introduction of the rating of empty domestic properties and the earlier introduction of the rating of empty non domestic properties.

Under rating law any ratepayer in Northern Ireland can apply at any time to have their rateable valuation reviewed. The system comprises 3 stages:-

- Stage 1 – Application to the District Valuer responsible for the District within which the property is located;

- Stage 2 – Appeal to the Commissioner of Valuation for Northern Ireland if dissatisfied with the District Valuer's decision; and
- Stage 3 – Appeal to the Northern Ireland Valuation Tribunal (for domestic properties) or Appeal to the Lands Tribunal for Northern Ireland (for non domestic properties) if dissatisfied with the Commissioner's decision.

Applications and appeals are often focused on the provision of information and an explanation of how an assessment is carried out. By dealing with these at a local, commensurate and appropriate level most applications and appeals are resolved with only the most contentious or problematic cases proceeding to any tribunal.

Under this system the number of applications received is modest. During the financial year 2011/12, less than 3% of non domestic ratepayers and less than 1% of domestic ratepayers initiated a stage 1 application to the District Valuer.

Whilst individual ratepayers may not always be content with the outcome of their application, my overall assessment is that the system provides an appropriate and cost effective means of dealing fairly and equitably with a ratepayer's concerns, with an opportunity of referral to an independent tribunal if required.

Lone Pensioner Allowance Scheme

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of pensioners who were successful in their application for the Lone Pensioner Allowance Scheme; and the value of the savings that have been made.

(AQW 11327/11-15)

Mr Wilson: From 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2012 there were approximately 27,400 awards of Lone Pensioner Allowance (LPA) with a total value of £4.4M.

The total amount of Lone Pensioner rate relief awarded since the scheme began on 1st April 2008 up to 31st March 2012 has been £15.6M.

BBC: Disclosure of Serious Tax Avoidance

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether requests have been made by his Department to the Treasury to ascertain if any agreed pay deals by Departments compare with the recent disclosures by the BBC of serious tax avoidance involving more than 2000 public sector workers as revealed in a letter from the Treasury Secretary to the Chancellor.

(AQW 11340/11-15)

Mr Wilson: No requests have been made by my Department to the Treasury to ascertain if any agreed pay deals by Departments compare with the recent disclosures by the BBC.

Regional Rate

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when he plans to review the regional rate set by the Executive.

(AQW 11392/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There are no plans to review the regional rate at this time.

The most recent Budget agreement covers the four year period from 2011 to 2015. As part of this process, the Executive agreed that the Regional Rate would be frozen in real terms until the 2014/2015 rating year. This will help provide certainty and stability for both businesses and households to plan and manage their finances.

As a result of this decision, the level of increase for the regional rate over the period from 2011/2012 onwards will be 2.5%, 2.2%, 2.7% and 2.7%. The domestic regional rate freeze also means that the average household is better off than would otherwise be the case when compared to an average 10% increase in the domestic regional rate over the last four years of direct rule.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) the amount of money claimed for irregular overtime and expenses by staff of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service; and (ii) the number of staff who have made such claims, broken down by rank.

(AQW 11201/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): No irregular overtime or expenses by staff for the periods 2009/10 and 2010/11 were identified by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. The 2011/12 audit of accounts has yet to be completed; there are a number of overtime claims during this period which are currently under review.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many members of staff of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service have been interviewed by Business Services Organisation investigators, broken down by rank.

(AQW 11202/11-15)

Mr Poots: Detailed information by rank cannot be provided, as to do so would potentially compromise the identities of those staff interviewed by the Business Services Organisation. A number of staff were interviewed, as follows:

- Six operational staff between the grade of Assistant Group Commander and above
- Six operational staff between the grade of Watch Commander and Crew Commander
- Three non-operational staff between the grade of Principal and Director.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) the number of staff of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service that have been suspended or are facing disciplinary measures, broken down by (i) rank; and (ii) the nature of the offences.

(AQW 11203/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is detailed on the tables below.

Number of NIFRS staff suspended over the past 3 years by rank, year and nature of offence

1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010

Category of Allegation	Support Staff	R/T WC	R/T CC	R/T FF	FF	Status of suspension	Total by Nature
Criminal Conviction				1		Resolved	1
Theft				1		Resolved	1
Total by Rank	0	0	0	2			2

1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011

Category of Allegation	Support Staff	R/T WC	R/T CC	R/T FF	FF	Status of suspension	Total by Nature
Criminal Conviction					1	Ongoing	1
Failure to disclose relevant information					1	Resolved	1
Misuse of alcohol/ drugs					2	Resolved	2
Total by Rank	0	0	0	0	4		4

1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012

Category of Allegation	Support Staff	R/T WC	R/T CC	R/T FF	FF	Status of suspension	Total by Nature
Criminal Conviction			1			Ongoing	1
Disrepute				1		Ongoing	1
Physical violence					1	Ongoing	1
Breach of obligation/ misuse of NIFRS property	1					Ongoing	1
Total by Rank	1	0	1	1	1		4

Number of NIFRS staff facing disciplinary measures over the past 3 years by rank and nature of offence**1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010**

Category of Allegation	Support Staff	AGC/GC	R/T WC	R/T CC	R/T FF	W/T FF	Trainee FF	Total by Nature	Status Resolved	Status Ongoing
Criminal Conviction		1			2			3	3	0
Disrepute					1			1	1	0
Driving Issue						2		2	2	0
Failure to disclose relevant information							1	1	1	0
Failure to comply with NIFRS Policy						1		1	1	0
Insubordination			1	1				2	2	0
Misuse of NIFRS property or its name			1					1	1	0
Poor timekeeping/ unauthorised absence	1			3	21	3		28	28	0
Theft					1			1	1	0
Insubordination/Bad behaviour/Misuse of alcohol/drugs					1			1	1	0
Total by Rank	1	1	2	4	26	6	1	41	41	0

1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011

Category of Allegation	AGC/GC	R/T WC	R/T CC	R/T FF	FF	Total by Nature	Status Resolved	Status Ongoing
Criminal Conviction				2		2	2	0
Failure to follow instructions		1		1	1	3	3	0
Failure to report damages			1	1		2	2	0
Failure to report pending criminal proceedings				1		1	1	0
Fraud			1	1		2	2	0
Misuse of alcohol/drugs					1	1	1	0
Poor timekeeping/ unauthorised absence			7	25		32	32	0
Unsatisfactory Work Performance	1					2	2	0
Total by Rank	1	1	9	31	3	45	45	0

1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012

Category of Allegation	Support Staff	SC	WC	FF	Trainee FF	R/T CC	R/T FF	Total by Nature	Status Resolved	Status Ongoing
Bad Behaviour				1		1	1	3	3	0
Breach of IT/IS Policy	1							1	1	0
Criminal Conviction						1		1	1	0
Disrepute		1	2					3	3	0
Failure to report for duty						1		1	1	0
Failure to comply with instructions/unauthorised absence				1				1	1	0
Inappropriate Claim	2							2	2	0
Poor timekeeping/unauthorised absence						7	45	52	47	5
Unsatisfactory Work Performance	1				3			4	4	0
Total by Rank	4	1	2	2	3	10	46	68	63	5

Key

RT Retained

WC Watch Commander

CC crew Commander

FF firefighter

AGC Assistant group commander

GC Group commander

SC Station Commander

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number; and (ii) the value payments for the irregular overtime claims that have been recovered from members of staff of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. **(AQW 11205/11-15)**

Mr Poots: A number of overtime claims are currently under review. A determination has yet to be made as to whether these claims are irregular or not.

Post of Co-ordinator ESW Responders

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) experience necessary; and (ii) pay scale for the post of Co-ordinator ESW Responder in each Health and Social Care Trust area. **(AQW 11241/11-15)**

Mr Poots: Two systems of Out-of-Hours Social Work services currently operate in the HSC. All staff working in this service must be registered Social Workers. (i) in the Belfast and the South Eastern Trust the Team Manager must have at least 2 years experience at Senior Social Worker Team Leader (Band 7 or above. Band 7 salary scale is £30,460 - £40,157) and have at least 1 year's experience of working in an Out-of-Hours service. In the other Trusts they require 5 years experience at Band 7 or above with up to 2 year's experience of working in an Out-of-Hours service. (ii) In the Belfast and the South Eastern Trust the Team Manager is paid at Band 8a; salary scale is £38,851 to £46,621. In the other Trusts staff are not employed specifically to work in the Out-of-Hours service and are paid according to their substantive role. In addition to this they receive £218 for an Out-of-Hours shift; which is either 5pm to 9am on weekdays or 9am to 5pm at weekends and Bank Holidays.

Learning Disability Team

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of staff employed by the Learning Disability Team that covers the Omagh and Fermanagh areas; (ii) their roles; and (iii) how many people are on the waiting list to be seen by the Team.

(AQW 11251/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested, as supplied by the Western Health and Social Care Trust, is set out below.

- (i) The number of staff employed by the learning disability team which covers the Omagh and Fermanagh areas is –
- (ii)

Children's Disability Services (not specific to Learning Disability)

- 2 Senior Social Worker/Team Leader
- 8 Social Workers
- 1 part-time hospital social worker
- 1 part-time transitions planning officer
- 1 community nurse, learning disability
- 2 part-time community nurses, learning disability
- 2 personal secretaries

Adult Learning Disability Services

- 1 whole time equivalent (wte) Consultant Psychiatrist
 - 1 wte associate specialist
 - 2.6 wte psychology staff
 - 2 wte behaviour therapy staff
 - 2 wte speech therapy staff
 - 1 wte sensory occupational therapist
 - 1 wte team leader
 - 3 wte community learning disability nurses
 - 8 wte social workers.
- (iii) In addition, these teams are supported by Trust-wide multi-disciplinary teams which include psychiatry, psychology, behaviour support and children's community nursing.

Social workers provide a range of services which enable disabled children and young people to live as full a life as possible, including individual assessment of need, community services to meet that need, respite opportunities, a listening ear, information and advice.

Transitions Officers co-ordinate and facilitate the smooth transition of young disabled people into adult services and career pathways. They enable young people to explore the most appropriate post school options through early person centred planning.

Community nurses are responsible for the management and delivery of care including assessment of need, development of care plans and providing individualised nursing, social and therapeutic care to children with a learning disability.

- (iv) I am advised that as of 8 May 2012 waiting lists are as follows –

Psychology Service – 11

Psychiatry service – 5

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: Drivers

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) why there are different rates of pay and pay bands for drivers employed by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust; and (ii) to provide a breakdown of the different rates of pay and pay bands.

(AQW 11253/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The Trust employs drivers to undertake a range of duties and the pay band for each post is determined by the Agenda for Change NHS Job Evaluation Scheme. Each job evaluation is carried out in partnership with the Trade Unions. Some posts involve delivering goods and services, some transporting patients and clients and some include both transporting clients to, and providing caring duties in day centres.

Some of the current drivers have asked to have their grading reviewed as they are unhappy with their initial banding. These posts will now require a full job evaluation to arrive at the correct banding. In the event that after the job evaluation process there remains a pay anomaly, there is a regional joint agreement for the Trust to follow to make any necessary amendments to the rate of pay.

(ii) The current pay bands covering these groups of staff are:

Band 1: £14,153 - £14,864

Band 2: £14,153 - £17,253

Band 3: £16,110 - £19,077

Lisgarel Residential Home, Larne

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department plans to close Lisgarel Residential Home, Larne.

(AQW 11258/11-15)

Mr Poots: Lisgarel Residential Home in Larne currently provides permanent residential placements, respite care and a number of intermediate care beds. The respite care and intermediate care beds are intended to provide short-term support for older people with a view to enabling them to return to live in their own homes.

Any plans regarding the future of Lisgarel will be subject to consultation and will be shared with local communities prior to any implementation.

Accident and Emergency Department: Belfast City Hospital

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, since the closure of the Accident and Emergency Department at Belfast City Hospital City, how much the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has spent on locum staff for the Accident and Emergency Department at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast. broken down by (i) junior doctors; (ii) senior doctors; (iii) consultants; (iv) the hourly rate of pay; and (v) mileage paid.

(AQW 11272/11-15)

Mr Poots: Cost of Agency Locum Medical Staff for Accident and Emergency Department at Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast since November 2011

Medical grade *	Amount	Hourly rate+	Mileage paid
Junior doctors	£87,870.24	Between £48.28 - £48.92	N/A
Senior doctors	£316,494.76	Between £58.48 - £70.00	N/A
Consultants	£8,662.50	£87.50	N/A

*Junior doctors include all medical staff up to but not including Specialist Registrars.

Senior doctors include all medical staff from Specialist Registrar up to but not including consultants.

+ Rates of pay vary depending on the medical agency used.

The above table identifies the agency locum costs i.e. medical staff hours purchased through an external medical agency by the Belfast HSC Trust since the date of the temporary closure of the Emergency Department in the City Hospital. The Trust does not pay mileage costs to agency locums.

Health Services in Northern Ireland

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what system is in place to ensure that a financial contribution is made by the Government or residents of the Republic of Ireland when availing of health services in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 11280/11-15)

Mr Poots: Depending on the route to treatment accessed by a Republic of Ireland resident, there are a variety of financial systems for dealing with the costs of providing care. These can range from centrally managed financial flows between the Department of Health in England and the Irish Government under EU legislation to arrangements negotiated on a contractual basis between Health and Social Care Trusts and their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland. Republic of Ireland patients may also pay to use HSC services on a private basis. It is recognised that in some instances Health and Social Care services are utilised by residents of the Republic of Ireland fraudulently and the Business Services Organisation counter fraud services pursue such cases.

Fire Hydrants

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the regulations for fire hydrant servicing; and whether these regulations being met.

(AQW 11297/11-15)

Mr Poots: Article 17 of The Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 makes provision for the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) to arrange with the Department for Regional Development for the provision and maintenance of fire hydrants.

Fire hydrant servicing is the responsibility of the Department for Regional Development, through Northern Ireland Water. Fire Hydrants are inspected by NIFRS personnel in line with its Hydrant Inspection Policy and any defects found are reported to NI Water for repair.

Fire Hydrants

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how often fire hydrants are serviced.

(AQW 11298/11-15)

Mr Poots: Under the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service's Hydrant Inspection Policy, inspection frequency in relation to fire hydrants is based on risk. The planned timescales between inspections are shown in the table below:

Risk	Frequency of Test
Low	5 Years
Medium	3 Years
High	1 Year

Fire Hydrants

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the timescale for rectifying a fault with a fire hydrant.

(AQW 11303/11-15)

Mr Poots: Fire hydrant servicing is the responsibility of the Department for Regional Development, through Northern Ireland Water. Fire Hydrants are inspected by NIFRS personnel in line with its Hydrant Inspection Policy and any defects found are reported to Northern Ireland Water for repair.

Waterborne Micro-organisms: Filters

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what consideration the Health and Social Care Trusts gave to the fitting of water filters to protect against waterborne micro-organisms (a) prior to; and (b) after the pseudomonas outbreak in December 2011; and (ii) if this action was not pursued, to detail the reasons why.

(AQW 11371/11-15)

Mr Poots: In reference to my answer to AQW 11228/11-15, the independent review of the tragic incidents of pseudomonas infection in neonatal units is ongoing and the technical area in this question may form part of the ongoing investigations of the review team. I cannot therefore comment on this area until the review investigations have been completed and I have received the final report at which time I will bring the report to the Assembly.

Fire and Rescue Service

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) payments received; and (ii) rank of each person in the Fire and Rescue Service who claimed overtime whilst taking part in the whole-time recruitment exercise.

(AQW 11430/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) The table below contains details of claims paid to date in respect of the NIFRS whole-time recruitment exercise:

Paid To	Amount (£)
Whole-time staff	76,232
Retained Staff	17,542
NI contributions	9,753
Total To Date	103,527

(ii) This information could only be established at disproportionate cost.

Compton Report

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Compton Report did not include councils. (AQW 11431/11-15)

Mr Poots: In June 2011, I announced a review of Health and Social Care services in Northern Ireland to be led by John Compton, Chief Executive of the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB). The Review was to examine:

- the future provision of services including acute hospital configuration;
- the development of primary health care services and social care; and
- the interfaces between the sectors.

The Review Report 'Transforming Your Care' was published on 13 December 2011.

The Review Team undertook extensive engagement during the review period. This included 6 public meetings across Northern Ireland to which all Councils were invited. In addition, all interested parties were encouraged to provide written submissions if they so wished. Submissions were received from two Councils.

Point-of-Use Tap-Mounted Disposable Filters

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, for the period 31 March 2010 and 31 March 2012, to detail (i) the number of point-of-use tap mounted disposable filters purchased; (ii) the total cost; and (iii) the number in use, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 11446/11-15)

Mr Poots: The answer to this question is provided in the following table:

HSC Trust	(i)	(ii)	(iii)
Belfast	12	£420	0
Northern	12	£624	0
South Eastern	23	£1,710.43	0
Southern	574	£24,946	21
Western	72	£3,744	0

Point-of-Use Tap-Mounted Disposable Filters

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any Health and Social Care Trust has undertaken a clinical validation of point-of-use tap mounted disposable filters.

(AQW 11448/11-15)

Mr Poots: As point of use tap mounted disposal filters are manufactured to international standards and have been validated under laboratory conditions, multicentre field evaluations and widely published independent clinical studies, there is no requirement for HSC Trusts to undertake additional clinical validation.

Point-of-Use Tap-Mounted Disposable Filters

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether a regional contract is in place for the supply of point-of-use tap mounted disposable filters; and (ii) to detail the trading name and registered office address of the business(es) holding the contract.

(AQW 11449/11-15)

Mr Poots: There is no regional contract in place for the supply of point of use tap mounted disposable filters however the need for such a contract will remain under review by the HSC Trusts together with the Business Services Organisation, taking into consideration the cost/benefits of establishing such a contract.

Circular CCPD/2/2011

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many personal education plans have been issued by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust since the issue of Circular CCPD/2/2011.

(AQW 11472/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not centrally available within the DHSSPS. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust advised my Department that 11 Personal Education Plans have been completed with a further 79 in the process of completion since the issue of Circular CCPD/2/2011.

MRI Scanner: Paediatric Intensive Care Unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 8481/11-15, to detail the number of (i) patients; and (ii) children waiting for an MRI scan in each Health and Social Care Trust area and the length of their wait to date. **(AQW 11488/11-15)**

Mr Poots: The number of patients waiting for an MRI scan at each HSC Trust, and the length of their wait in time bands, is outlined in the table below:

HSC Trust	Patients waiting for an MRI scan by HSC Trust and weeks waiting						Total number of patients waiting
	0-6	6-9	9-13	13-21	21-26	26+	
Belfast	808	364	140	62	8	0	1,382
Northern	284	3	0	0	0	0	287
South Eastern	222	169	56	0	0	0	447
Southern	603	170	0	0	0	0	773
Western	683	26	16	0	0	0	725
Total	2,600	732	212	62	8	0	3,614

Source: HSC Trusts

The number of children (categorized as patients aged between 0 and 16 years of age) waiting for an MRI scan at each HSC Trust, and the length of their wait in time bands, is outlined in the table below:

HSC Trust	Children waiting for an MRI scan by HSC Trust and weeks waiting						Total number of children waiting
	0-6	6-9	9-13	13-21	21-26	26+	
Belfast	121	62	43	31	8	0	265
Northern	9	0	0	0	0	0	9
South Eastern	7	2	0	0	0	0	9
Southern	8	0	0	0	0	0	8
Western	57	3	5	0	0	0	65
Total	202	67	48	31	8	0	356

Source: HSC Trusts

Cloth Nappies: Use in Maternity Units

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration has been given to the promotion of the use of cloth nappies in maternity units, including providing information through Bounty Packs. **(AQW 11489/11-15)**

Mr Poots: Mothers provide their own nappies for use in maternity units and do receive literature on the use of cloth nappies; however, using cloth nappies in maternity units presents many difficulties in terms of the management and laundry of soiled nappies and of infection control.

The contents of Bounty packs are the sole responsibility of the charity Bounty; my Department has no input into the contents of the Bounty packs.

Needs of Children in Kinship Care and Their Carers

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what plans he has to address the needs of children in kinship care and their carers, given that the majority of children are being raised informally; and (ii) whether his Department is carrying out research on the issue, and if so, to outline the timescale for its completion. **(AQW 11492/11-15)**

Mr Poots:

- i) The Department is publishing Standards on Kinship Care for children/young people who live in kinship arrangements approved by Social Services later this month. It is also looking at current initiatives that could be developed or tailored to meet the needs of informal kinship i.e. through the Families Matters Strategy, as well as looking at ways to raise awareness of the support that may be available to kinship carers. At the Kinship Care debate in the Assembly I made a commitment to highlight the needs of kinship care through the fora of sub committee for children's and young people.
- ii) The Department is currently pursuing research on a range of information on the characteristics of children and their carers living in kinship care arrangements from the Census 2011. The Census Office has indicated that the earliest date for publication of this information is 2013. The Department has further agreed one of the priority topics for consideration for inclusion in the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) work programme is research on kinship care. This is currently being actively progressed through the Steering Group and discussions with SCIE.

Hospices: Policy on Providing Funding and Support

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his Department's policy on providing funding to and supporting hospices.

(AQW 11532/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has recently reviewed Core and Project Funding to the Third (voluntary) Sector, including hospices. After consideration of the findings I can advise that:

- The Department should not be supporting service delivery – responsibility for this should pass to HSC Board as commissioners;
- Core funding should only be provided with the aim of enabling organisations to become self-sustainable;
- A small sum of money should be set aside to establish an 'Engagement Forum' which will provide strategic policy input;
- An Innovation Grant Fund should be established with funding directed to specific areas that would assist in delivering the Department's objectives;
- The Department should consider ways of encouraging commissioners and Trusts to open more contracts up to tendering and move away from short-term funding.

Until new funding arrangements have been implemented, the Department is not in a position to increase the level of core funding to any regional voluntary organisation.

Hospices

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) all hospices in operation; (ii) the annual running costs of each hospice; and (iii) how much funding his Department has provided to each hospice in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 11533/11-15)

Mr Poots: Northern Ireland has four independent hospices:

- (i) Foyle; Marie Curie Cancer Care (Belfast); Northern Ireland Hospice, which includes the NI Children's Hospice (Killadeas and Newtownabbey); and St John's House (Newry).

There are also a number of specialist palliative care beds within Trust facilities that do not come under the 'hospice' term.

- (ii) My Department does not hold information on the running costs of non-statutory, independent bodies such as hospices; neither are these voluntary organisations required to provide such information to my Department.
- (iii) Funding provided to hospices in Northern Ireland is provided in the table below. Figures prior to 2008/09 are not available as data from all former HSSB areas is no longer available.

Funding Provided	Financial Year			
	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12
Ni Hospice (Childrens)	£ -	£ 210,000	£ 538,406	£ 566,862
Ni Hospice (Adults)	£ 1,884,552	£ 1,797,392	£ 1,944,488	£ 1,944,488
Marie Curie - Beaconsfield	£ 1,377,588	£ 1,416,486	£ 1,373,264	£ 1,373,264
Foyle Hospice	£ 314,650	£ 323,687	£ 430,800	£ 430,800
St John's Newry Hospice	£ 1,014,920	£ 1,062,202	£ 1,032,202	£ 1,012,202
Total	£ 4,591,710	£ 4,809,767	£ 5,319,160	£ 5,327,616

Addiction: Alcohol or Drugs

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what is the estimated number of people who have an addiction to alcohol or drugs; and (ii) what support his Department offers to people who are trying to overcome addiction to alcohol or drugs.

(AQW 11537/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) According to the most recent Census of Drug and Alcohol Treatment Services, on 01 March 2010 there were 5,846 individuals in treatment for drug and/or alcohol misuse.

The New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs (NSD) Phase 2, which I launched in January 2012, is Northern Ireland's cross-sectoral and cross-Department strategy to reduce the harm related to alcohol and drug misuse. The NSD seeks to direct action across five pillars:

- (ii) prevention and early intervention; harm reduction; treatment and support; law and criminal justice; and monitoring, evaluation and research. Approximately £8 million is allocated to its implementation each year, and additional funding is provided through the mental health budget for the provision of treatment and support services.

In line with the NSD Phase 2, the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and the Public Health Agency (PHA) commission a range of services across Northern Ireland to support people who have substance misuse issues. These services are commissioned using the 4-tier model and services range from population-wide information and education programmes at Tier 1, to detoxification and in-patient treatment at Tier 4. It is the duty of the HSCB and the PHA to assess the need for such services and then commission these as required.

Through the NSD Phase 2, I have tasked the HSCB and the PHA with developing a regional commissioning framework for addiction services. Work to develop this framework is currently underway and it is anticipated that this will provide greater consistency to the provision of these services across Northern Ireland.

Addiction: Prescription Drugs

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of people addicted to prescription drugs; and (ii) what guidelines his Department has issued to doctors advising them on what action to take when a patient becomes addicted to prescribed medicines.

(AQW 11538/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) Information on the number of people addicted to prescription drugs is not available. The Northern Ireland Drug Misuse Database in 2010/11 recorded that 635 people presented to treatment services where the main drug had been prescribed. This represented 24% of individuals who presented for treatment.
- (ii) The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) issues to GPs and other healthcare professionals any relevant guidelines in relation to what action to take when a patient becomes addicted to prescribed medicines. The legacy Health and Social Services Boards and the HSCB have produced a range of guidance and protocols in relation to a range of medication issues and these include:
- Prescribing Review: Tramadol, dihydrocodeine, cocodamol 30/500
 - Guidance on the management of anxiety disorders
 - Guidance on the treatment of depression
 - Guidance on the management of benzodiazepine prescribing.

Guidance is produced on an ongoing basis as required by the changing evidence base and service needs.

A number of Prescribed Drug Misuse Practitioners (PDMPs) are commissioned by the PHA and HSCB. Their role is to address specific needs of individuals who have a dependency on Benzodiazepines and / or 'z drugs' and to raise awareness within local communities by education on the complexities associated with benzodiazepine use. Benzodiazepine withdrawal or reduction is undertaken where appropriate.

It should also be noted that the HSCB monitors the prescribing of individual GMS practices on a regular basis, and issues identified are discussed and reviewed with GPs at monitoring visits as appropriate.

Doctors can refer patients who misuse prescription drugs to a range of treatment and support services, in the same way they can for a patient who misuses other substances, including alcohol and illegal drugs.

Regional Fertility Clinic: Guidelines for Referrals

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any changes that have been made to the guidelines for referrals to the Regional Fertility Clinic and the waiting list for fertility treatment in each of the last three years; and (ii) whether any public consultation was carried out prior to the changes coming into effect.

(AQW 11584/11-15)

Mr Poots: The original criteria for referral to the Regional Fertility Centre were devised following a public consultation in 2006. The criteria were amended after a further public consultation in 2009; when criteria regarding the relationship status of prospective patients were removed. There have been no other changes made to the criteria

In 2009 the service moved to one regional waiting list for fertility treatment ensuring equality of access for all Northern Ireland residents.

Currently over £3m is available recurrently for fertility services. This additional funding allocated since 2009 ensures that no one on the waiting list waits longer than 12 months for treatment. In addition, now that the waiting list has been stabilised at 12 months, the service has been expanded to offer frozen embryo transfer to new referrals from 1 April 2012.

Medication for Prisoners

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what procedures and practices are in place to ensure that an adequate supply of medication for prisoners suffering from debilitating and life threatening illnesses are available and administered as and when required; and whether there were any failings in these procedures and practices during April 2012.

(AQW 11606/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is responsible for the delivery of prison healthcare services. Policies and procedures are in place in prison healthcare to ensure that all patients receive their prescribed medication in a safe and evidence-based way. Patients who have been assessed as having capacity to manage their own medication are expected to comply with the reordering procedures so that medicines can be supplied in a timely manner. All prescribed medication will be made available to prisoners provided the Standard Operating Procedures for ordering medications are followed.

During the month of April, there was one reported incident where the prisoner did not receive his prescribed medication. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that this was managed appropriately as per SE Trust policies and procedures and the patient came to no harm. Additional checking procedures have been implemented as a result of this incident.

Contracts for the Provision of Sandwiches for Sale on Health Service Premises

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the listeria outbreak, to clarify the current status of the contracts for the provision of sandwiches for sale on Health Service premises.

(AQW 11614/11-15)

Mr Poots: The status of the contracts remains unchanged however supply from one contractor has been suspended temporarily as a precautionary measure.

The contract for the supply of sandwiches covers only those supplied by the Trust either for patients or for those retail outlets run by the Trust i.e. sandwiches for sale by the Trust. The contract does not extend to those outlets run by independent retailers based within Trust premises.

Social Workers

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what training is given to social workers to ensure that they comply with his Department's guidance 'Northern Ireland Working Arrangements for the Welfare and Safeguarding of Child Victims of Human Trafficking'.

(AQW 11621/11-15)

Mr Poots: Social workers in HSC Trusts and in the Voluntary Sector receive a range of training on child protection. Whilst not specifically on the DHSSPS Guidance these training courses cover signs and symptoms of all forms of child abuse and what a social worker has to do when abuse is discovered. Specialist child protection training is also delivered to social workers working in children's services by Barnardo's which, among other things, provides specific training on preventing sexual exploitation of young people.

I am aware that specific regional training on human trafficking is planned for from October this year. This will be delivered to a multi-agency audience, including social workers, involved in safeguarding child victims of human trafficking. There are also plans in place to run the Merton Age Assessment training in the Autumn for social workers working in Children's Services. The existing and proposed training will support compliance with the Department's guidance on safeguarding child victims of human trafficking.

New Hospital: Ballymena Area

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether as part of the current consultation, a site for a new hospital in the Ballymena area has been discussed as an alternative to the Antrim Area Hospital and the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine.

(AQW 11655/11-15)

Mr Poots: Transforming Your Care is about ensuring that our health system is resilient and safe and delivers the best possible outcomes well into the future, meeting the needs of the citizens of Northern Ireland.

The production of Population Plans was proposed in Transforming Your Care as a necessary early stage in implementation of the Review proposals. Local Commissioning Groups, in partnership with Trusts, are undertaking initial work on developing these Plans and these are due to be completed by the end of June 2012.

The purpose of Population Plans is to identify the projected needs for an area and how best to meet those needs, consistent with the principles in the Review Report.

As part of the development of these Population Plans in the Northern area, a number of professional advisory groups populated with local consultants, GPs, nurses and Allied Health Professional staff have been established to work through the issues and possible solutions. Participants are drawn from right across the Northern LCG area.

These groups have identified a series of options ranging from one acute hospital for the Northern area to models using primary care support and specialists GPs to support hospital services. Identifying all the possible options is an important element of this process, as is ensuring that options are investigated in terms of the best way of delivering a safe, sustainable and resilient service. Within the wide range of possible options identified, the possibility of a new hospital in Ballymena has been raised. It is important to recognise however that much further work needs to be done before the Populations Plans can be completed. A range of engagement activities are underway with Councils and community groups across the Northern area, and a discussion of these options is included in these workshops and meetings.

Once Population Plans have been produced, there will be formal consultation processes put in place in relation to any significant changes to services, and key stakeholders and the public would be able to provide their views.

Regional Adoption and Fostering Taskforce

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why Kinship Care Northern Ireland has been refused membership of the Regional Adoption and Fostering Taskforce which is responsible for developing kinship care policy and practice. **(AQW 11680/11-15)**

Mr Poots: The function and membership of the Regional Adoption and Fostering Taskforce (RAFT) is a matter for the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), which leads the Taskforce. I have been advised by the HSCB that Kinship Care Northern Ireland has recently been invited to join the Independent Fostering Stakeholders' Group of RAFT along with all other voluntary and independent organisations involved in fostering in Northern Ireland. In addition, Kinship Care Northern Ireland has also been invited to join a working group of RAFT which will develop policy and procedures for kinship carers who care for looked after children.

Alzheimer's Disease: Retrospective Fee Claims

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to permit families of individuals diagnosed with Alzheimers Disease, who were wrongly assessed in the past and who have undergone a new assessment, to claim care home fees retrospectively. **(AQW 11682/11-15)**

Mr Poots: Eligibility for continuing health care is not condition-specific and therefore a particular diagnosis would not necessarily make an individual eligible for continuing health care. The distinction between health and social care is complex and requires a careful appraisal of each individual case. Within our integrated system, it is clinicians, together with other health and social care professional colleagues, who are responsible for making decisions about appropriate long term care, in consultation with the client and their families and carers.

Where a client or family in Northern Ireland is dissatisfied with the outcome of an assessment, they can seek a review. If, following review, disagreement persists about the outcome of an assessment, a right of complaint exists under the formal HSC Complaints Procedure. The local Patient Client Council, which represents the interests of patients and clients of the HSC, can provide further information and support to people who wish to pursue a formal complaint.

Department of Justice

Prison Service: Transferred Staff

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total amount paid to Prison Service staff who have had their place of employment changed, including claims for essential travel costs by road, in each of the last five years. **(AQW 10950/11-15)**

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Table A below details the cost to the Prison Service in the last five financial years for staff claiming travel expenses due to being permanently transferred.

Table A

Year	Staff Costs
07/08	£ 57,818
08/09	£ 98,075
09/10	£ 90,208
10/11	£ 53,522
11/12	£ 35,058
Total	£334,681

The cost to the Prison Service in the last five financial years for staff claiming travel expenses due to being temporarily transferred is not routinely available and can only be calculated at disproportionate cost to the public purse.

Criminal Justice Inspection: Follow-up Report on Mistaken Prisoner Releases

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the Criminal Justice Inspectorate's follow-up report on mistaken prisoner releases, and in particular point 2.1, what are the remaining 'considerable risks'; and how does the Northern Ireland Prisoner Service intend to address the lack of staff confidence.

(AQW 11035/11-15)

Mr Ford: The remaining 'considerable risks' referred to in paragraph 2.1 of the recent report by Criminal Justice Inspection were those identified in a report by the NIPS Head of Standards and Audit, and include the use of different terms by agencies when recording decisions made at Court; the complexity of the processes that are involved in the calculation of sentences; the absence of formal staff training; and NIPS occasionally receiving inaccurate information from other criminal justice partners.

The provision of a confident and well motivated cadre of staff remains a key element of the Custody Office change programme. As a result, a number of changes have been made.

A Senior Governor has been appointed with the responsibility to develop

a corporate approach to the committal and discharge of prisoners from all three prisons; develop and revise both the legislative and policy advice given to staff; implement procedural changes to the Custody Office working practices; and devise and implement a sustainable training programme for all staff expected to be involved in the committal and discharge of prisoners.

Progress has also been made with regard to the updating of the Custody Office IT infrastructure, and staff are now in receipt of revised job descriptions and 'know-your-job' guides covering the key risks within their areas.

In their report, CJINI inspectors did recognise that considerable work had been undertaken to resolve or manage the risks as outlined above. To this end, NIPS has given a commitment that by September 2012 it will have resolved or have controls in place to manage the risks posed by the outstanding issues identified in this report.

Illegal Republican Parades

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many illegal republican parades have taken place in each of the last three years; and how many (i) prosecutions; and (ii) convictions have resulted.

(AQW 11079/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information available indicates that there were two illegal Republican parades in 2009; three in 2010; four in 2011 and two in 2012.

These figures relate to illegal Republican parades which have taken place since July 2009, information prior to this date is not available.

The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) has provided the following information in relation to individuals prosecuted and convicted in relation to illegal parades which have taken place since that date.

	Prosecutions	Convictions	Ongoing
2009	5	1	2
2010	6	2	0
2011	30	13	0

PSNI has advised that investigations are ongoing in relation to the two illegal republican parades which have taken place this year.

Former Juvenile Justice Centre Site at Lisnevin, Millisle

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the proposals for the former Juvenile Justice Centre site at Lisnevin, Millisle. (AQW 11083/11-15)

Mr Ford: At present, there is nothing substantive to add to my previous correspondence.

Separated Prisoner Compact

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the separated prisoner compact which states that 'admitting a prisoner to separated conditions would not be likely to prejudice the safety of others', whether this statement applies to the safety of prison staff. (AQW 11120/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service has a duty to hold all those committed by courts. Separated conditions exist to best manage those prisoners with proven links to paramilitary organisations and who then wish to be managed separately. Such prisoners are managed under a system designed and developed to specifically limit their ability to subvert the regime or the general security infrastructure of the prison. This includes considerations relating to the safety of our staff.

Court Cases

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many court cases in each court division have been dealt with by a (i) treatment order; (ii) hospital order; and (iii) combination of both, in each of the last five years. (AQW 11204/11-15)

Mr Ford: Table 1 below details by County Court Division the number of court cases in which a Supervision and Treatment Order was made in each of the last five years.

Table 1: Cases Dealt With which had at least one Supervision & Treatment Order

County Court Division	2007	2008	2009	2010 [1]	2011	Total
Belfast	0	0	0	2	0	2
Londonderry	0	0	1	0	1	2
Antrim	0	0	1	0	0	1
Fermanagh and Tyrone	1	0	1	1	0	3
Armagh and South Down	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ards	0	0	1	0	1	2
Craigavon	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	1	0	5	3	2	11

Notes:

Includes cases resulted with at least one Crown Court Supervision and Treatment Order.

[1] Includes 1 case with 2 defendants who both received a Supervision and Treatment Order.

Data for 2011 is provisional

Table 2 below details by County Court Division the number of court cases in which a Hospital Order was made in each of the last five years.

Table 2: Cases Dealt With which had at least one Hospital Order

County Court Division	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Belfast	3	3	2	1	0	9
Londonderry	0	1	0	1	0	2
Antrim	0	0	0	0	0	0

County Court Division	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Fermanagh and Tyrone	0	0	0	0	0	0
Armagh and South Down	0	0	0	1	0	1
Ards	1	0	1	1	0	3
Craigavon	0	1	0	0	1	2
Total	4	5	3	4	1	17

Note:

Data for 2011 are provisional

There were no cases with the combination of Supervision and Treatment Order and a Hospital Order in the last 5 years.

Enniskillen Court House: Double Yellow Lines

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the impact on public confidence in the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service's decision to close five courthouses arising from the Service's failure to consult adequately on the double yellow lines outside Enniskillen Court House and their subsequent removal.

(AQW 11206/11-15)

Mr Ford: I do not consider that these matters are connected.

Separated Prisoners in Roe House, Maghaberry Prison

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 4438/11-15, for a breakdown of the £104,761 non-payroll cost of running Roe House.

(AQW 11210/11-15)

Mr Ford: Table A below details the breakdown of the total non payroll cost of running Roe House residential accommodation from 1 November 2010 to 31 October 2011.

Table A

Area	Cost
Staff Uniforms	34661.47
Office Supplies	14410.95
Fixtures & Fittings	149.10
Health & Safety Costs	204.87
Local Damage repairs	97.47
Amenities – including: Electrical appliances Cell furniture Cleaning materials	33431.94
Accommodation Waste	1012.40
Prisoners Earnings (PREPS)	13261.60
Prisoners Clothing	684.54
Prisoners Toiletries	5765.83
Prisoner Recreational activities	678.68
Prisoner Initiatives Activities	402.45
Total	104761.30

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Justice how many Policing and Community Safety Partnerships have been unable to appoint their full quota of independent members.

(AQW 11283/11-15)

Mr Ford: The process of appointing independent members to Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) and District Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (DPCSPs) is a restricted function of the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

However, the Board has confirmed that the following Policing and Community Safety Partnerships were unable to appoint their full quota of independent members: Castlereagh; Coleraine; Dungannon and South Tyrone; and North Down. The Board is currently liaising with PCSPs and Councils in these areas to determine the best way forward to fill the vacancies.

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what vetting procedures or other measures are in place to prevent members of paramilitary organisations or terrorists, past or present, from serving on the new Policing and Community Safety Partnerships.

(AQW 11291/11-15)

Mr Ford: While the process of appointing independent members to Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) and District Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (DPCSPs) is a restricted function of the Northern Ireland Policing Board, I understand that independent members are required to make a declaration against terrorism at the time of application.

The Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 also disqualifies individuals who have been convicted and served a sentence of imprisonment or detention from which they have not been discharged within the five year period prior to application from sitting as independent members of PCSPs or DPCSPs. A criminal records check is carried out on each applicant to confirm this is not the case.

Furthermore, independent members can be removed from a PCSP/DPCSP if they fail to disclose a conviction for a criminal offence or if they act in breach of the terms of a declaration against terrorism.

Political members are nominated to PCSPs/DPCSPs by their District Council, and are therefore not subject to the requirements set out above, but rather to those required for nomination as a councillor.

In addition, any member, whether political or independent, can be removed from a PCSP if they have been convicted of a criminal offence after their date of appointment.

Separated Prisoner Compact

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the separated prisoner compact point 3.3G 'Admitting a prisoner to separated conditions would not be likely to prejudice the maintenance of security or good order in prison', whether this point is being breached by republican separated prisoners on protest; and to explain why the situation is tolerated and allowed to continue.

(AQW 11292/11-15)

Mr Ford: Those republican prisoners currently on protest in Maghaberry prison are in dispute with prison authorities about their regime and entitlements. The protest is being managed through the application of a restricted regime (rule 32); this regime assists in maintaining good order and discipline. The Governor has determined that the ongoing protest is best managed within the separated unit but with the additional rule 32 restriction applied.

Punishment-Type Attacks: Compensation to Victims

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how much has been paid in compensation to victims of punishment-type attacks in each of the last five years.

(AQW 11295/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Compensation Agency's data base does not identify those claims made as a result of paramilitary assaults separately to other general criminal injury claims. This makes it very difficult to provide the information requested as it would require a significant manual exercise with disproportionate costs, and the information may not be completely accurate.

Punishment-Type Attacks: Compensation to Victims

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the compensation payment for victims of punishment-type attacks, broken down by (i) injury; and (ii) limb.

(AQW 11296/11-15)

Mr Ford: Pursuant to AQW/11295/11-15. The Compensation Agency's data base does not identify those claims made as a result of paramilitary assaults separately to other general criminal injury claims. This would make it difficult to provide an accurate breakdown of injuries and would involve a significant manual exercise with disproportionate costs.

Republican Separated Prisoners on Protest

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what percentage of the entire Northern Ireland prison population is currently made up of republican separated prisoners on protest.

(AQW 11376/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are currently 29 republican separated prisoners on protest. They make up 1.6% of the Northern Ireland prison population, as at 11 May 2012.

Payment of a Prisoner's Drug Debts

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the payment of a prisoner's drug debts, why prison staff who facilitated this action were not reported to the PSNI for failing to report a crime, under Section 5 of the Criminal Law (NI) Act 1967.

(AQW 11381/11-15)

Mr Ford: I would refer the Member to the reply I provided to him dated 23 March 2012 relating to AQW 9330/11-15. The Northern Ireland Prison Service did not consider that there was evidence of a criminal offence having been committed by staff. This view was confirmed by legal advisers.

Republican Separated Prisoners

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice why alternative search arrangements are being sought in line with the demands of republican separated prisoners on protest when they have signed the required separated compact, of which point 13.1 states that prisoners 'will be required to co-operate with all searches including full searches'.

(AQW 11384/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I stated in the Assembly on 1 May, this is not an issue for one group of prisoners, it is an issue for the entire Northern Ireland Prison Service. Officials within NIPS are taking forward work to implement pilot schemes in Magilligan Prison and Hydebank Wood YOC to address recommendation eight in the Prison Review Team's Final Report. Recommendation eight stated that 'efforts should be continued to see whether there is an effective and less intrusive method than full body-searching of ensuring that prisoners leaving and entering prison are not bringing in contraband'. I remain firmly of the view that all prisoners and all staff would benefit from ensuring that we carry out searching in our prisons in a way that is less demeaning than it currently is for both staff and prisoners.

Sexual Offences Prevention Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 10454/11-15, if he will supply the information requested on breaches in whichever format is available.

(AQW 11405/11-15)

Mr Ford: I would refer the Member to my answer to AQW/11058/11-15 for written answer on 16 May 2012. Table 2 of that answer provides a breakdown of the number of defendants convicted for a breach of a Sexual Offences Prevention Order by calendar year and County Court Division.

Barristers: Legal Aid Payments List

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 10811/11-15, and with the exception of the stated case, how many (i) barristers; and (ii) legal companies objected to the publication of these details; and of these, how many (a) had their objection overruled; and (b) withdrew their objection.

(AQW 11462/11-15)

Mr Ford: With the exception of the case mentioned in AQW10811/11-15, the Legal Services Commission (the Commission) received representations from one other individual, a barrister, who restated the view that there was no need for the Commission to publish names along with legal aid earnings. As the Commission had considered similar objections previously, it took the view that the representations did not prevent publication.

Laundered DERV

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Justice what plans he has to introduce legislation to address the problem of people selling laundered DERV.

(AQW 11479/11-15)

Mr Ford: Fuel laundering is an issue of tax evasion, and while it is a key element of the work of the Organised Crime Task Force, the operational activity is led by colleagues in HMRC. They will often be supported by other agencies such as the Serious Organised Crime Agency or PSNI.

The existing legislation surrounding laundering and selling of rebated diesel which has been altered to give it the appearance of white diesel is clear. Under section 170 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979, fraudulent evasion of duty in relation to oils is a criminal offence.

In addition, the existing legislation allows for the seizure and dismantling of fuel laundering sites, and for the pursuit of assets which are believed to have been obtained using the proceeds of criminal activity.

In 2009/10 it is estimated that £70m was lost in tax revenue in Northern Ireland, down from £250m just five years ago.

Although taxation of fuels is a reserved matter, I am considering legislating to add evasion of duty in relation to oils to the offences which are referable to the Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland as unduly lenient.

Court Cases: Dismissals by a Judge

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice how many court cases have been dismissed by a judge, in the last twelve months, on the grounds of the failure of the Public Prosecution Service to provide the relevant papers at the preliminary inquiry stage.
(AQW 11634/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service IT system records how charges are dealt with at committal proceedings, but the specific reasons for these decisions are not recorded.

Therefore it is not possible to say how many cases were dismissed on the grounds of the failure of the Public Prosecution Service to provide the relevant papers at the Preliminary Inquiry stage.

The Life Sentences (Northern Ireland) Order 2001: Article 7, Paragraph 3

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether he has ever received a notification from the Secretary of State under Article 7 paragraph 3 of the Life Sentences (Northern Ireland) Order 2001 and; (ii) if so, whether the notification was related to any individuals who are currently in prison.
(AQW 11637/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have received no notifications from the Secretary of State under Article 7 paragraph 3 of the Life Sentences (Northern Ireland) Order 2001.

Attorney General v the Rt Hon Peter Hain MP

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the cost of; and (ii) the man-hours spent to date, by the Northern Ireland Court Service, on the action taken by the Attorney General against the Rt Hon Peter Hain MP; and for an estimate of the final cost and man-hours of this case.
(AQW 11706/11-15)

Mr Ford: The case of the Attorney General v The Right Honourable Peter Hain MP and Biteback Publishing Limited was concluded on 17 May 2012. The final estimated costs associated with the case are approximately £2,690. This represents approximately sixteen judicial and staff man-hours.

Department for Regional Development

Cyclists

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development how many cyclists regularly use the roads.
(AQW 10968/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I can advise the Member that I remain committed to supporting the use of sustainable transportation of which cycling has an important role to play. My Department does not record the number of cyclists using public roads however the Annual Cycle Usage Report for Northern Ireland 2000 – 2010 contains information on the average daily flow of cycles recorded at locations throughout Northern Ireland over the 11 year period with increases of over 47% in the number of cyclists across N. Ireland. The report is currently being updated.

A5 Project

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the A5 project, when the report will be published.
(AQW 10974/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it received the Inspector's Report on the A5 Western Transport Corridor Public Inquiry on 24 February 2012, and officials are currently reviewing the issues arising out of this Report.

It is anticipated that the Departmental Statement, which is the Department's response to the Inspector's Report, will be published in early summer. The Inspector's Report will also be made available to the public at that time.

Public Consultations

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the public consultations carried out by his Department in the last five years; and how many responses were received to each consultation.

(AQW 10998/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The list of consultations from my Department and number of responses to each in the last 5 years are as follows:

	Completed consultations DRD 2007-2012	Date Published	Number of responses received
1	Accessible Transport Strategy Draft Action Plan 20012-2015	2012	24
2	Disability Action Plan 2012	2012	4
3	EQIA of the RDS 2035	2012	129
4	Equality Impact Assessment on the Policy to Permit Return Rail Journeys to be Purchased using Half Fare Smartpasses Only	2012	7
5	Building an Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland	2011	34
6	Draft Budget - Departmental Spending and Savings Plans 2011-2015	2011	82
7	Draft EQIA of the Belfast Rapid Transit proposals	2011	3
8	Draft Equality Impact Assessment on Departmental Spending and Savings Plans 2011-2015	2011	9
9	Equality Scheme 2011 - 2016	2011	8
10	North South Collaborative Spatial planning Framework - Consultation document	2011	21
11	Regional Transportation Strategy - A Sustainable Transport Future	2011	355
12	Regional Transportation Strategy - A Sustainable Transport Future (Draft Equality Impact Assessment)	2011	0
13	Regional Transportation Strategy - A Sustainable Transport Future (Draft Habitats Assessment)	2011	1
14	Regional Transportation Strategy - A Sustainable Transport Future (Draft Integrated Impact Assessment)	2011	0
15	Regional Transportation Strategy - A Sustainable Transport Future (Environmental Report)	2011	1
16	Route Options for Belfast Rapid Transit	2011	192
17	Belfast On The Move	2010	67
18	Bilingual Traffic Signs	2010	101
19	Public Transport Reform	2010	103
20	RDS Public Consultation & Environmental Report	2010	129
21	Review of Financial Assistance for Domestic Properties Not Served By a Water Main 2010	2010	50
22	Accessible Transport Strategy Draft Action Plan 2009-2012	2009	37
23	Belfast Rapid Transit	2009	36
24	Draft Social and Environmental Guidance - 2009	2009	29
25	Guidance on Port Master Plans - A consultation paper	2009	32
26	Rathlin Island Policy	2009	15
27	RDS Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report	2009	4

	Completed consultations DRD 2007-2012	Date Published	Number of responses received
28	Regional Transport Strategy Discussion Document	2009	38
29	Restricted Zone Access Permits	2009	22
30	Consultation on Policy Proposals for a Roads (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill	2008	29
31	Equality Impacts of DRD Elements of draft PfG 2008/11, Draft Budget 2008/11 and draft Investment Strategy - Equality Unit	2008	7
32	Setting Local Speed Limits	2008	55
33	Water Supply - Water Fittings 2008	2008	12
34	Water Supply - Water Quality Amendment Regulations 2008	2008	14
35	Accessible Transport Strategy Draft Action Plan 2007-2009	2007	14
36	Disability Action Plan 2007	2007	5
37	Draft Charges Scheme for NIWL 2007	2007	38

Developments: Gortmerron Link, Dungannon

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the Brookfield Road, Brookfield Mews, Brookfield Glen and Brookfield Crescent developments in the Gortmerron Link area of Dungannon have been adapted.

(AQW 11031/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Brookfield Road, Brookfield Mews, Brookfield Glen and Brookfield Crescent developments in the Gortmerron Link area of Dungannon have not been adopted.

Road Bond: Princetoon, Portavogie

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps Roads Service has taken to ensure that the conditions attached to the road bond for Princetoon, Portavogie are met and that the road is adopted.

(AQW 11093/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service is endeavouring to progress the adoption of this site through liaison with the developer and other statutory bodies, in particular Northern Ireland Water in relation to provision of a pumping station.

As soon as the aforementioned matter is resolved, Roads Service will consider enforcement action, should the developer not complete the works without delay.

Unadopted Roads: Strangford Constituency

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 3650/11-15, what steps Roads Service has taken to ensure that the conditions attached to the road bond for East Street Court, Newtownards are met and that the road is adopted.

(AQW 11094/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has informed me that East Street Court, Newtownards has not been adopted into the public road network as the developer is yet to complete outstanding works relating to the provision of street lighting and it is also awaiting receipt of the necessary clearance from Northern Ireland Water in respect of the sewers. In addition, an engineer's certificate is being sought from the developer in relation to a retaining wall bordering the site. My officials will endeavour to progress these particular issues in an effort to expedite adoption.

Northern Ireland Water: Regulatory Compliance

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development how many inspections to ensure regulatory compliance Northern Ireland Water has carried out on (i) domestic; and (ii) commercial properties in each of the last five years.

(AQW 11095/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that accurate electronic records of Water Regulation inspections (formerly known as plumbing inspections) are only available from 1 January 2010, following the introduction of the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations (NI) 2009.

Details of inspections between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2011 are set out in the table.

Inspections	1 January 2010 to 31 December 2010	1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011
(i) Domestic	41	252
(ii) Non-domestic	549	648
Total	590	900

NIW publishes an annual return on its water regulation inspections, activities and findings in its Drinking Water Quality Report.

Plumbing Inspectors

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development how many plumbing inspectors, with responsibility for site plumbing inspections, have been engaged on behalf of Northern Ireland Water in each of the last five years.

(AQW 11096/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the total number of water regulation inspectors, formerly known as plumbing inspectors, engaged during each of the past five years is as follows.

Year	Number of Inspectors
2007/08	8
2008/09	8
2009/10	8
2010/11	6
2011/12	6

Housing Developments: Inspections

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline Northern Ireland Water's obligations in relation to the number, or percentage, of inspections that should be carried out on housing developments to ensure that water mains and fittings comply with British standards.

(AQW 11097/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations (NI) 2009 are designed to protect consumers and the environment from poor water quality, unnecessary waste, misuse and the contamination of wholesome water supplies. All water systems must comply with the Regulations and can be subject to inspections. However, there is no specific number or percentage of inspections required under the Regulations.

Inspections are carried out on a risk based approach determined by a property's water use and the potential risk of it contaminating the public water supply should any back flow or erroneous cross connections occur. There are five categories of risk ranging from lowest to highest, and property types are allocated to a category based on national guidance. In line with the water companies in GB, NIW arranges water regulation inspections across all categories but places greater emphasis on the higher risk categories. Domestic properties in new housing developments are normally classified in a low risk category.

NIW publishes an annual return on its water regulations inspections, activities and findings in its Drinking Water Quality Report.

Departmental Guidance: FD DFP 01/09

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 10464/11-15, whether the contracts that have been awarded in respect of the A5 road project, and the process by which they were awarded, comply with the relevant Department of Finance and Personnel requirements.

(AQW 11118/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has worked closely with the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) in managing the funding and financial procedures associated with the A5 project and to ensure compliance with the relevant requirements. As agreed with DFP, the contracts awarded in respect of the A5 project, include a break point to allow consideration of the Business Case, which must be approved by DFP before the contracts continue into the construction phase.

Bicycles: Safe Storage for Train Passengers

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Regional Development what provision is made for the safe storage of bicycles by train passengers at local railway stations.

(AQW 11182/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that a large number of its transport facilities have dedicated covered bicycle parking facilities which are provided free of charge.

Dedicated bicycle parking facilities, which have been developed in consultation with Sustrans, are available at the following rail locations:

- Antrim Bus and Rail Station
- Bangor Bus and Rail Station
- Carrickfergus Rail Station
- Central Rail Station
- Coleraine Rail Station
- Europa Bus Centre/Great Victoria Street Rail Station
- Hollywood Rail Station
- Lisburn Rail Station
- Lurgan Rail Station
- Moira Rail Station
- Portadown Rail Station

A8 Road Project

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) when the business case was submitted and approved for the A8 road project; (ii) how old were the traffic volume figures on which it was based; and (iii) how do these figures compare with current traffic figures, including heavy port traffic.

(AQW 11193/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service submitted its Business Case for the proposed A8 scheme to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) on 8 March 2012. DFP approved funding for the scheme on 4 April 2012.

The Business Case for the scheme is based on a traffic model developed using a variety of traffic survey data collected between March and April 2008. The model was validated to ensure it replicated the existing traffic situation as close as possible, in accordance with the guidance and requirements outlined in the Department for Transport's Design Manual for Roads and Bridges.

There are two permanent traffic counters on this section of the existing A8 which are used to monitor and record traffic flows. The data from these two sites show overall traffic, including heavy port traffic, has reduced by approximately 4% since 2008. However, the general trend over the last 10 years for traffic volumes, including the heavy port traffic, has been an increase.

NI Water Budget

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 10573/11-15, to detail the gross profit made by NI Water in each of the last three years, including a breakdown of tax, and the dividends paid to his Department.

(AQW 11240/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that its gross profit, tax and dividend paid to the Department for Regional Development (DRD) in each of the last three years was as follows:

	2009/10 £000	2010/11 £000	2011/12 £000
Profit before income tax and dividend	95,128	112,172	Not yet available
Income tax expense	37,185	31,714	
Profit after income tax and before dividend	57,943	80,458	
Dividend paid to DRD	35,006	36,028	

Notes:

- 1) Figures are extracted from NIW's audited statutory accounts.
- 2) A dividend is paid to DRD in respect of the activities for the preceding year.
- 3) The accounts have been prepared under International Financial Reporting Standards which requires that assets adopted by the company, mainly sewers, are treated as income and contribute directly to profit. These assets increased income and therefore profit by approximately £46m in 2010/11 (£19m 2009/10).
- 4) The asset adoptions, treated as income in the accounts, did not provide NIW with additional funds to spend.

- 5) The profits do not indicate that customers were being over-charged. Indeed below inflation price increases were passed on to non-domestic customers in 2011/12.

Northern Ireland Railways: Signal Box at Londonderry

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the Northern Ireland Railway signal box at Londonderry will remain open after the track is relayed.

(AQW 11404/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that the replacement and upgrade of the signalling system between Coleraine and Londonderry is scheduled to take place during 2014/15. As a result of these works the signal cabins at Castlerock and Londonderry will close and the signalling control for this section of the line will be relocated to Coleraine signal cabin. It is currently estimated that this will take place during the summer of 2015.

A2 Belfast to Bangor Dual Carriageway: Manhole Repairs

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the manhole repairs on the A2 Belfast to Bangor dual carriageway at the Devil's Elbow (i) why it took almost a week to complete; (ii) why interim measures were not put in place, including a steel plate over the manhole, to allow traffic to flow during peak times; and (iii) what management processes will be put in place to avoid any recurrence of traffic problems in the future.

(AQW 11541/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Road Service has advised that it became aware of a potential safety hazard associated with an inspection chamber, belonging to British Telecom (BT), in the vicinity of the Devil's Elbow at around 17:00 on 4 May 2012. Roads Service advised BT of the potential safety issue soon afterwards and the site was immediately secured using cones and warning signs erected by a contractor working for BT.

Roads Service officials further advise that the initial assessment provided by the contractor indicated that temporary traffic management (TTM) measures would be required. As a result, an emergency lane closure was deemed appropriate given the lower volumes of traffic expected over the weekend. Roads Service considered the TTM proposed adequate and contacted local media outlets to warn motorists of possible delays as a result of this work.

Following a more detailed examination of the chamber by the BT Contractor, it was decided that full reconstruction of the chamber would be required. Roads Service officials have confirmed that this work commenced immediately, and a new chamber was cast in concrete on Saturday 5 May 2012. At this time, Roads Service officials continued to liaise with BT representatives to determine the earliest time that the lane restriction could be removed and were advised by the BT contractor that restrictions should remain in place until 10 May 2012 by which time the new chamber would have sufficient strength to carry traffic. Traffic restrictions were removed around midday on the 10 May 2012.

Roads Service officials considered that a tidal contra-flow (TCF) system for managing traffic would be the best and least disruptive TTM measure in these circumstances. However, due to physical constraints, such as the adjacent signalised junction, central island, side roads, private accesses and narrow traffic lanes within the potential TCF zone, this form of traffic management could not be implemented without compromising the safety of road users. Similarly, health and safety concerns precluded the use of temporary metal plates.

Roads Service officials advise that they will review this incident with BT and other Statutory Bodies, with a view to establishing if additional procedures could be put in place to ensure that the disruption arising from such incidents can be minimised in the future.

Roads Service has contacted BT to highlight its concerns about the disruption caused by this incident. I am content that my Roads Service officials acted promptly and carried out their responsibilities in a timely and professional manner to ensure that any potential danger to the travelling public was mitigated and the necessary action was taken.

Department for Social Development

Organisations or Projects in the Sandy Row, Donegall Road and Village Areas of South Belfast

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding his Department and its arm's-length bodies have given to organisations or projects in the (i) Sandy Row; and (ii) Donegall Road and Village areas of South Belfast in each of the last ten years; and from which funding streams was each allocation made.

(AQW 10834/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Table 1 below provides the details requested in respect of Sandy Row:

TABLE 1 SANDY ROW £

Funding Stream	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund (commenced 2003)	-	-	106,017	163,755	165,802	383,795	703,907	208,562	186,389
Community Volunteering Scheme 2006/10	-	-	-	-	970	990	950	-	-
Volunteer Bureaux Initiative 2010/11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,100	-
Urban Development Grant	-	-	-	274,724	-	-	1,300,000	-	-
Estate based cohesion project budget	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20,000
Regeneration Services Budget	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10,000
Supported People Funding(commenced 2003)	31,259	32,197	28,575	34,466	37,259	37,764	35,506	31,035	28,979
Housing Association Grant	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,000,000	-

Table 2 below provides the details requested in respect of Donegal Road and Village areas of South Belfast:

TABLE 2 DONEGAL ROAD AND VILLAGE AREAS OF SOUTH BELFAST £

Funding Stream	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund(commenced 2003)	-	5,349	150,310	397,506	466,136	517,028	436,130	316,192	419,752
Public Realm - Capital	-	-	-	-	150,000	-	-	180,000	-
Local Community Fund 2003/04	4,615	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Local Community Fund 2005/06	-	-	70,873	-	-	-	-	-	-
Active Community Initiative 2003/04	31,800	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Community Volunteering Scheme 2006/10	-	-	-	16,370	19,717	19,416	1,100	-	-
Executive Programme Fund for short-term (commenced 2003)	90,675	92,596	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Funding Stream	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Short Term Support to Women's Sector Organisations (commenced 2005)	-	-	132,731	28,015	-	-	-	-	-
Children and Young People Funding Package. Voluntary and Community Sector Projects (commenced 2006)	-	-	-	48,031	106,443	-	-	-	-
Community Investment Fund 2006/09	-	-	-	-	45,581	76,897	-	-	-
Community Investment Fund 2009/12	-	-	-	-	-	-	70,000	67,211	66,539
Women's Centres Childcare Fund (commenced 2008)	-	-	-	-	-	109,371	112,023	112,023	117,023
Urban Development Grant	-	-	-	-	223,125	74,375	-	-	-
Community Development Budget	10,400	10,600	8,200	14,395	13,470	13,897	13,775	14,100	14,100
Estate based cohesion project budget	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15,000
Supported People Funding (commenced April 2003)	363,677	366,907	364,780	380,089	321,633	273,331	267,453	261,773	254,148
Housing Association Grant	-	-	-	3,100,000	-	1,500,000	-	-	-

In addition to the funding detailed above, Private Sector Grants were also paid but the breakdown can only be provided by District Council area. Table 3 below therefore, provides details of funding provided within Belfast City Council area over the last ten years:

TABLE 3 Belfast City Council Private Sector Grants £

2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
10,459,000	11,002,000	11,779,000	12,236,000	11,798,000	10,111,000	8,484,000	8,639,000	3,439,000	2,720,000

It should be noted that the details provided prior to 2005 may not be complete as there was no requirement to maintain a database prior to this date.

Housing Need

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the current housing need; and (ii) the housing need in each of the last five years in the (a) Rasharkin; (b) Ballymoney; (c) Dunloy; (d) Cloughmills; and (e) Loughgiel areas.

(AQW 10856/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details the five year projected need figures and the current housing need in the areas in question. Housing need figures are based on a five year period and are reviewed annually.

5 Year Projected Social Housing Need

Area	March 2007 - 12	March 2008 - 13	March 2009 - 14	March 2010 - 15	March 2011 - 16
Rasharkin	20	30	15	6	6
Ballymoney Town	55	50	45	10	10
Dunloy	10	10	6	6	6
Cloughmills	6	6	8	9	6
Loughgiel	0	0	0	0	0

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.

Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are in receipt of (i) Jobseekers Allowance; and (ii) Income Support in the Glens area of East Antrim.

(AQW 10917/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department does not hold information at the geographical level requested. The table below shows the number of people in receipt of (i) Jobseekers Allowance and (ii) Income Support in the two district council areas in which the Glens lie.

Local Government District	Jobseekers Allowance Claimants	Income Support Claimants
Larne	720	1,130
Moyle	600	700

Data Source: Northern Ireland Benefits Statistics Summary November 2011d

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.

Welfare Reform

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the proposed changes under Welfare Reform, for his assessment of the potential impact on the level of rent arrears within the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

(AQW 10978/11-15)

Mr McCausland: At the present time the Housing Executive is unable to definitively quantify the likely impact of Welfare Reform. Research and investigations are currently underway to determine the potential impact of Welfare Reform on a number of functions within the organisation. Data is still to be captured which will provide a basis for analysis to be carried out which will provide a definitive estimate on the potential increase in rent arrears. I am taking forward a number of actions to ensure that appropriate housing services and support are in place to assist those impacted by the changes.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive Properties

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the percentage of Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties whose occupants are not in work, or have earned income arising from work.

(AQW 10979/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that a survey-based estimate from their Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey states that 77% of their tenant households have no-one in paid employment. This includes households who are not of working age.

Housing Executive Stock: Proposed Transfer

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how, in any proposed transfer of Housing Executive stock to a body created to replace it, the amount of overhead and corporate debt apportioned to each property will be accounted for at the time of transfer.

(AQW 10982/11-15)

Mr McCausland: PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has completed an independent Fundamental Review of the Housing Executive. Their report contained a number of proposals which included the separation of the Housing Executive Landlord and Strategic functions. All proposals for change to the current Housing Model will be subject to detailed design, this will include full consideration of the options for dealing with stock and corporate debt.

Amateur Boxing Clubs: Funding

Mr Allister asked for Social Development to detail the level of funding his Department and its arm's-length bodies have allocated to amateur boxing clubs in each of the last five years, including the amount awarded to each club.

(AQW 11013/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Please see the attached table detailing the level of funding provided to amateur boxing clubs in the last five years.

Public Realm Scheme: Dungannon Town Centre

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Social Development whether a date for the commencement of the Public Realm Scheme in Dungannon town centre has been confirmed; and if not, to detail the reasons for the delay.

(AQW 11054/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The date for commencement of the construction of the Dungannon Public Realm scheme has not yet been confirmed. There have been several issues beyond the control of either my Department or Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council which have led to delays on the start of this scheme. These include:

- A requirement to undertake additional traffic modelling requested by the Roads Service;
- Insufficient capital funding in my Department's budget in the 2010/11 financial year which meant that work on the procurement could not be progressed; and
- A need to address concerns over the location of a pedestrian crossing raised by a local retailer which required negotiation with Translink and the Roads Service.

All of these issues have now been resolved and the tender documents for the construction phase of the project have been prepared for issue. However, as the original approval for this scheme was granted in December 2007 it has been necessary to revisit the original Business Case, update the costs and refer the scheme back to the Department of Finance and Personnel for approval to proceed. An Addendum to the cost information in the original Business Case is currently being prepared for submission to DFP. Upon receipt of DFP approval, the tendering for the construction of Dungannon Public Realm Phase 1 will commence immediately.

Limited Capability for Work Questionnaire

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will ensure that Atos Healthcare professionals are required to seek GP and/or further medical evidence in all cases where customers state on their Limited Capability for Work Questionnaire (ESA50) that they are, or have recently been, undergoing treatment for cancer related illnesses.

(AQW 11081/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The requirement to seek GP and/or further medical evidence is dependent on the circumstances of each individual case.

It is not necessary for Atos Healthcare Professionals to seek GP and/or further medical evidence in all cases where customers state on their medical questionnaire (ESA 50) that they are, or have recently been, undergoing treatment for cancer related illnesses. Where it is evident that the customer is receiving, or likely to receive (within the next 6 months), certain forms of chemotherapy (intravenous, intraperitoneal or intrathecal) or radiotherapy, the customer will be assigned to the Support Group without the need for further medical evidence or attendance at a medical assessment. These claims will be periodically reviewed to ensure that customers continue to receive the right amount of benefit.

In circumstances where the customer has not provided sufficient information about their cancer related illness, e.g. type, duration, etc., or have not stated the type of treatment they are receiving on their medical questionnaire (ESA 50), a Healthcare Professional may consider it necessary to approach the customer's GP for further medical evidence in order to determine if the customer can be assigned to the Support Group without the need to attend a medical examination.

If a customer states that they have had cancer on their medical questionnaire (ESA 50) but that the cancer related treatment ceased more than six months ago, a Healthcare Professional will not seek GP and/or further medical evidence. The customer will be asked to attend a medical examination to determine if they have limited capability for work.

Employment and Support Allowance Claimants

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Employment and Support Allowance claimants to date who have (i) appealed against a Work Capability Assessment decision; (ii) had their appeals heard; and (iii) been through the ATOS Healthcare formal complaint procedure.

(AQW 11113/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

- i) The information is not available in the format requested. However, I can advise that since the launch of Employment and Support Allowance in October 2008 until end of March 2012, the Department had received a total of 22,159 Employment and Support Allowance appeals against the decisions made by departmental decision makers.
- ii) At the end of March 2012, the results of 12,061 Employment and Support Allowance appeals had been received.
- iii) Since June 2011, 84 customers have been through the ATOS Healthcare formal complaint process.

Newbuild Social Housing

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the new build social housing schemes that Housing Associations have planned for the Bangor area in this financial year.

(AQW 11161/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Details of the exact schemes across Northern Ireland have now been published on the Housing Executive website (www.nihe.gov.uk). This provides members with the most up to date way of assessing schemes as it is updated on a weekly basis.

Lock Out Crime Scheme

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department intends to introduce a scheme similar to the previous Lock Out Crime Scheme.

(AQW 11163/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The previous "Lock Out Crime Scheme", which was a three year crime reduction initiative launched in May 2004, was funded by the Northern Ireland Office at a cost of almost £3m and was delivered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The Department of Justice has advised me that it has no plans to reintroduce such a scheme but anticipates that the newly established Policing and Community Safety Partnerships will include initiatives aimed at improving home security and reducing the fear of crime in their local plans.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive Properties

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the scheme which allows Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties to be transferred to housing associations, including the (i) anticipated uptake in 2011/12; (ii) actual uptake in 2011/12 and (iii) total number of properties that have been transferred to each housing association to date.

(AQW 11209/11-15)

Mr McCausland: To date only 55 properties in Rinmore in Londonderry have been transferred into Housing Association ownership following a tenant vote. While the transfer process seemed more protracted than was first envisaged the end results for tenants has been very positive, in part due to the extensive consultation carried out in the lead up to transfer and the ongoing engagement with Apex Housing Association since.

Following the success of this pilot, I asked the Housing Executive to bring forward a substantial Programme over the next 3 years that could see up to 2,000 more homes improved as part of this sort of initiative. I expect this Programme within the coming weeks and of course just as in Rinmore, the eventual success or take up will be entirely down to the tenants to decide as they will be consulted on a scheme by scheme basis before a vote is undertaken on any transfer of their homes.

Renting of Social Housing

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the differences in the guidance and legislation that regulates the renting of social housing from (i) the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; (ii) housing associations; and (iii) private landlords.

(AQW 11211/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is a statutory body whose functions are detailed in housing legislation. Registered Housing Associations are voluntary bodies whose registration with the Department is subject to meeting eligibility criteria set out in Article 15 of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1992. Given the different status and funding arrangements, the Department regulates the Housing Executive and registered housing associations in different ways.

There are common forms of tenancy across all social housing and, whoever their landlord, social tenants enjoy, in law, similar rights and have similar responsibilities. As a statutory body, many of the Housing Executive's requirements to provide tenant services, such as repairs, are established in legislation. Similar requirements are placed on registered housing associations in the Housing Association Guide.

Private landlords do not provide social housing. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive contracts some temporary accommodation for homeless households from the private rented sector. This has to meet all minimum statutory standards for private rented accommodation as well as adhere to any particular conditions specified by Housing Executive as part of the contract.

Northern Ireland Housing Association Guide

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the Northern Ireland Housing Association Guide, including the number of revisions made and the rationale for each revision.

(AQW 11212/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My assessment is that the Housing Association (HA) Guide is one of the key management tools employed by my Department (DSD) to deliver its regulatory responsibilities for Housing Associations. It sets out the Department's guidelines for Registered Housing Associations requiring robust policy and procedural standards across all Associations and equitable quality service provision for social housing tenants. In 2010 the Guide underwent a fundamental review.

The guide is constantly being kept up to date. In 2009/10 14 amendments were made, in 2010/11 42 amendments were made and so far this year there has been 17 amendments. Below are the links where these amendments and their rationale can be found.

2009/10:

www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/hsdiv-housing/ha_guide/hag-amendments/hag-amendments-archive-2009-10.htm

2010/11:

www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/hsdiv-housing/ha_guide/hag-amendments/hag-amendments-archive-2010-11.htm

2011/12:

www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/hsdiv-housing/ha_guide/hag-amendments.htm

Subletting of Housing Executive Properties

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development (i) for his assessment of the level of subletting of Housing Executive properties; (ii) how many people have been caught engaging in this practice in each of the last five years; and (iii) what punishments were imposed.

(AQW 11213/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Under the terms of a secure tenancy a tenant is entitled to sublet part of their dwelling house by virtue of Article 30 of the Housing (NI) Order 1983 which states the following: -

Terms of a secure tenancy N.I.

Subletting and lodgers N.I.

30.—(1) It is by virtue of this Article a term of every secure tenancy that the tenant may allow any persons to reside as lodgers in the dwelling-house.

(2) It is by virtue of this Article a term of every secure tenancy that the tenancy will not, without the written consent of the landlord, sublet or part with the possession of part of the dwelling-house.

(3) The consent required by virtue of this Article is not to be unreasonably withheld and, if unreasonably withheld, shall be treated as given.

(4) An application for the landlord's consent required by virtue of paragraph (2) shall be in writing.

However, under the terms of a secure tenancy Housing Executive tenants are not permitted under Article 30 to sublet their whole home. As such, it would be considered a breach of their tenancy obligations and would result in the Housing Executive seeking the termination of the tenancy and recovery of vacant possession of the property. Recovery action in these circumstances would be co-ordinated through individual district offices. The Housing Executive does not hold records regarding the number of cases pursued.

SS Nomadic

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development from where funding will be sourced to maintain the SS Nomadic once it has been refurbished,

(AQW 11234/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The estimated projected maintenance and running costs for the initial three years of operation once the SS Nomadic opens as a visitor and industrial maritime heritage attraction amounts to £1.55million; and, it is anticipated that these costs will be met from a combination of admission income, corporate sponsorship, venue hire, dining and café income, retail and booklet sales and a £535,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Employment and Support Allowance: Medical Examinations

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) how many complaints have been lodged about incidents or problems with the manner in which the Employment and Support Allowance medical examinations have been carried out; (ii) how many were upheld; (iii) how many are on-going; (iv) of those completed, how many led to reviews of decisions; and (v) how many staff (a) have been disciplined; (b) have had their employment terminated; and (c) have been retrained as a result of complaints.
(AQW 11246/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Atos Healthcare began providing Medical Support Services including Employment and Support Allowance medical examinations, on behalf of the Social Security Agency on 20 June 2011. Since then (i) there have been 22 complaints lodged about incidents or problems with the manner in which Employment and Support Allowance medical examinations have been carried out; (ii) one complaint has been upheld; and (iii) four complaints investigations are currently ongoing. (iv) there have been no reviews of Employment and Support Allowance decisions as a result of complaints regarding incidents or problems with the manner in which the Work Capability Assessment medical examination was conducted. (v) With regards staff, (a) there have been no staff disciplined; (b) there have been no staff who have had their employment terminated; and (c) there have been 3 staff retrained due to complaints and audit outcomes.

Employment and Support Allowance: Medical Examinations

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development what measures his Department has taken to ensure that the Employment and Support Allowance medical examinations are carried out in a fair, consistent and professional manner and to an acceptable standard.

(AQW 11249/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Employment and Support Allowance medical examinations are carried out by Atos Healthcare on behalf of the Social Security Agency. The Medical Support Services Agreement has a number of service levels which measure the performance of Atos Healthcare. In addition, the Social Security Agency has appointed a Health Assessment Advisor to quality assure the appointment of Healthcare Professionals, their training and the medical processes identified in the contract. These measures have been developed to ensure that medical assessments are carried out professionally and to an acceptable standard.

Social Fund: Abolition

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions he has had with the Department for Work and Pensions regarding (i) the abolition of the Social Fund; and (ii) whether money will be ring-fenced, at UK or the Northern Ireland level, to provide emergency funding for people facing hardship.

(AQW 11255/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

- (i) I have met with Department for Work and Pensions Ministers on several occasions since June 2011 during which I have discussed the reform of Social Fund as one element of the Welfare Reform Programme.
- (ii) On 26 April I brought forward for Executive consideration, proposals to develop a new discretionary payment scheme to replace Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans for Living Expenses and Household items.

The Executive agreed to this proposal and also agreed that funding transferred from Annually Managed Expenditure to Departmental Expenditure Limit for the delivery of discretionary support provision in Northern Ireland should be ring-fenced.

Houses in Multiple Occupancy

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his Department's assessment of whether the housing stock has the sufficient capacity to cope with the increased levels of demand for houses of multiple occupancy as a result of the changes to housing benefit.

(AQW 11256/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The precise effects of the Housing Benefit changes and their impacts on housing stock are not known at this time. The Housing Executive has identified around 5,000 existing Housing Benefit recipients who will be financially disadvantaged by the shared accommodation rate change. It is by no means certain that all of these people will have to move into houses in multiple occupation, as some may be able to fund additional rent themselves, others may make alternative arrangements and in other cases landlords may reduce rents. Those impacted may avail of Discretionary Housing Payments in certain circumstances. The Draft Housing Market Review and Perspectives 2012/15 reports that 7.9% of the total private rented sector stock are Houses in Multiple Occupation. This represents approximately 10,000 multiple occupancy units which equates to some 30,000 bedspaces. Although the Housing Executive are unable to confirm the exact number unoccupied, they continue to carry out work to identify the total number that are empty.

I have commissioned research to fully understand the impacts of the changes, but more importantly I am working with representatives from across the housing sector to ensure we have the right services and initiatives in place to support those impacted.

Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings Scheme

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development, in the case of Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings Scheme applications, whether the purchase price of a property will be the market price prior to the intimidation or attack.

(AQW 11266/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The procedure for the valuation of a property being purchased under the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings (SPED) scheme is as follows: The purchase price of a house acquired under SPED shall be determined by the Land and Property Services Agency of the Department of Finance and Personnel, at a consideration assessed as though the sale were by a willing vendor, in an open market and without adverse security considerations. "Without adverse security considerations" denotes that if the property being acquired under SPED was damaged as a result of incidents which prompted the owner to apply for the scheme, then that property would be valued as in an undamaged condition and thus allowing any forthcoming claim for damage to the property to be assigned to the Housing Executive. Therefore the valuation for any property being purchased shall be current market value, in an undamaged condition, at the date of the instruction letter to Land and Property Services Agency from the Housing Executive.

Emergency Grants

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will consider changing the criteria for emergency grants to allow private homeowners who are under threat or intimidation to apply, especially if they are in financial difficulty.

(AQW 11268/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive's Scheme for Emergency Grants is approved by my Department under Article 29A of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988. The Scheme provides that emergency grants are payable to tenants in the public or private rented sectors who have been awarded "intimidation points" by the Housing Executive. Earlier this year, the Housing Executive published a consultation paper which focussed on certain aspects of the Housing Selection Scheme, including the award of intimidation points. I am currently considering the need for a wide ranging review of the way social housing is accessed and allocated in Northern Ireland. It is likely that such a review would include an examination of the rules for awarding intimidation points, which may have implications for the Scheme for Emergency Grants.

While the Scheme for Emergency Grants provides for the payment of grant in circumstances where a tenant has become an owner occupier, an amendment to primary legislation would be required to allow private homeowners to apply for emergency grant.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has made an assessment of the numbers of people likely to be adversely affected by replacing the Disability Living Allowance with the Personal Independence Allowance.

(AQW 11271/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are currently 121,000 Working Age customers (aged 16-64) currently in receipt of Disability Living Allowance who will be affected by the introduction of Personal Independence Payment. All such customers will be invited to claim and be assessed for Personal Independence Payment. Children will continue to receive Disability Living Allowance provided they satisfy the conditions of that benefit until they reach age 16 and people over the age of 65 at 8 April 2013 who are already receiving Disability Living Allowance will continue to receive the benefit.

Whilst the legislative framework underpinning Personal Independence Payment has already been set out in the Welfare Reform Act in Great Britain, it is too early to assess the impact in Northern Ireland given the differences in the Disability Living Allowance caseload between Northern Ireland and Great Britain and that work to finalise key elements of the new benefit, including the assessment criteria and proposed thresholds for Personal Independence Payment, is still ongoing. Public consultation exercises have already been undertaken on the assessment criteria and proposed thresholds for Personal Independence Payment and one is currently ongoing on the design of the new benefit. This will close on 30 June 2012.

I fully understand and appreciate that existing Working Age Disability Living Allowance customers may be anxious and concerned about the change and my Department, through the Social Security Agency, will be working to fully support them on an individual basis as they encounter the new benefit.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the timescale for the introduction of a new Boiler Replacement Scheme.

(AQW 11273/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme has been very successful. Almost 1700 households have had inefficient boilers replaced under the scheme. I am now examining the evaluation of the pilot and I expect to make an announcement about a new Boiler Replacement Scheme in the near future.

Craigowen Lodge, Seahill, Holywood: Purchase

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development whether any funding has been requested or granted to allow the purchase of Craigowen Lodge, Seahill, Holywood for development as Social Housing by Hearth Housing Association.

(AQW 11282/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I understand that Craigowen Lodge is a listed building dating from 1851. Hearth Housing Association has surveyed the property and is still considering the potential of the site.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of boilers provided in South Down constituency through the Warm Homes Scheme in each of the last four years; and (ii) of these, how many have since been repaired or replaced.

(AQW 11313/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The new Warm Homes Scheme came into operation on 1 July 2009 and the Housing Executive as scheme administrators only hold information from that date. Under the current Warm Homes Scheme, 21 heating installations were installed in South Down in 2009/2010; 70 in 2010/2011 and 5 in 2011/2012. The Housing Executive is not responsible for repairs or replacements of boilers and is therefore not in a position to know how many have been repaired or replaced.

Funding

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the current level of funding allocated to each (a) neighbourhood renewal project; (b) Small Pockets of Deprivation area; and (c) Area at Risk; and (ii) the level of funding allocated and the projects supported in the 2011/12 financial year.

(AQW 11325/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Annex A

Neighbourhood Renewal Project	2011/12 (£)	2012/13 (£)
Limavady Borough Council	49356.50	0.00
Derry City Council	40054.78	40326.00
Cathedral Youth Club	35821.72	36282.64
Cathedral Youth Club	25339.22	24424.60
Community Restorative Justice	158049.10	159991.66
Dunluce Family Centre Ltd	65586.12	66262.56
Older People NW (Age Concern Derry)	54065.71	54815.16
International School for Peace Studies Ltd	234585.24	0.00
Creggan Country Park Enterprises Ltd	62573.28	63056.64
Strabane Community Project	29254.37	29896.64
Gasyard Development Trust	46888.58	46668.41
DSD Housing Division - NIHE	11630.13	11630.13
Bloody Sunday Trust	20892.16	21087.02
NW Play Resource Centre	44916.54	42611.16
Waterside Area Partnership	78862.30	79523.50
Strabane Ethnic Community Association	30991.16	31059.61
The Glens Community Association	42424.81	40473.26
Resource Centre Derry	68766.71	70470.02
Rosemount & District Welfare Rights Group	88077.32	87961.70
Creggan Pre-School & Training Trust Ltd	112546.90	112659.63
Gasyard Wall Feile	29425.35	29463.20

Neighbourhood Renewal Project	2011/12 (£)	2012/13 (£)
Clooney Estate Residents Association	44082.18	41481.44
Bogside & Brandywell Initiative	175319.19	149978.29
Triax	67091.06	64895.64
Caw/Nelson Drive Action Group	48910.97	49309.01
Liberty Consortium	32692.22	33064.58
Currynierin Community Association	26499.45	26369.17
Old Library Trust	52233.72	52668.00
Clooney Estate Residents Association	22463.76	22407.36
Derry Travellers Support Group	21283.37	0.00
Currynierin Community Association	24746.28	24689.88
Currynierin Community Association	59958.51	59432.74
Melmount EBA Comm Assoc Forum	41871.49	42154.60
Lisnafin/Ardnalee Trust Cross CDA	25800.63	29721.01
Springhill Park Community Development Association	49231.02	49205.15
Shantallow Community Residents Association	23875.05	0.00
Creggan Neighbourhood Partnership	29738.89	29680.93
Shantallow Community Residents Association	80710.18	0.00
Dove House Community Trust	75635.33	76486.28
Irish Street Community Association	61400.29	56785.95
Dove House Community Trust	52234.48	53193.02
Dove House Community Trust	24953.35	24827.82
Top of the Hill 2010	67594.87	66291.24
Triax	236299.00	98541.25
Top of the Hill 2010	21514.53	21397.86
Waterside Neighbourhood Partnership	31156.96	38789.64
Galliagh Community Development Group	35348.68	39354.88
Galliagh Community Development Group	38073.64	38073.64
Hillcrest House Ltd	42510.04	42771.23
Greater Shantallow Area Partnership	84406.22	84600.52
Neighbourhood Renewal Project		
Greater Shantallow Area Partnership	44717.32	44078.72
Ballymagroarty/Hazelbank Community Partnership	122708.51	121692.86
Greater Shantallow Community Arts	37869.09	37749.52
Irish Street Community Association	11854.68	11796.72
Triax	83476.05	0.00
Londonderry Citizens Advice Bureau	126489.82	127201.15
Roe Valley Residents Association	38222.22	38263.02
An Gaelaras	25414.27	25262.06

Neighbourhood Renewal Project	2011/12 (£)	2012/13 (£)
Glen Development Initiative	83466.92	83870.95
Western Education & Library Board	91208.24	91015.00
Strabane Sigerson's GAA	29731.88	29763.80
St Columb's Cathedral	28737.24	28854.96
Outer West Ltd	37994.90	30226.86
Strabane & Lifford LGBT Group	41710.51	42120.19
SEEDS	26077.36	0.00
Fountain Primary School	15984.77	15984.77
Fountain Street Community Development Association	43100.99	43070.51
HURT	10160.00	10160.00
Limavady Borough Council	30093.06	30226.86
Foyle Womens Aid	22773.20	22762.16
Gingerbread NI	43235.96	42572.92
Tullyally & District Development Group Ltd	69367.99	0.00
Strabane & District Citizens Advice Bureau	42220.52	39257.12
Strabane Local Strategy Partnership	55416.05	50849.19
Tullyally & District Development Group Ltd	35948.62	0.00
Limavady Borough Council	14226.24	0.00
Resource Centre Derry	29698.32	30300.44
Derry City Council	89229.57	88903.32
Limavady Community Development Initiative	19128.22	19036.09
WHSSB	229565.50	203663.00
Limavady Borough Council (Rivers Agency - Western Region)	125000.00	0.00
Derry City Council	186808.94	0.00
Caw/Nelson Drive Action Group	50000.00	0.00
Galliagh Development Trust	33887.74	0.00
Old Library Trust	11793.22	0.00
Shantallow Community Residents Association	0.00	104296.11
174 Trust After Schools Club	11221.80	0.00
174 TRUST AFTERSCHOOL CLUB	2100.00	0.00
An Droichead Limited Core Costs	47556.72	0.00
An Munia Tober Salaries & Running Costs	87619.44	0.00
Andersonstown Traditional & Contemp Music Salary-Class Co-Ordinator/ Administrator	42517.00	0.00
Ardmonagh Family And Community Group Salary	80760.66	0.00
Ardoyne Association Community Contact/Admin Worker, Implementation Of Neighbourhood Renewal	13628.16	0.00
Ardoyne Women's Group	50879.00	0.00

Neighbourhood Renewal Project	2011/12 (£)	2012/13 (£)
Ardoyne Youth Providers Forum -Youth and Community Development Project	108111.96	0.00
Arts For All - Community Development through Art	8373.50	0.00
Neighbourhood Renewal Project		
Ashfield Boys High School - Counselling Service for Vulnerable Boys	35908.36	0.00
Ashton Community Trust - ESF - Progress To Employment	92110.85	93228.45
Ashton Community Trust - Community ICT & Community Access to Lifelong Learning	65703.29	0.00
Ashton Community Trust - ESF - Women Into Training	37937.11	38400.10
Ashton Community Trust - Kinderkids Daycare	126478.96	0.00
Ballymac Friendship Trust Limited -Salaries for Director, Youth Dev Officer & R/Costs	62896.04	0.00
Ballysillan Community Forum - Community Support Team	52634.40	0.00
Belfast Activity Centre - Greater Shankill Youth build Initiative	126170.84	0.00
Belfast Buildings Preservation Trust - Economic Appraisal - Sussex Place Schoolhouse Restoration Project	10000.00	0.00
Belfast City Council - Active Belfast Consortium	58000.00	42000.00
Belfast City Council - Community Safety Warden Service	50000.00	0.00
Belfast Health And Social Care Trust - Tullycarnet Healthy Neighbourhood Partnership	65000.00	0.00
Belfast South Community Resources - Positive Future - Sandy Row	120981.84	0.00
Benview Community Centre	32076.08	0.00
Blackie Community Groups Association - Salary,Running Costs & Professional Fees	130952.67	0.00
Blackmountain Action Group - Salaries, Overheads & Professional Fees	61317.96	0.00
Bridge Community Association (The) - Salaries and R/Costs	86653.62	0.00
Cancer Lifeline	8747.33	0.00
Carrick Hill Residents Assoc. - Carrick Hill Community Development Project	31776.68	0.00
Centre for Health and Wellbeing - Salaries and Running Costs	78970.51	0.00
Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum - Cliftonville Community Renewal Project	51957.80	0.00
Clonard Neighbourhood Development Partnership - Salary for Project Manager	50782.44	0.00
Colin Neighbourhood Partnership - Core salaries and Running Costs	137038.76	112576.37
Colin Community Development Network/Good Morning Colin	185917.20	0.00
Colin Neighbourhood Partnership - Colin Early Intervention Community	29141.35	65939.28
Community Drug Awareness - CODA Project	55966.47	0.00
Community Restorative Justice Ireland - Neighbourhood Dispute Resolution	229812.19	0.00
Conway Education Centre - Coordination	113136.60	0.00
Neighbourhood Renewal Project		

Neighbourhood Renewal Project	2011/12 (£)	2012/13 (£)
Corpus Christi Services - Salaries & Running Costs	117898.48	0.00
Culturlann Mcadam O Fiaich - Salary Tourism Officer and Running Costs	34424.12	0.00
Depaul Trust Ni - Drive Ahead Belfast	76482.32	0.00
Divis Joint Development Committee Capacity Building Programme	90177.84	0.00
Donegall Pass Community Forum Sustainability Project	162601.72	0.00
East Belfast Community Development Agency - Community Resource/ Finance Unit & Volunteer Development Project	90545.13	0.00
East Belfast Partnership - Core Costs	228877.10	0.00
East Belfast Partnership - Economic Appraisal - Titanic People	10000.00	0.00
EPIC Salaries Overheads & Professional Fees	135764.00	0.00
Failte Feirste Thair - Salaries and Overheads	88881.88	0.00
Falls Community Council - Salaries Running Costs & Programme Costs	187823.07	0.00
Falls Women's Centre	128024.40	0.00
Footprints Womens Centre - Salaries and Running Costs	4082.40	0.00
Footprints Womens Centre - Salaries & Running Costs	171005.33	0.00
Forbairt Feirste - An Sportlann	24000.00	0.00
Forthspring Inter Community Group - Support Salaries	14460.36	0.00
Forum For Action On Substance Abuse - Salaries & Running Costs	35380.46	0.00
Forum For Action On Substance Abuse - Salaries, Overheads & Associated Costs	246194.78	0.00
Gems Northern Ireland Limited - ESF - M-Power Project	63114.00	0.00
Glen Community Parent/Youth Group - Co-Ordination of Essential Services Salary	63496.20	0.00
Glenbank Community Association - Glenbank Playgroup	17356.44	0.00
Glencolin Residents Association - Glencolin Development Project	31689.64	0.00
Good Shepherd Primary School - Nurture Group	26397.34	19798.00
Greater Shankill Partnership Board - Core Costs	216835.60	0.00
Greater Village Regeneration Trust - ESF - TREE Tools for Life Project	49639.00	0.00
Greater Village Regeneration Trust - Regenerating the Greater Village Area	160254.14	0.00
Hobby Horse Playgroup - Salaries & Running Costs	51678.24	0.00
Holy Trinity Centre - Salaries of Manager & Finance Administrator	50751.44	0.00
Inner East Youth Project - Salaries and Running Costs	83174.87	0.00
Ionad Uibh Eachach - Childcare Coordinators Salary	84280.76	0.00
Neighbourhood Renewal Project		
Lenadoon Community Forum - Salaries and Running Costs	1346.13	0.00
Lenadoon Community Forum - ESF - Training for Employment	31390.00	0.00
Lenadoon Community Forum - Core Posts	97029.30	0.00
Lenadoon Women's Group - Community Parenting Project	45122.65	0.00
Ligoneil Improvement Association - Salaries and Running Costs	3188.14	0.00

Neighbourhood Renewal Project	2011/12 (£)	2012/13 (£)
Ligoniel Improve Association - Salaries & Running Costs	133472.88	0.00
Loughview Community Action Partnership - Neighbourhood Renewal	99615.90	0.00
Lower Oldpark Community Association - Centre Projects Manager	63652.58	0.00
Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group - Youth & Community Development	101050.43	0.00
Manor St/Cliftonville Comm Centre Youth & Childcare Posts	132705.08	0.00
Markets Development Association - Development Officer, Administrator/ Dev Support Worker Salaries	52189.68	0.00
Marrowbone Community Association - Marrowbone Regeneration	58740.06	0.00
Mount Vernon Community Development Forum - Community Led Renewal	31606.00	0.00
Neighbourhood Development Association - Salaries & Overheads	34200.00	0.00
New Life Counselling Service - Child, Adult, Family & Youth Services	103271.28	0.00
Newstart Education Centre - Salaries and Overheads	28482.80	0.00
Newtownabbey Borough Council - Neighbourhood Co-Ordinators Post	35453.27	0.00
Newtownabbey Womens Group - Development Worker	25253.20	0.00
Newtownards Road Women's Group Limited - Carew II Family & Childcare Services & Core Costs	116431.72	0.00
North Belfast Advice Partnership - Ballysillan Community Forum	29429.00	0.00
North Belfast Advice Partnership - Ligoniel Improvement Association	60642.71	0.00
North Belfast Advice Partnership - The Vine Centre	28368.54	0.00
North Belfast Employment Centre - ESF - Improving Your Future Prospects	57148.35	57152.55
North Belfast Employment Centre	3005.71	0.00
North Belfast Partnership -ESF - LEAP	38301.90	38760.75
North Belfast Partnership - Regeneration and Renewal of North Belfast	208428.78	0.00
North Belfast Senior Citizen Forum - Community Capacity Building Project	59161.80	0.00
North Belfast Womens Initiative	33409.32	0.00
Neighbourhood Renewal Project		
Northern Ireland Alternatives Community Support Project	309720.48	0.00
Oasis - Caring In Action - Directors Salary	46164.36	0.00
Pobal - Beo	36092.00	0.00
Rathcoole Primary School Nurture Unit	50900.60	69447.52
Riddell Creche Association - Salaries	13703.28	0.00
Roden Street Community Development Group	56693.76	0.00
Sally Gardens Community Centre Manager	32006.36	0.00
Sandy Row Community Forum Area Operations Support Team	65407.44	0.00
Scoil Na Fuisioige Managers Salary	33203.04	0.00
Shankill Womens Centre - Salaries, Key Core Staff, Overheads & Travel	141676.90	0.00
Shankill Womens Centre - ESF - Education, Training & Employability	51889.25	53187.40
Short Strand Community Forum - Development Officer's Salary	31543.72	0.00

Neighbourhood Renewal Project	2011/12 (£)	2012/13 (£)
Short Strand Partnership - Staff Salaries, Stationery & Audit Fees	40044.96	0.00
South Belfast Partnership Board Core Costs	176196.88	0.00
Cloona Child Contact Centre	34769.00	0.00
Southcity Resource & Development Centre Development Programme	144062.86	0.00
Springfield Charitable Association - Advice Centre Outreach Service Salaries	40930.44	0.00
Springhill Community House - Salaries & Overheads	33639.40	0.00
St Kieran's Primary School Nurture Group	19798.20	19798.20
St Rose's Dominican College - Business Class N.I.	4000.00	0.00
St Vincent De Paul Project Manager Salary	31754.64	0.00
Stadium Youth & Community Project - Salaries and Running Costs	66862.56	0.00
Star Neighbourhood Centre - Implementation of Neighbourhood Renewal	140443.37	0.00
Streetbeat Youth Work Programme	70925.48	0.00
Suffolk Community Forum - Salary & Running Costs	1498.47	0.00
Suffolk Community Forum - Salaries & Overheads	34573.40	0.00
Synergy@JVC - Rathcoole Neighbourhood Renewal Implementation Project/Synergy	36390.52	0.00
Tar Anall - TRG & FAMILY SUPPORT SALARIES & R/C'S & PROG COSTS	10447.39	0.00
Tar Anall - Pathways	144625.03	0.00
Tullycarnet Community Support Services Limited - Core Salaries, R/Costs & Pre-School Education Project	76150.90	0.00
Tullycarnet Primary School Enhanced Nurture Group Project	98764.00	106889.00
Upper Andersonstown Community Forum - Salaries & Running Costs	195269.18	0.00
Neighbourhood Renewal Project		
Upper Ardoyne Community Partnership - Community Education	37792.56	0.00
Upper Springfield Development Company Limited - Training for Life Project	330.42	0.00
Upper Springfield Development Company Limited - Neighbourhood Renewal Team	21216.81	0.00
Upper Springfield Development Company Limited - Core Costs	122347.28	0.00
Upper Springfield Development Company Limited - Youth and Arts	230638.62	0.00
Upper Springfield Development Company Limited - Action on Disability	77769.88	0.00
Upper Springfield Development Company Limited - Neighbourhood Renewal	98752.28	0.00
Upper Springfield Resource Centre - Salaries & Overheads	19564.48	0.00
Vine Community And Advice Centre - Sustaining the Vine Centre	82861.50	0.00
Voices Womens Group - Salaries & Running Costs	34370.86	0.00
Walkway Community Association - Staff Salaries & Audit	52518.07	0.00
Welcome Trust - Salary Co-Ordinator & Running Costs	24352.08	0.00
West Belfast Athletic & Cultural Society - Salary & Overheads Development Worker	49433.64	0.00

Neighbourhood Renewal Project	2011/12 (£)	2012/13 (£)
West Belfast Parent Youth Support Group - Secretary Salary	10585.64	0.00
West Belfast Partnership Board - Core Costs	235756.62	0.00
Westland Community Development and Regeneration Project	28905.00	0.00
Whiterock Creche Association - Salary Costs-Family Learning Manager	27073.20	0.00
Windsor Women's Centre - EUTERPE	2187.95	0.00
Windsor Women's Centre - Centre Administrator & Domestic Salaries	27624.64	0.00
Windsor Women's Centre - ESF - Thalia Project	38171.00	0.00
Wishing Well Family Centre - Family Centre	49201.20	0.00
Womens News - Salaries and Running Costs	6995.18	0.00
Women's Tec - Extended Training in Communities	3502.25	0.00
Women's Tec - ESF - Extended Training in The Community	68531.83	78094.80
Youth Initiatives - Salaries,Overheads,Fees	26756.68	0.00
Skainos Limited - Mixed Use Community Facility	3000000.30	1500000.00
Templemore Avenue School - East Belfast Network Centre	500000.00	250000.00
St Malachy's Youth Centre	150000.00	570000.00
Belfast City Council Site A Playpark	55000.00	0.00
Short Strand Partnership - Water Babies	21050.00	0.00
Lenadoon Sport Pavilion - Changing Facilities	20115.00	0.00
Connswater Community Greenway	10000.00	1504500.00
Neighbourhood Renewal Project		
Refurbishment/Extension of Gleann Amateur Boxing Club's premises & 1 year rental costs	5000.00	95000.00
Belfast Activity Centre Ardaluin House Refurbishment	102000.00	98000.00
Dunville Park	0.00	1000000.00
Woodvale Park	0.00	1000000.00
Northern Ireland Alternatives - Community Safety / Crime Prevention	0.00	350387.44
Falls Community Council - Community Development & Economic Regeneration	0.00	338904.67
Forum For Action On Substance Abuse - Community One Stop Shop	0.00	337849.52
East Belfast Community Development Agency - Community Development - Inner East Neighbourhood Renewal	0.00	330728.36
Conway Education Centre - Education	0.00	264366.42
Upper Springfield Development Company Limited - Children Young people & Families	0.00	258890.52
Upper Springfield Development Company Limited - Health & Wellbeing	0.00	250231.49
Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum - Community Development and Relations	0.00	247353.78
Upper Springfield Development Company Limited - Developing Effective Community Services	0.00	230266.09
Community Restorative Justice Ireland - Social Environment Programme	0.00	218395.51

Neighbourhood Renewal Project	2011/12 (£)	2012/13 (£)
West Belfast Partnership Board - Delivering effective strategic regeneration locally & citywide	0.00	206657.85
East Belfast Partnership - Delivering Effective Regeneration locally and Citywide	0.00	205299.78
Greater Shankill Partnership Board - Delivering Neighbourhood Renewal and Contributing to Citywide Generation	0.00	196195.68
North Belfast Partnership - The Regeneration and Renewal of North Belfast	0.00	194214.49
Ardoyne Youth Providers Forum - Youth	0.00	193085.42
EPIC - Community Safety / Crime Prevention	0.00	186207.96
East Belfast Community Development Agency - Youth - Inner East Neighbourhood Renewal	0.00	166280.01
South Belfast Partnership Board - South Belfast Partnership Board Delivering Effective Regeneration Locally and City Wide	0.00	163211.32
Greater Village Regeneration Trust - Social Renewal - Education	0.00	158451.97
Colin Neighbourhood Partnership - health	0.00	156794.94
Falls Womens Centre - Health and Wellbeing	0.00	154186.23
Vine Community And Advice Centre - Community Development and Relations	0.00	149075.06
Shankill Womens Centre - Community Development and Relations	0.00	142860.90
Neighbourhood Renewal Project		
Star Neighbourhood Centre - Community Development and Relations	0.00	141529.77
Colin Neighbourhood Partnership - Colin Early Intervention Community	0.00	140841.20
Mount Vernon Community Development Forum - Community Development and Relations	0.00	132751.60
Ligoniel Improve Association - Community Development and Relations	0.00	132704.44
Blackie Community Groups Association - Education	0.00	131203.02
Greater Village Regeneration Trust - South West Belfast - Delivering Training Together - ESF Match Funding	0.00	129249.00
Colin Neighbourhood Partnership - Community Development	0.00	128993.40
Belfast Activity Centre - Youth	0.00	126258.06
Upper Springfield Development Company Limited - West Belfast Disability services	0.00	125543.04
North Belfast Advice Partnership - Welfare and Benefit Support	0.00	124467.47
Roden Street Community Development Group - Greater Falls Neighbourhood Partnership Health Programme	0.00	120892.46
Ashton Community Trust - Childcare	0.00	117181.08
New Life Counselling Service - Health	0.00	114881.76
Greater Village Regeneration Trust - Community Renewal	0.00	114778.30
Upper Andersonstown Community Forum - Andersonstown Neighbourhood Partnership/Community Infrastructure/Development	0.00	111431.94
Divis Joint Development Committee - Community Infrastructure / Bonneagar Pobail	0.00	101673.38

Neighbourhood Renewal Project	2011/12 (£)	2012/13 (£)
Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group - Youth - Engaging young people & supporting their wider family circle	0.00	100876.55
Donegall Pass Community Forum - Skills & Employment - Training & Education in Skills, Employability & Personal Development	0.00	100353.26
Upper Springfield Development Company Limited - Housing & Environment	0.00	98338.36
West Belfast Parent Youth Support Group - Social Environment	0.00	94710.24
Lenadoon Community Forum - Co-ordination of housing, Community Safety & Environmental Services	0.00	93793.00
Newtownards Road Women's Group Limited - Childcare - Early Years - Carew II Family and Training Centre	0.00	89945.64
Stadium Youth & Community Project - Youth	0.00	89794.50
Ionad Uibh Eachach - Development & Regeneration	0.00	87828.47
Neighbourhood Renewal Project		
Upper Andersonstown Community Forum - Andersonstown Neighbourhood Partnership/Community Infrastructure/Development	0.00	84178.92
Bryson Multi-Cultural Resource Centre (An Munia Tober) - Belfast Traveller Education/Training & Business Development Support Programme	0.00	81143.03
Tullycarnet Community Support Services Limited - Childcare, Early Years - Community Support Services	0.00	78568.38
Womens Tec - ESF - Extended Training in The Community	0.00	78094.80
Greater Village Regeneration Trust - Economic Renewal	0.00	73856.65
Streetbeat Youth Project - Youth	0.00	72103.00
Greater Village Regeneration Trust - Physical Renewal	0.00	67999.30
Synergy@JVC - Community Development and Relations	0.00	67078.92
Ardoyne Women's Group - Community Development and Relations	0.00	66237.94
Glen Community Parent/Youth Group - Co-ordination of Education, Youth and Associated Services	0.00	66167.08
Hobby Horse Playgroup - Childcare	0.00	66066.28
Suffolk Community Forum - Community Development	0.00	65786.46
Ashton Community Trust - Skills and Employment	0.00	65696.69
Gems Northern Ireland Limited - M-POWER	0.00	64626.00
Blackmountain Action Group	0.00	61317.96
Markets Development Association Regeneration Project - Inner South Belfast	0.00	60631.36
Cancer Lifeline -Health	0.00	59041.10
Greater Village Regeneration Trust - Social Renewal - Cohesion	0.00	57125.32
Donegall Pass Community Forum / Community Development, Inner South Belfast	0.00	53954.76
Footprints Womens Centre - ESF Project 2012-2014	0.00	50566.80
Wishing Well Family Centre - Childcare	0.00	49579.16
Lenadoon Women's Group - Lenadoon parenting & Family Support Project	0.00	48611.00

Neighbourhood Renewal Project	2011/12 (£)	2012/13 (£)
An Droichead Limited - Education	0.00	47440.80
Upper Ardoyne Community Partnership - Education	0.00	45330.28
Andersonstown Traditional & Contemp Music - Culture Programme	0.00	42400.96
Newtownabbey Borough Council - Community Development and Relations	0.00	40023.95
North Belfast Womens Initiative - Health	0.00	33736.88
Carrick Hill Residents Assoc. - Community Development and Relations	0.00	32237.16
Neighbourhood Renewal Project		
Lenadoon Community Forum - Lenadoon Neighbourhood Training For Employment Project	0.00	31390.00
Glenbank Community Association - Childcare	0.00	17663.36
Upper Springfield Development Company Limited - Education & Training	0.00	16790.92
174 Trust - Childcare	0.00	11191.20
Arts For All - Community Development and Relations	0.00	10893.96
Upper Andersonstown Community Forum - Health Project	0.00	40488.76
Ballysally Integrated Nurturing Project	137605.85	137282.78
Coleraine NRP Technical Assistance	65262.70	64047.46
West Bann Regeneration Project	61111.66	61779.55
Ballysally Healthy Eating Café	25232.31	20303.88
Alcohol Outreach Worker	39796.43	0.00
Coleraine Community Education project	150764.77	150590.92
Financial Assistance for Play Equipment	10941.51	0.00
Schools are the Business	21806.75	11247.31
West Bann Development Health & Wellbeing Project	240.00	2800.00
Jigsaw Project	64307.72	76162.05
Ballymena NR Co-ordinator	42506.24	47093.84
BEAT NI	70508.62	55463.76
BRAID ABC	5699.00	0.00
Ballykeel Mature Adults Luncheon Club	5211.00	8926.00
Ballymena South Community Cluster Worker	6998.94	12997.12
Ballee Childcare Services	14406.39	36616.30
Ballee Community Centre Refurbishment		260340.00
Community Learning Chest	2795.00	0.00
Straight Talking Community Consultation	6427.00	0.00
Rock Challenge 2012	817.50	2358.00
Grange Neighbourhood Coordinator's post	12581.29	0.00
Grange Allotments & Landscaping Project	44225.45	0.00
Strathroy Homework Club – Continuation	32969.30	40049.30
O'Kane Park/Gallows Hill EI Scheme	43600.00	20000.00

Neighbourhood Renewal Project	2011/12 (£)	2012/13 (£)
Supporting Women Alcohol Project (SWAP)	20418.00	30852.00
Omagh Education Mentor	23039.00	66289.00
Promotion of social economy & employability prospects in Omagh	3590.04	33723.35
Omagh NRA Technical Assistance & Employment of coordinator to 31/03/2015	43144.60	54397.20
Mullaghmore Eco Facility	9900.00	116637.50
Omagh Health Project 11/14	107547.61	107548.00
Omagh Riverside Development – Strathroy Bridge	320000.00	280000.00
CKS Equipment	50000.00	40000.00
O’Kane Park Sports Improvement Project	115230.50	0.00
Strathroy Sports Improvement Project	0.00	162882.00
Community Development for O’Kane Park	6727.40	0.00
Mullaghmore Community Development Worker	16613.95	0.00
CKS new community centre	397445.00	0.00
Neighbourhood Renewal Project		
Enniskillen NRA Technical Assistance & employment of coordinator to 31/03/2015	44114.10	59069.86
Lakeshore Litter Collection	506.00	2700.00
Community Interaction & Awareness raising Programme	5624.62	0.00
Enniskillen NRA Exploring Enterprise Programme	5898.14	7498.14
Homework & Activities Club- Devenish Partnership Forum	58365.75	64078.46
Enniskillen NRA Estate Markers	18800.00	0.00
Professional fees - Kilmacormick Resource Centre Extension	15870.00	0.00
Temporary Community Facility for Enniskillen West End residents 2012-2014	24234.31	29554.22
Enniskillen NRA NIHE Capital works (Inishkeen)	180743.64	47274.20
Enniskillen NRA Learning Mentor	15436.23	54747.20
Enniskillen Health Project 11/14	146084.34	141285.00
WEA Community Training Programme For Enniskillen/Omagh NRA's	0.00	64000.00
Dungannon Business Survival continuation project	27400.00	0.00
Refurbishment & Fit Out of Gardner's Hall	196000.00	0.00
NIHE Capital Programme of Works 11/12	90000.00	0.00
Dungannon & Coalisland Health Programme 2011/2015	9120.00	34459.51
Dungannon Interim Health Programme (continuation)	36455.04	0.00
Dungannon Education Programme 11/14	82911.78	51388.78
Milltown Super Adults – continuation programme	6284.00	0.00
Dungannon Social Economy/Employability Project	4499.98	127921.14
Dungannon Youth Resource Centre – Refurbishment Works	218346.00	0.00
Dungannon & Coalisland Education Programme 10/11	8145.87	0.00

Neighbourhood Renewal Project	2011/12 (£)	2012/13 (£)
Lighting Coalisland Canal Towpath	5000.00	44712.00
Coalisland and Dungannon Community Audit	13976.90	38575.74
Coalisland Interim Health Programme (continuation)	28086.43	5000.00
Dungannon & Coalisland TA & co-ordinator 2011 – 2014	49878.63	57818.63
Coalisland Education Programme 11/14	66552.97	54092.79
St Joseph's College Coalisland 11/14 programme	10000.00	28960.00
Capital Build Feasibility Study for Coalisland	4500.00	3000.00

Small Pockets Of Deprivation Project	2011/12 (£)	2012/13 (£)
NR Pockets (xfer out to RDO)	54000.00	*54,000
Benmore	17408.00	17769.00
Carnary	3000.00	0.00
Ballymoney	7080.00	27584.00
Glebeside	3715.00	0.00
Glenvarna	0.00	0.00
Glen	19143.00	20033.00
Larne	1600.00	11580.00
Rathgill	78136.00	76400.00
WestWinds	79172.80	32481.00
Bowtown	18220.00	3800.00
Harbour	49910.00	49910.00
Strathfoyle	54932.00	64213.00
Castle	17460.00	11000.00
Sunnylands	53703.00	56692.00
Greenisland	0.00	0.00
White City	0.00	16268.00
Bawnmore	6140.00	15870.00

* NR Pockets not yet agreed for 12/13 so indicative allocation same as 11/12 at this time.

Area at Risk Project	2011/12 (£)	2012/13 (£)
Enagh Youth Forum	19780.44	21232.56
Tiny Tots Community Playgroup	21868.85	19115.89
Strathfoyle Women's Activity Group	13760.00	19166.00
Caw/Nelson Drive Action Group	64428.27	0.00
Lettershandoney & District Development Group	56259.28	0.00
Ballynaveigh Community Development Association Areas At Risk Pilot Programme - Annadale	32333.28	45177.16
East Belfast Community Development Agency Areas At Risk Pilot Programme - Ballybeen	53903.00	60163.00

Area at Risk Project	2011/12 (£)	2012/13 (£)
Supporting Communities NI Areas At Risk Pilot Programme - Building for the Future of Lower Whitewell	56453.76	59453.76
Craigyhill and Antiville - Areas at Risk	34589.68	31120.32
Doury Road Employability & Development Programme	0.00	86990.14
Ferris Park	49096.01	59733.17
Ashfield Gardens Fintona	47197.23	

Rents: Average

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what is the average price of rent for a housing association property and how this compares with a Housing Executive property.

(AQW 11333/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In 2010-2011 the average weekly rent for a housing association property is £75.57 and the average weekly rent of a Housing Executive property is £52.76.

Housing Association Properties

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what is the average price of rent for a housing association property in each district council area.

(AQW 11334/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department does not gather information on the average rent of a housing association by district council area.

Employment and Support Allowance Claimants

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) why Employment and Support Allowance claimants have the Severe Disability Premium of their benefit removed when their children reach 18 years of age and remain at home; and (ii) whether there is a provision for claimants whose children stay on in full-time education after turning 18 and are therefore unable to contribute to household costs.

(AQW 11337/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Severe Disability Premium is included in the calculation of income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Pension Credit and Housing Benefit. The premium is paid to those severely disabled people who live independently, and who are most likely to need to purchase care. A severely disabled person is someone who receives Attendance Allowance, or the Higher or Middle rate Care Component of Disability Living Allowance.

It is not, however, paid to a claimant who has a non-dependant aged 18 or over normally residing with them or with whom the claimant is normally residing. A non-dependant may include an adult relative such as a son or daughter.

It is recognised however, that there are circumstances when people sharing accommodation should not be expected, or may not be able, to provide care for the disabled person. For this reason, the presence of certain people is ignored when deciding whether or not the disabled person lives alone. This means for example that no account is taken of people (other than close relatives of the claimant) who live in the same house because of a commercial arrangement (such as a tenant or landlord).

Similarly, no account is taken of persons under the age of 18, or who are blind, or are themselves receiving Attendance Allowance, or the Middle or Higher rate Care Component of Disability Living Allowance. Also, people who are co-owners or joint tenants with a customer, and jointly occupy their home, are ignored for the purposes of the additional amount payable for the severely disabled.

There is also provision for a young person who is in full time non-advanced education or approved training not to be considered as a non-dependant up to their 20th birthday.

Employment and Support Allowance Claimants

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Employment and Support Allowance claimants in the Foyle area who (i) have appealed against a Work Capability Assessment decision; (ii) had their appeals heard; and (iii) went through the ATOS Healthcare formal complaints procedure in the 2011/12 financial year.

(AQW 11339/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not available by Parliamentary constituency. I refer the member to the written answer given to AQW 11113/11 – 15.

Housing Executive Properties: Multi-Element Improvements

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) why the total asset value of the 6000 Housing Executive properties that require multi-element improvements is not available; (ii) what information is available on the value of Housing Executive properties; (iii) the asset value for each scheme which requires multi-element improvements; (iv) the last valuation of the 6000 homes; (v) the last valuation of each of the schemes and the date of the valuations.

(AQW 11341/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The entire Housing Executive stock has been valued by Land and Property Services for inclusion in the annual accounts to 31 March 2012.

However, the asset value of the individual properties that require multi element improvements (MEI) cannot be provided without disproportionate costs being incurred. This is because data on each of the dwellings would have to be extracted and collated manually to provide an overall total value. Additionally, the asset value for each scheme would only be capable of being produced when the exact addresses are confirmed for the individual MEI schemes and that Programme is still being finalised.

Housing Developments

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development whether he intends to introduce legislation that will require developers to make 20 percent of housing developments available for social and affordable housing.

(AQW 11343/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department has been working closely with the Department of the Environment, to develop a draft Affordable Housing Policy, draft Planning Policy Statement on Affordable Housing Legislation and draft Partial Regulatory Impact Assessment that could support the introduction of a scheme for developer contributions.

Once this work is finalised, these documents will be issued for public consultation and one of the key issues to be resolved during that consultation will be when such a scheme should be introduced given the very real challenges the construction industry is already facing.

Housing Executive Properties: Multi-Element Improvements

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) what information is available on the value of the 6000 Housing Executive properties that require multi-element improvements; (ii) the approximate asset value based on this information; (iii) how his Department currently calculates the asset value of properties owned by the Housing Executive; (iv) when he expects to transfer the housing which requires multi-element improvements from the Housing Executive to housing associations; (v) how much revenue the Housing Executive has raised in each of the last three years for (a) each scheme requiring multi-element improvements; and (b) the 6000 houses requiring multi-element improvements; and (vi) for an estimate of the average rent increase for the properties when they are transferred to housing associations.

(AQW 11346/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In my reply to AQW 10328/11-15 I confirmed that the Housing Executive have identified a total of 5,706 units that would require multi element improvement works. In a further reply to AQW 11341/11-15 I confirmed that it was not possible to provide specific valuations on each of these schemes/homes without incurring significant and disproportionate costs. That same principle would apply to revenue raised on these homes in each of the last three years.

The NIHE are currently preparing a programme of homes from those requiring MEI that could see up to 2000 of them improved, subject to a successful tenant vote, over the next 3 years. That programme has not been completed yet. Once available, I will be happy to publish it outlining what schemes will be included and when.

As part of the process, a business case for each individual scheme will be prepared and at that time detailed valuations and costings will be included to support the proposed transfer. That process will also include details of future rent increases on the homes post transfer and will identify the financial feasibility of each scheme when the valuation and cost of the improvements is measured against future loss of income etc.

House Sales Scheme

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development what consideration he has given to increasing the maximum amount of discount available in the House Sales Scheme, in line with the recent increase in England.

(AQW 11394/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As part of my forthcoming 'Housing Strategy', I have already carried out a fundamental review of the House Sales Scheme that currently exists in Northern Ireland. I plan to announce the outcome of that review in the coming weeks when I launch my new strategy.

Housing Strategy

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will include the promotion of shared social housing in his Department's Housing Strategy.

(AQW 11582/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Yes

Work Capability Assessment

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the Work Capability Assessment (i) how many claimants have been deemed fit for work and have had their Employment and Support Allowance removed to date; and (ii) of these, how many have had this decision overturned on appeal.

(AQW 11626/11-15)

Mr McCausland: i) The table below shows a breakdown of the total number of claims where entitlement to Employment and Support Allowance has ceased in each of the last three years. In some instances customers may have lost their entitlement on more than one occasion.

Year	Employment and Support Allowance*
Apr 09 to Mar 10	12,827
Apr 10 to Mar 11	17,672
Apr 11 to Nov 11	12,770

The Information provided above are Official Statistics. 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.

*The figures provided have been derived from scans of the Department's Matching Intelligence Database Analysis and General Matching Service systems and include cases where a customer has been found fit for work, has failed to attend a medical assessment or has not provided the required information. The figures also include claims where entitlement has ceased following changes in a customer's circumstances including when a customer returns to work, claims an alternative benefit or the death of a customer.

ii) The information requested regarding appeals is not available in the format requested. However, details of all Employment and Support Allowance appeals found in the customers' favour is set out in the table below:

Year	Appeals upheld in customer favour
Apr 09 to Mar 10	354
Apr 10 to Mar 11	1410
Apr 11 to Mar 12	2065
Total	3829

Programme for Government: Target for Affordable Homes

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister for Social Development how many of the 8,000 affordable homes, as outlined in the Programme for Government's target, will be located in the East Derry area.

(AQW 11678/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Programme for Government target was to deliver 8,000 new social and affordable homes by 2015, broken down as 6000 social and 2000 affordable homes.

I am pleased to report that in our first year, we have surpassed our milestone target, delivering 2053 new social and affordable homes during 2011/12. This equated to 1410 new social and 643 new affordable homes across Northern Ireland, of which 40 new social homes were started in East Londonderry. While affordable homes statistics are only available on a District Council basis I can report that in the Coleraine and Limavady Borough Council Districts in 2011/12 there were a total of 23 affordable homes delivered.

The Social Housing Development Programme for the next 3 years is available on the Housing Executive website and this will identify where new social housing will be delivered in those years. Affordable homes are demand led and cannot be identified in advance as the member requests.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Price of Alcohol in Parliament Buildings

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission whether the price of alcohol is subsidised in Parliament Buildings; and if so, to what extent and for what reason.

(AQW 11400/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): Alcohol sold in Parliament Buildings is priced in line with Recommended Retail Prices (RRP) and therefore the price is not subsidised.

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

Friday 27 April 2012

Education

Post-primary Education for Children Living in the Republic of Ireland

In Bound Volume 73, page WA 429, replace the answer to the question (AQW 10267/11-15) asked by Mr Durkan with:

Mr O'Dowd (Minister of Education): Pupils from the south can already apply for admission to a post-primary school in the north. Currently 256 young people (including boarders) who live in the south attend post-primary schools here and all applicants for the 2011/12 school year were accepted for places.

This is reflective of how people in the border areas live and avail of services, including education. My Department and the Department of Education and Skills are both planning for schools into the future and it is important to do so in a sustainable way that is able to meet parental preference in the border region. At the North South Ministerial Council education sectoral meeting in February 2012 it was agreed that the Departments will jointly conduct a survey in the autumn of potential cross border pupil movement to inform school planning.

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Tourist Board: Capital Investment

In Bound Volume 73, page WA 440, replace the answer to the question (AQW 9785/11-15) asked by Mr Flanagan with:

Mrs Foster (Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The total amount of financial assistance paid to tourism related businesses by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board in each of the last five financial years is broken down in the table attached at Annex A.

(please see table on the following pages)

ANNEX A

Breakdown of capital investment for District Council areas by financial year.

District Council Area	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
Antrim			£5,000.00	£58,382.50	£145,000.00	£208,382.50
Ards			£214,284.00	£53,428.00	£120,655.27	£388,367.27
Armagh			£1,029.00	£375,926.50	£356,506.12	£733,461.62
Ballymena			£2,800.00		£5,875.00	£8,675.00
Ballymoney						£0.00
Banbridge						£0.00
Belfast		£612,085.00		£39,703,021.00	£89,000.00	£40,404,106.00
Carrickfergus			£126,055.00		£2,875.00	£128,930.00
Castlereagh						£0.00
Coleraine	£110,000.00	£68,650.00	£5,000.00	£497,655.00	£168,814.25	£850,119.25
Cookstown				£27,000.00	£500,000.00	£527,000.00
Craigavon				£263,697.00		£263,697.00
Derry		£778,225.45	£3,467,006.00	£333,087.00	£812,500.00	£5,390,818.45
Down		£275,769.00	£6,750.00	£4,763.00	£1,812,845.58	£2,100,127.58

District Council Area	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
Dungannon					£132,971.00	£132,971.00
Fermanagh	£194,997.00	£50,000.00		£217,145.00		£462,142.00
Larne		£204,500.00		£29,918.00	£132,777.09	£367,195.09
Limavady		£64,534.75			£7,202.75	£71,737.50
Lisburn		£29,072.00				£29,072.00
Magherafelt					£35,753.00	£35,753.00
Moyle		£76,752.00	£142,005.00	£283,772.38	£9,487,532.29	£9,990,061.67
Newry and Mourne			£8,750.00	£363,330.25	£494,083.10	£866,163.35
Newtownabbey				£669,359.00		£669,359.00
North Down				£4,970.00	£37,521.30	£42,491.30
Omagh		£206,790.25		£150,000.00	£32,500.00	£389,290.25
Strabane						£0.00
Cross		£443,269.80		£199,769.00	£32,800.00	£675,838.80
Total	£304,997.00	£2,809,648.25	£3,978,679.00	£43,235,223.63	£14,407,211.75	£64,735,759.63

Social Development

Social Housing

In this Bound Volume, page WA 31, replace the answer to the question (AQW 10,328/11-15) asked by Mr Agnew with:

Mr McCausland (Minister for Social Development): Table 1 below details the Housing Executive's revenue and capital budgets for the Social Housing Development Programme and maintenance in each of the 2011-15 budget periods.

	2011/12 (£m)	2012/13 (£m)	2013/14 (£m)	2014/15 (£m)
Capital	143.1 (SHDP)	93.1 (SHDP)	83.9 (SHDP)	91.4 (SHDP)
Revenue	137.9 (Maint)	171.1 (Maint)	190.0 (Maint)	186.9 (Maint)

It should be noted that a 5% rental income uplift has been assumed in years 2013/14 and 2014/15.

The information for part (ii) of the question is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not collate information by parliamentary constituency. The Housing Executive has identified that 5,706 homes require Multi Element Improvement work and these homes are listed below. MEI work can only be funded through capital budget.

District	Properties
East Belfast	119
North Belfast	202
Shankill	36
South Belfast	767
West Belfast	194
Antrim	323
Ballymena	747
Carrickfergus	161

District	Properties
Coleraine	355
Larne	313
Newtownabbey 1	403
Newtownabbey 2	115
Armagh	225
Banbridge	106
Dungannon	62
Lurgan/Brownlow	131
Newry	282
Portadown	62
Bangor	224
Castlereagh	67
Lisburn	131
Newtownards	229
Cookstown	34
Limavady	193
Magherafelt	36
Omagh	35
Strabane	40
Waterloo Place	114
Total	5,706

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Minutes of Proceedings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 16 April 2012

The Assembly met at noon, the Principal Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

The Principal Deputy Speaker informed Members that he had been notified by the Chief Electoral Officer that Mr Sean Rogers had been returned as a Member of the Assembly for the South Down constituency to fill the vacancy that resulted from the resignation of Ms Margaret Ritchie; and that Mr Chris Hazzard had been returned as a Member of the Assembly for the South Down constituency to fill the vacancy that resulted from the resignation of Mr Willie Clarke.

Mr Rogers had signed the Roll of Members on 2 April 2012 in the presence of the Speaker and the Director of Clerking and Reporting. Mr Hazzard had signed the Roll of Members on 16 April 2012 in the presence of the Speaker and the Clerk/Director General. The Principal Deputy Speaker confirmed that the Members had signed the Roll and had entered their designations of identity.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion – RMS Titanic Centennial Commemoration

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the 100th Anniversary of the maiden voyage of RMS Titanic; acknowledges the innovation and ingenuity of the design and construction of the world's most famous ship; welcomes the creation of 'Titanic Belfast' and the commemoration by the Assembly; and calls for any further marking of the anniversary or memorial to be solemn and dignified as a tribute to the 1517 people who lost their lives on 15 April 1912.

*Mr S Douglas
Ms P Bradley
Mr A Easton*

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.2 Motion – Disappeared Victims

Proposed:

That this Assembly acknowledges the progress that has been made in locating the remains of disappeared victims; recognises the work of the families, the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains, WAVE Trauma Centre and others in achieving that progress; notes that some families are still waiting; and calls on anyone with information which might help in the location of the remains to share that information with the Commission, through whatever means they choose, without further delay.

*Mr D Bradley
Mr P McGlone
Mrs D Kelly
Mr A Maginness*

3.3 Amendment:**Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'waiting;' and insert:

'and calls on the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains to make clear what more can be done, and by whom, to bring the comfort of recovery to the remaining families.'

Mr M Nesbitt

Mr T Elliott

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Speaker took the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Environment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood.

4.2 Social Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland.

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion – Disappeared Victims

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) 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

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.02pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

16 April 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 28 March - 16 April 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
 - Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (Amendment) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)
 - Insolvency Service Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March 2011 (DETI)
 - The accounts of the Trust Funds held by the Western Health and Social Care Trust for the year ending 31 March 2011 (DHSSPS)
 - Libraries NI Retention and Disposal Schedule (DCAL)
 - Ilex Annual Report and Financial Accounts 2010-11 (OFMDFM)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
 - S.R. 2012/137 Pensions Increase (Review) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)
 - S.R. 2012/139 Registered Rents (Increase) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
 - S.R. 2012/143 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Rathfriland) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
 - S.R. 2012/146 The Road Traffic (Immobilisation, Removal and Disposal of Vehicles) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
 - S.R. 2012/148 The Motor Vehicles Testing (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
 - S.R. 2012/149 The Goods Vehicles (Testing) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
 - S.R. 2012/150 The Motor Vehicles (Construction and Use) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
 - S.R. 2012/151 The Firefighters' Pension Scheme (Contributions) (Revocation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
 - S.R. 2012/152 The New Firefighters' Pension Scheme (Contributions) (Revocation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
 - S.R. 2012/153 The Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
 - S.R. 2012/155 The Jobseeker's Allowance (Domestic Violence) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
 - S.R. 2012/156 The Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)
 - S.R. 2012/157 The Housing Benefit (Executive Determinations) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
 - S.R. 2012/158 The Zoonoses (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)

- S.R. 2012/160 The Employment and Support Allowance (Amendment of Linking Rules) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
- S.R. 2012/161 The Firefighters' Pension Scheme (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
- S.R. 2012/162 The New Firefighters' Pension Scheme (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
- S.R. 2012/163 The Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)

For Information Only:

- S.R. 2012/144 The Road Races (Cookstown 100) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
- S.R. 2012/145 The Road Races (Tandragee 100) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
- S.R. 2012/154 (C.15) The Welfare of Animals (2011 Act) (Commencement and Transitional Provisions No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

- Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Surgery Services (DHSSPS)
- Interim Report on Pseudomonas Incidents in Neonatal Units (DHSSPS)

8. Consultation Documents

- Supplementary Planning Guidance to Accompany Policy PED 8 of Planning Policy Statement 4 (DOE)
- DLA Reform and Personal Independence Payment: Completing the Detailed Design (DSD)
- Department for Business Innovation & Skills - Enhancing Consumer Confidence through Effective Enforcement (DETI)

9. Departmental Publications

- Offshore Renewable Energy Strategic Action Plan 2012-2020 (DETI)
- Prison Service Pay Review Body - Eighth Report on Northern Ireland 2012 (DOJ)
- Food Law Codes of Practice Northern Ireland (DHSSPS)
- Policy and Economics Division: Statistical Review of Northern Ireland Agriculture 2011 (DFP)
- Northern Ireland Police Fund Annual Report and Accounts for Year Ended 31 March 2011 (DOJ)
- Steps to Work - Evaluation of the Steps to Work Programme (DEL)
- Steps to Work - A Survey of Leavers from the Steps to Work Programme (DEL)

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

- Health and Social Care Act 2012 - Chapter 7

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 17 April 2012

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Private Members' Business

2.1 Motion – Establishment of a Working Group to Consider the Return of Lough Neagh into Public Ownership

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, to convene a working group to explore and pursue actively the potential for a cross-departmental approach to bring Lough Neagh back into public ownership.

*Mr F Molloy
Mr O McMullan
Ms M Boyle*

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** (Division 1).

2.2 Motion – Kinship Care

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes and welcomes the growth of kinship care and acknowledges the valuable role it plays in providing care for the many children who cannot be raised by their parents; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to note the excellent, and often invisible, contribution made by kinship carers, to identify a number of key priorities and actions for their support, and to consider amending the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 in support of kinship carers.

*Miss M McIlveen
Mr J Wells*

The sitting was suspended at 12.30pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

3. Assembly Business

3.1 Committee Chairperson and deputy Chairperson Appointments

The Deputy Speaker informed Members that he had received notification of the resignation of Mr Tom Elliott as Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister; and the resignation of Mr Mike Nesbitt as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Education.

The Deputy Speaker further informed Members that he had received correspondence from the nominating officer of the Ulster Unionist Party, Mr Mike Nesbitt, nominating himself as Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister; and Mr Danny Kinahan as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Education, both with immediate effect. The Deputy Speaker confirmed the appointments.

4. Question Time

4.1 Agriculture and Rural Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

4.2 Regional Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

5. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Kinship Care (Cont'd)

The Speaker took the Chair.

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6. Adjournment

Mr Sammy Douglas spoke to his topic on the provision of counselling services in East Belfast.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.59pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

17 April 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

17 April 2012

Division 1

Lough Neagh - Motion

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, to convene a working group to explore and pursue actively the potential for a cross-departmental approach to bring Lough Neagh back into public ownership.

Mr F Molloy

Mr O McMullan

Ms M Boyle

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 62

Noes: 15

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Doherty, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr I McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Gildernew and Mr Lynch.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McClarty, Mr McNarry, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Dobson and Mr Kinahan.

The Motion was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 17 April 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
 - Draft S.R. 2012. The Race Relations Order 1997 (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (OFMDFM)
- For Information Only:**
 - S.R. 2012/166 The Roads (Speed Limit) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
 - The Draft Single Use Carrier Bags Charge Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
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 18 April 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	08.03.12	27.03.12			
/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	20.03.12
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12					
Superannuation Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	22.05.12					

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 23 April 2012

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Committee Business

2.1 Motion – Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Tom Elliott replace Mr Basil McCrea as a member of the Committee for Justice; that Mr Tom Elliott replace Mr Danny Kinahan as a member of the Committee for the Environment; that Mr Danny Kinahan be appointed as a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister; that Mr Roy Beggs replace Mr Ross Hussey as a member of the Committee for Finance and Personnel; that Mr Ross Hussey replace Mr Roy Beggs as a member of the Committee for Regional Development; that Mr John McCallister replace Mrs Sandra Overend as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee; and that Mrs Sandra Overend replace Mr John McCallister as a member of the Business Committee.

Mr R Swann

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

2.2 Motion – Committee Membership

Proposed

That Mr Sean Rogers replace Mr Conall McDevitt as a member of the Committee for Education; that Mr Conall McDevitt replace Mr Mark Durkan as a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety; that Mr Patsy McGlone replace Dr Alasdair McDonnell as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; that Mr Patsy McGlone replace Mr Colum Eastwood as a member of the Committee for Justice; that Mr John Dallat replace Mr Joe Byrne as a member of the Committee for Regional Development; that Mrs Dolores Kelly replace Mr Patsy McGlone as a member of the Committee for the Environment; that Mr Dominic Bradley be appointed as a member of the Audit Committee; and that Mr Colum Eastwood replace Mr Patsy McGlone as a member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Mr P Ramsey

Mrs K McKeivitt

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion – Pre-School Nursery Provision

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to take immediate action on the findings of the Review of the Pre-School Admissions Arrangements, and remove the July and August birthday admissions criterion for the 2013/14 academic year; and urges the Minister to prevent a repeat of the problems being faced this year in relation to the 2012/13 academic year, by ensuring that there are sufficient pre-school places for all children in the required locations.

Mrs J Cochrane

Ms A Lo

Mr C Lyttle

Mr T Lunn

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.2 Motion – Multi-Agency Support Teams

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the success of the multi-agency support teams, and equivalent bodies, in detecting and addressing problems which children may experience in the early stages of their education; recognises the effective partnerships that are in place between the Health Service, schools and parents to address the needs of children; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to work closely with the Minister of Education to review the model of service provision and expand the service to the schools and nurseries which are not currently part of the scheme.

Mr R Beggs

Mr J McCallister

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Speaker took the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

4.2 Employment and Learning

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry.

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion – Multi-Agency Support Teams

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair

Debate resumed on the Motion.

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 3.49pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

23 April 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 18 April - 23 April 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
 - Retention and Disposal Schedule for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DCAL)
 - The Use of Special Measures in the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland (DOJ)
5. Assembly Reports
 - Report on Uptake of Benefits by Pensioners (NIA 45/11-15) (Public Accounts Committee)
6. Statutory Rules
 - S.R. 2012/167 The Health Care (Reimbursement of the Cost of EEA Services etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
 - S.R. 2012/169 The Road Transport (Working Time) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)

For Information Only:

 - S.R. 2012/164 The Road Races (Spamont Hill Climb) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
 - S.R. 2012/165 The Waiting Restrictions (Bangor) 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 24 April 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: A Higher Education Strategy for Northern Ireland

The Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry, made a statement regarding a Higher Education Strategy for Northern Ireland, following which he replied to questions.

2.2 Further Consideration Stage – Pensions Bill (NIA 3/11-15)

The Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland, moved the Further Consideration Stage of the Pensions Bill.

Two amendments were tabled to the Bill.

Clauses

After debate, Amendment 1, inserting new Clause 1A, was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 2 to Clause 19 was **negatived** without division.

Bill NIA 3/11-15 passed Further Consideration Stage and stood referred to the Speaker for consideration in accordance with Section 10 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion – Devolution of Fuel Duty Powers

Proposed:

That this Assembly condemns the forthcoming three pence rise in the cost of fuel; notes that our people pay some of the highest fuel costs in Europe; and calls on the Executive to start negotiations with the British Government regarding the devolution of powers on fuel duty.

Mr D McKay

Mr P Maskey

Mr C Murphy

3.2 Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Europe;' and insert:

'and calls on Her Majesty's Government to halt its planned fuel duty increase and, due to Northern Ireland's peripherality within the United Kingdom, to devise and implement a scheme for Northern Ireland similar to the rural fuel duty relief scheme which was recently introduced for the Inner and Outer Hebrides, the Northern Isles, the Islands of the Clyde and the Isles of Scilly.'

Mr S Hamilton

Mr A Ross

3.3 Amendment 2

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Europe;' and insert:

'recognises the potentially significant cost to the block grant of devolving fuel duty; and calls on the Executive to lobby Her Majesty's Government to take action to address high fuel prices in Northern Ireland.'

Mrs S Overend

Mr L Cree

Mr R Beggs

3.4 Amendment 3

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'regarding the' and insert:

'establishment of a commission to assess the devolution of further fiscal powers, such as fuel duty, which would enable the Assembly to serve the people of Northern Ireland better.'

Mr D Bradley

Mr C McDevitt

Mr A Maginness

The sitting was suspended at 12.28pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm with the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) 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 First Minister, Mr Peter Robinson. The junior Minister, Mr Jonathan Bell, also answered a number of questions.

4.2 Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster.

5. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Question being put, Amendment No.1 was **made** (Division 1).

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

6. Adjournment

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

Mr Cathal Boylan spoke to his topic on the progress of the East and West link road projects in Armagh City.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.19pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

24 April 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

24 April 2012

Division 1

Devolution of Fuel Duty Powers – Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Europe;' and insert:

'and calls on Her Majesty's Government to halt its planned fuel duty increase and, due to Northern Ireland's peripherality within the United Kingdom, to devise and implement a scheme for Northern Ireland similar to the rural fuel duty relief scheme which was recently introduced for the Inner and Outer Hebrides, the Northern Isles, the Islands of the Clyde and the Isles of Scilly.'

Mr S Hamilton

Mr A Ross

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 51

Noes: 33

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

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

NOES

Mr Agnew, Ms M Anderson, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Gildernew, Mr G Kelly, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, 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 Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Boylan and Mr Brady.

The amendment was made.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 24 April 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. 2012/172 The Trunk Road T9 (Coleman's Corner to Ballyrickard Road) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
 - S.R. 2012/173 The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)
 - Draft S.R. 2012 Local Government (Boundaries) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
- For Information Only:**
 - S.R. 2012/171 The Road Races (Drumhorc Hill Climb) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
 - Belfast Rapid Transit - Public Consultation Report (DRD)
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 24 April 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	08.03.12	27.03.12	24.04.12		
/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	20.03.12
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12					
Superannuation Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	22.05.12					

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 30 April 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 Newry Bomb

Mr Dominic Bradley made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the Newry Bomb. Party representatives were also called to speak on the matter.

3. Assembly Business

3.1 Use of Electronic Devices in the Chamber

The Speaker delivered a revised ruling on the use of electronic devices in the Chamber.

3.2 Motion - Committee Membership

The following motion stood on the Order Paper in the name of Ms Jennifer McCann.

Proposed:

That Mr Chris Hazzard be appointed as a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development and as a member of the Committee for the Environment.

Ms J McCann

The Motion was **not moved**.

4. Committee Business

4.1 Motion - Amend Standing Order 26(1)(a)

Proposed:

In Standing Order 26(1)(a) leave out 'a provision of the Northern Ireland Act 1998' and insert 'any statutory provision'

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

4.2 Motion - Amend Standing Order 27

Proposed:

In Standing Order 27, leave out paragraph (1) and insert –

'(1) Subject to paragraph (1A), the Speaker shall direct that the lobbies be cleared and the division bells sounded if –

(a) the Speaker is unsure whether or not a question is carried following the collection of voices under Standing Order 26;
or

(b) the Speaker's judgement as to whether a question is so carried is challenged.'

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

4.3 Motion - Amend Standing Order 27(1)

Proposed:

After Standing Order 27(1) insert –

‘(1A) Where a question is put immediately after the result of a previous division is announced, and paragraph 1(a) or (b) applies –

(a) the Speaker may direct that the lobbies be cleared and the division bells sounded; or

(b) the Speaker may direct that the lobbies be cleared and proceed immediately in accordance with paragraphs (4) to (11)

and in deciding whether to direct that the lobbies be cleared and the division bells sounded under this paragraph, the Speaker shall have regard to any representations made by any party whip.’

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

4.4 Motion - Amend Standing Order 27(2)

Proposed:

In Standing Order 27(2) line 1 leave out ‘this direction’ and insert –

‘a direction under paragraph (1) or (1A)(a)’

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

4.5 Motion - Amend Standing Order 76(1)

Proposed:

In Standing Order 76, leave out paragraph (1) and insert –

‘(1) Any determination made by the Assembly under section 47(2A)(a) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 shall be published in full.’

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

4.6 Motion - Amend Standing Order 76(2)

Proposed:

In Standing Order 76(2) line 1, leave out ‘also’

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

5. Private Members’ Business

5.1 Motion - Limit to Tax Relief on Charitable Donations

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses concern at the proposals by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to limit tax relief on large charitable donations; believes that this could have a devastating impact on charities; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to abandon this approach.

*Mr P Weir
Mr A Ross
Mr S Hamilton
Mr M Storey*

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5.2 Motion - The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to support and encourage Tourism Ireland's plans for 'The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming' in 2013, which will promote Ireland as a tourism destination to 70 million people worldwide; and further calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to engage with the Irish Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to ensure that the benefit from these plans is derived on an all-island basis and that the Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 celebrations are included as an integral attraction.

*Mrs D Kelly
Mr A Maginness
Mr P Ramsey*

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

6. Question Time

6.1 Agriculture and Rural Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

6.2 Finance and Personnel

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson.

7. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

7.1 Motion - The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** (Division 1).

8. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.11pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

30 April 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

30 April 2012

Division 1

The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming - Motion

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to support and encourage Tourism Ireland's plans for 'The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming' in 2013, which will promote Ireland as a tourism destination to 70 million people worldwide; and further calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to engage with the Irish Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to ensure that the benefit from these plans is derived on an all-island basis and that the Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 celebrations are included as an integral attraction.

*Mrs D Kelly
Mr A Maginness
Mr P Ramsey*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 48

Noes: 46

AYES

Mr Agnew, Ms M Anderson, Mr Attwood, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Mr Chris Hazzard, 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, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mr Rogers.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCreagh, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

The Motion was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 25 - 30 April 2012

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

Pensions Bill (As Amended at Further Consideration Stage) NIA Bill 3/11-15

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

- Legislative Consent Memorandum - Finance (No.4) Bill (DFP)
- Financial Reporting Advisory Board - Annual Report 2011-2012 (DFP)
- Second Legislative Consent Memorandum - Finance (No.4) Bill 2012 (DCAL)
- Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service: An inspection of the adequacy of the courts estate (DOJ)

5. Assembly Reports

- Review of Judicial Appointments in Northern Ireland (NIA 38/11-15) (Committee for Justice)

6. Statutory Rules

- S.R. 2012/168 The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
- S.R. 2012/170 The Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
- S.R. 2012/179 The Control of Asbestos Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DETI)
- S.R. 2012/180 The Food Additives (Amendment) and the Extraction Solvents in Food (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
- S.R. 2012/181 The Jobseeker's Allowance (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)

For Information Only:

- S.R. 2012/174 The Private Accesses (A8 Belfast to Larne Dual Carriageway (Coleman's Corner to Ballyrickard Road)) Stopping-Up Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
- S.R. 2012/175 The Road Races (North West 200) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
- S.R. 2012/176 The Diseases of Animals (Importation of Machinery and Vehicles) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

- Consultation on Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products (DHSSPS)
- The Law on Damages (A) Claims for Wrongful Death (B) Bereavement Damages (C) Damages for Gratuitous Care (DFP)
- Consultation Paper on the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)

9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 1 May 2012

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Private Members' Business

2.1 Motion - Strategy to Promote Patient Safety

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to put in place a robust strategy to promote patient safety across the Health Service.

*Mr J Wells
Ms P Bradley
Ms P Brown
Mr G Dunne*

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

2.2 Motion - Pseudomonas Incidents in Neonatal Units

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with concern the recent Interim Report on Pseudomonas Incidents in Neonatal Units and its recommendation that the development of the new Regional Neonatal Intensive Care Unit should be expedited as soon as possible; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to bring forward a timeframe for the completion of the new regional women and children's hospital.

*Mr M Brady
Ms M Gildernew
Ms S Ramsey*

Debate ensued.

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 Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots.

3.2 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford.

4. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

4.1 Motion - Pseudomonas Incidents in Neonatal Units (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5. Adjournment

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

Mr Michael McGimpsey spoke to his topic on the refurbishment and renovation of the Annadale Flats, South Belfast.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.12pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

1 May 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

**Papers Presented to the Assembly on
1 May 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. 2012/178 Police Service of Northern Ireland (Amendment) Regulations 2012 (DOJ)

For Information Only:

7. Written Ministerial Statements

A8 Belfast to Larne Dualling – Publication of Notice of Intention to Proceed and Making of Statutory Orders (DRD)

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 2 MAY 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	08.03.12	27.03.12	24.04.12		
/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	20.03.12
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12					
Superannuation Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	22.05.12					

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

Tuesday 8 May 2012

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Assembly Business

2.1 Motion - Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Chris Hazzard be appointed as a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development and as a member of the Committee for the Environment.

*Ms J McCann
Mr R McCartney
Mr P Maskey*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Final Stage - Pensions Bill (NIA 3/11-15)

The Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland, moved that the Final Stage of the Pensions Bill (NIA 3/11-15) do now pass.

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Pensions Bill passed Final Stage (Division 1).

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Motion - Support for Victims and Survivors

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the significant number of victims and survivors who need appropriate help and support to enable them to deal with the legacy of the past; further recognises the important work of the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund in addressing the specific needs of victims and survivors; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to consider the implications of the European Parliament's proposed legal definition of a victim contained in its draft Directive to establish minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime.

*Mr T Elliott
Mr M Nesbitt [R]
Mr D Kinahan*

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The sitting was suspended at 12.34pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm with the Speaker in the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness. The junior Minister, Ms Martina Anderson, also answered a number of questions.

5.2 Regional Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy.

5.3 Social Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland.

5.4 Culture, Arts and Leisure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

6. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

6.1 Motion - Support for Victims and Survivors (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

7. Adjournment

- Mr Alex Easton spoke to his topic on the future of the Prison Service Lisnevin site in Millisle

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.02pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

8 May 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

8 May 2012

Division 1

Final Stage - Pensions Bill (NIA 3/11/15)

Minister for Social Development

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 77

Noes: 13

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Doherty, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Ms Gildernew, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCreagh, Mr I McCreagh, Mr McElduff, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Ó hOisín, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

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

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Durkan and Mr P Ramsey.

The Final Stage was **passed**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 2 - 8 May 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
 - Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DOJ)
5. Assembly Reports
 - Report on Excess Votes (Northern Ireland) 2010-2011 (NIA 47/11-15) (Public Accounts Committee)
 - Report on the Bioscience Technology Institute (NIA 48/11-15) (Public Accounts Committee)
 - Seventeenth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules (NIA 49/11-15)
6. Statutory Rules
 - S.R. 2012/177 The Carriage of Explosives (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOJ)
 - S.R. 2012/182 The Children's Homes (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
 - S.R. 2012/183 Local Government Pension Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
 - A Strategy to Improve the Lives of Disabled People - 2012-2015 (OFMDFM)
 - Consultation on the Review of HSC Student Bursary Schemes (DHSSPS)
9. Departmental Publications
 - Regulations to Prohibit the Blacklisting of Trade Unionists: Departmental Response to the Public Consultation (DEL)
 - Sustainable Energy Action Plan (SEAP) (DETI)
 - Department of Finance and Personnel Memorandum on the Fourth Report from the Public Accounts Committee Mandate 2011-2015 - The use of Locum Doctors by Northern Ireland Hospitals (DFP)
 - Welfare Reform Bill (Northern Ireland) 2011 Completed Equality Impact Assessment (DSD)
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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Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 9 May 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	08.03.12	27.03.12	24.04.12	08.05.12	
/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	20.03.12
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12					
Superannuation Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	22.05.12					

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 14 May 2012

The Assembly met at noon, 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 Institutional Format

The deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness, made a statement regarding the North-South Ministerial Council meeting in Institutional Format, following which he replied to questions.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

2.2 Statement - Health and Social Care Shared Services

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, made a statement regarding the Health and Social Care Shared Services, following which he replied to questions.

3. Committee Business

3.1 Motion - Report on the Review of Judicial Appointments (NIA 38/11-15)

Proposed:

That this Assembly approves the Report of the Committee for Justice on its Review of Judicial Appointments and the recommendation that there should be no changes to the current process for judicial appointments and removals in Northern Ireland at this time; and endorses the intention of the Committee to undertake a further review of the judicial appointments and removals processes.

Chairperson, Committee for Justice

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.2 Motion - Extension of Committee Stage: Superannuation Bill (NIA 6/11-15)

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33 (4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33 (2) be extended to 28 September 2012, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Superannuation Bill (NIA Bill 6/11-15).

Chairperson, Committee for Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The sitting was suspended at 2.23pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.30pm 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 First Minister, Rt Hon Peter Robinson. The junior Minister, Mr Jonathan Bell, also answered a number of questions.

4.2 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion - Agri-Crime

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with concern the impact of agri-crime on our farming community; calls on the Minister of Justice to ensure that the perpetrators of such crimes receive the maximum possible sentences; and further calls on the Minister to ensure that clear advice is provided by the Department on the extent to which land owners are permitted to defend their property, and that this is reflected in the forthcoming Justice Bill.

*Mr D McIlveen
Lord Morrow*

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

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 4.53pm.

**Mr William Hay
The Speaker**

14 May 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 9 - 14 May 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
 - Environment Inquiry into the Management of Used Tyres in Northern Ireland (NIA 11/11-15) (Committee for the Environment)
 - Summary of Responses and Evidence to the Committee's Consultation on the Dissolution of the Department for Employment and Learning and the Transfer of its Functions (NIA 51/11-15) (Committee for Employment and Learning)
6. Statutory Rules
 - Draft S.R.2012 The Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide (2007 Act) (Commencement) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOJ)
 - Draft S.R. 2012 The Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) (Exemption) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
 - S.R. 2012/185 The Potatoes Originating in Egypt (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
 - Scotland Act 2012
 - Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012
 - Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 15 May 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 Transport Sectoral Format: Roads and Transport Issues

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, made a statement regarding the North-South Ministerial Council meeting in Transport Sectoral Format: Roads and Transport Issues, following which he replied to questions.

2.2 Statement - North-South Ministerial Council meeting in Transport Sectoral Format: Road Safety Issues

The Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood, made a statement regarding the North-South Ministerial Council meeting in Transport Sectoral Format: Road Safety Issues, following which he replied to questions.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

2.3 Statement - Further Funding Allocations in 2012 - 13

The Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd, made a statement regarding Further Funding Allocations in 2012 - 13, following which he replied to questions.

3. Committee Business

3.1 Motion - Interim Report of the Committee for the Environment on its Inquiry into the Management of Used Tyres in Northern Ireland

Proposed:

That this Assembly approves the interim report of the Committee for the Environment on its Inquiry into the Management of Used Tyres in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister of the Environment to bring forward a timetable for implementing the recommendations contained in the report.

Chairperson, Committee for Environment

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.32pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm with the Speaker in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Employment and Learning

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry.

4.2 Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster.

5. Committee Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Motion - Interim Report of the Committee for the Environment on its Inquiry into the Management of Used Tyres in Northern Ireland (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5.2 Motion - Transfer of Department for Employment and Learning Functions

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister, when considering the transfer of the functions currently exercised by the Department for Employment and Learning to other Departments, to take note of the views expressed by key stakeholders consulted by the Committee for Employment and Learning.

Chairperson, Committee for Employment and Learning

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6. Adjournment

Mr Jonathan Craig spoke to his topic on the consultation on the removal of special needs units at Knockmore Primary School, Lisburn.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 6.05pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

15 May 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

**Papers Presented to the Assembly on
15 May 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
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

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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 16 MAY 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	08.03.12	27.03.12	24.04.12	08.05.12	
/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	20.03.12
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12					
Superannuation Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	28.09.12					

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

