



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

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

**Volume 121**

(19 November 2016 to 2 December 2016)



# Table of Contents

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

## Official Report (Hansard)

### Assembly Sittings

Monday 21 November 2016

<b>Speaker's Business</b> .....	1
<b>Ministerial Statement</b>	
Prisons: Mental Health .....	2
<b>Opposition Business</b>	
Agriculture: EU Funding.....	7
<b>Oral Answers to Questions</b>	
The Executive Office .....	17
Economy.....	23
<b>Question for Urgent Oral Answer</b>	
<b>The Executive Office</b>	
Social Investment Fund: Audit .....	30
<b>Assembly Business</b>	
Extension of Sitting .....	34
<b>Opposition Business</b>	
Agriculture: EU Funding ( <i>continued</i> ) .....	35
Rural Schools: Draft Strategic Area Plan.....	39
Poverty and Deprivation .....	53

## Tuesday 22 November 2016

<b>Assembly Business</b> .....	63
Public Petition: Campaign for Abortion Law Reform in Northern Ireland .....	63
<b>Ministerial Statements</b>	
North/South Ministerial Council Plenary: Friday 18 November 2016 .....	64
Rating Policy .....	69
North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture .....	78
<b>Oral Answers to Questions</b>	
Education .....	82
Finance .....	88
<b>Question for Urgent Oral Answer</b>	
<b>Education</b>	
Schools: Proposed Industrial Action by the NASUWT .....	95
<b>Ministerial Statements</b>	
Regeneration Bill .....	98
British-Irish Council: Environment .....	105
<b>Executive Committee Business</b>	
Savings (Government Contributions) Bill: Legislative Consent Motion .....	108
<b>Private Members' Business</b>	
Energy Affordability and Security .....	110
<b>Assembly Business</b> .....	123
<b>Private Members' Business</b>	
Arm's-length Bodies .....	123
<b>Assembly Business</b> .....	137
<b>Adjournment</b>	
Road and Footpath Maintenance: North Down .....	138

## Monday 28 November 2016

<b>Assembly Business</b>	
Public Petition: Promotion of the Protection of Unborn Children in Northern Ireland .....	143
<b>Executive Committee Business</b>	
Higher Education and Research Bill: Legislative Consent Motion .....	144
Further Education (Governing Body of Institution of Further Education) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 .....	155
Policing and Crime Bill: Legislative Consent Motion .....	156
<b>Oral Answers to Questions</b>	
Health .....	158
Infrastructure .....	166
<b>Executive Committee Business</b>	
Policing and Crime Bill: Legislative Consent Motion ( <i>continued</i> ) .....	173
Civil Legal Services (Scope) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 .....	186
<b>Assembly Business</b>	
Extension of Sitting: Standing Order 10(3A) .....	187
<b>Private Members' Business</b>	
House Sales Scheme .....	188

Tuesday 29 November 2016

<b>Assembly Business</b> .....	201
<b>Ministerial Statement</b>	
British-Irish Council: Summit .....	201
<b>Executive Committee Business</b>	
Insolvency (Monetary Limits) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 .....	206
Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 .....	207
<b>Private Members' Business</b>	
Medical School in the North-west .....	207
People Diagnosed with HIV .....	218
<b>Oral Answers to Questions</b>	
The Executive Office .....	222
Justice .....	228
Northern Ireland Assembly Commission .....	235
<b>Private Members' Business</b>	
People Diagnosed with HIV ( <i>continued</i> ) .....	240
<b>Adjournment</b>	
Outdoor Education Centres in South Down .....	247

## Written Answers

Friday 25 November 2016

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs .....	WA 1
Department for Communities .....	WA 10
Department of Education .....	WA 24
Department for the Economy .....	WA 56
Department of Finance .....	WA 62
Department of Health .....	WA 69
Department for Infrastructure .....	WA 136
Department of Justice .....	WA 157
Northern Ireland Assembly Commission .....	WA 166

Friday 2 December 2016

The Executive Office .....	WA 169
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs .....	WA 175
Department for Communities .....	WA 186
Department of Education .....	WA 196
Department for the Economy .....	WA 214
Department of Finance .....	WA 223
Department of Health .....	WA 231
Department for Infrastructure .....	WA 247
Department of Justice .....	WA 274
Northern Ireland Assembly Commission .....	WA 288

# Revised Written Answers

Friday 25 November 2016

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission ..... RWA 1

Friday 2 December 2016

Department for Communities ..... RWA 2

# Journal of Proceedings

## Minutes of Proceedings

Monday 21 November 2016.....MOP 1

Tuesday 22 November 2016 .....MOP 9

Monday 28 November 2016.....MOP 15

Tuesday 29 November 2016 .....MOP 21

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# Official Report (Hansard)



# Assembly Sitings



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# Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 21 November 2016

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

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## Speaker's Business

**Mr Speaker:** Members, on Friday afternoon, I received a media query to ask whether I would recuse myself from any future decisions on Assembly business in relation to Charter NI and the social investment fund. I replied to make it clear that I had already done so. I had, in fact, made it clear to my office on 24 October 2016. However, it is only right that the Assembly is the place where I should make a fuller statement on the issue. It is not normal that any Speaker would speak to the House about constituency interests, but I recognise that I should do so today.

I make it clear that, while I have offered advice, I do not hold and have never held a position as adviser to Charter NI. My involvement with Charter NI, as an organisation working on the ground in my constituency, has been no different than it would be with any organisation in my constituency seeking advice from its elected representative. I have supported Charter NI in projects that it is working on for the benefit of my constituents. All Members know that they will act similarly for organisations in their constituencies. Similarly, like Members from other parties, I was appointed as a constituency member to my local steering group for the social investment fund.

When a first question for urgent oral answer was received in relation to Charter NI on 24 October 2016, I gave consideration to whether I should take the decision. Given the time pressure, I proceeded to take the decision, but, in doing so, made it clear to my office that, if future decisions were required, it would be prudent for me to delegate to avoid any perception of conflict. As a consequence of that, when a second question for urgent oral answer was tabled on 8 November, the decision was delegated to the Principal Deputy Speaker, in line with the instruction given to my office on 24 October. The Principal Deputy Speaker then considered the procedural advice and made a decision on the basis of it.

With hindsight, I accept that it would have been better had I followed my initial instincts and also delegated the first question. I apologise unreservedly to the House for not having done so. Members can be assured that I will err on the side of caution in the future.

In accordance with the direction I gave to my office on 24 October, should any further procedural decisions be required relating to Assembly business around the social investment fund in East Belfast or Charter NI, I will again use the ability to delegate, which has been given to me under Standing Order 5(2). The Speaker's Office is diligent in recording when such decisions have been delegated, but, for the future, when a decision or oral question or

similar item is communicated, if it has been delegated, the Member will also be made aware of that when receiving the answer.

I am advised that it is unusual for there to be a direct conflict between a Speaker's constituency role and procedural decisions that may have to be taken. There are occasions when issues might come up related to our constituencies or other interests when the Deputy Speakers or I are in the Chair. In most circumstances, those are not problematic, but Members can be assured that, when a perceived conflict arises, we take account of it. For instance, it was very clear last week that questions on the social investment fund may feature prominently during questions for oral answer to the Executive Office today. I made clear to my office on Friday morning that I needed to consider whether it would be wiser for me not to be in the Chair for those questions as would normally be expected, and I will not be.

I want to make some additional points. Members may be aware that one of the issues I have been frustrated about in recent weeks has been trying to get across that the political reasons Members may give for accepting an item of business or, indeed, speculate as to why it has not been accepted, are not the same as the procedural considerations the Deputy Speakers and I take account of. That is why Members may sometimes reach different conclusions. In my letter to party leaders on 21 October, I made clear that the best way for me or, indeed, any of us to assure our independence and impartiality is to base our decisions on our procedures and precedents. While Members may not always like the outcomes, they can be assured that that is the approach I have taken.

I want to remind Members that I informed the House last week that I intend to bring forward new rulings on Matters of the Day and questions for urgent oral answer in the new year to make Members aware of the factors I will take account of. I have clearly noted the increased demand in this new mandate, and Members can expect that to be reflected in the new ruling.

Finally, I want to remind the House that, like other Members, I am elected to represent a constituency, but I am more constrained in how I can do that. For instance, I cannot raise constituency issues on the Floor or make public comment on areas of political debate. As someone who has always found working for constituents the most rewarding part of being an elected representative, I will admit that this is one aspect of being Speaker I have found particularly difficult. As I said, Members can expect me to be extremely cautious in the future in relation to where my responsibilities as Speaker and a constituency Member

interact. I will be having further discussions with my officials on that. However, I ask Members to be conscious that I, too, have constituents to represent.

I have clearly heard and understood the concerns that Members raised. I hope that a number of points are now on the record to make it clear that lessons have been learned and steps taken for the future.

**Mr Allister:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Would it be of assistance if guidance was given to Members that their membership of the steering committees under the social investment fund should be declared on the Register of Members' Interests?

**Mr Speaker:** I think, Mr Allister, that I will seek advice on that — you can also seek advice on the matter — from the Clerk of Standards.

**Mr Attwood:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In your statement, you said that there are occasions related to constituency or other interests where there would not be an issue that would be problematic in making a ruling, and you then referred in that regard to perceived conflicts of interest. I suggest that you consider that, where there are issues that might be problematic, and indeed where there may be perceived conflict of interest, it might be a better course of action for you as Speaker to take the advice of the Principal Deputy Speaker and the Deputy Speakers in order to ensure that there is a full hearing among you and your colleagues in relation to rulings that might be made when it comes to issues that might present as perceived conflicts of interest and where there are indeed issues that are problematic.

**Mr Speaker:** I will reflect on your comments, Mr Attwood, but I do have to say that I have confidence in the Speaker's team in the Assembly.

## Ministerial Statement

### Prisons: Mental Health

**Mr Speaker:** Before I call the Minister to make her statement, I remind her that Standing Order 18A(2) requires her to make a written copy of it available to Members at least 30 minutes before delivering it in the Chamber. The Minister has failed to meet this requirement this morning. The Business Office received the statement only at 11.49 am. Therefore, in accordance with Standing Order 18A(2), I ask her to state the reason for this prior to making her statement.

**Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice):** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I apologise to the House for the lateness in supplying the Business Office with my statement. It was an administrative oversight on our part. I will ensure that it does not happen again.

**Mr Speaker:** Thank you.

**Ms Sugden:** I wish to update Members on matters relating to mental health in the Northern Ireland Prison Service following recent deaths in custody.

First, my thoughts and sympathy are with all those who have been affected by the recent deaths in Maghaberry Prison. Every death in custody is a tragedy. It is a tragedy for bereaved family and friends. It greatly affects prison staff, particularly those officers who have worked with these vulnerable people and have come to know them. It is also a tragedy for other inmates who are affected, too.

As Justice Minister, I take extremely seriously the responsibility that is placed on me to care for every individual in custody in Northern Ireland. It is a very sad fact that the prison population includes groups of highly vulnerable people and, for some, the confinement regime itself presents a significant burden on their mental health.

Since November 2015, there have been five deaths in custody in Northern Ireland, four relating to mental health issues. On 17 November 2016, the prison population totalled 1,533. Of these, 417 were recorded as having a mental illness, and a further 740 prisoners were recorded as having an addiction. That amounts to just over 75% of the prison population.

The needs of those who are in prison are complex. In comparison with wider society, disproportionately higher numbers of prisoners present with mental health problems and personality disorders. In addition, the problems that are associated with alcohol and substance misuse, mental illness and generally poor coping skills are all higher among the prison population. Research also tells us that people who are in custody are more likely to have either undiagnosed or unmet health needs. For many, their first mental health diagnosis occurs only when they are in custody.

The Prison Service supports vulnerable prisoners through the supporting prisoners at risk (SPAR) process. This helps staff to identify at an early stage behaviours that suggest that a prisoner may be in personal crisis and in need of additional and immediate support and care. The emphasis is on individualised care of the prisoner and engagement to understand what is causing the distress.

**12.15 pm**

The SPAR process is designed to be a short-term crisis, first-aid management tool; it is not designed to provide long-term care or to address underlying issues such as poor mental health or historical trauma. The process provides for an immediate plan for keeping the person safe, a swift assessment of the concerns causing the crisis and a pathway for longer-term interventions and support to prevent or reduce a recurrence.

However we portray it, the custody environment is not designed to deal with those experiencing severe, chronic mental health issues. Whatever level of training we provide to staff, they remain prison officers. The Northern Ireland Prison Service cannot meet the challenge alone. We need the ongoing help and support of the Department of Health, other Departments and partners across the justice system and in the wider community. Prison officers play a vital role in assessing and supporting vulnerable offenders during periods of crisis. Countless lives have been saved by prison officers who identify prisoners at risk and care for them successfully. We owe them a debt of gratitude for the work that they do around the clock to keep prisoners as safe as possible in very challenging circumstances.

The management of the Prison Service, governors and their teams work tirelessly to reduce the rate of self-harm and to prevent suicide. Identifying and supporting prisoners with mental health issues remains a high priority for the Northern Ireland Prison Service. However, not every episode of self-harm can be prevented. Tragically, some suicides will happen despite the best efforts of staff. The Prison Service and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, which deliver healthcare in prisons, are committed to providing effective services to vulnerable people in custody. The Health Minister and I want to reassure the Assembly and the public that we are working together on this issue.

Following the most recent tragic death at Maghaberry, a meeting was held on Friday 18 November to develop a community response plan. It followed the same model that is adopted when there are potential clusters of suicide in the community. The aim of using that approach is to detect a potential suicide cluster and thereby prevent further deaths by suicide. Full investigations into the circumstances of the recent deaths at Maghaberry are ongoing. Whilst it would be wrong to pre-empt the findings of the Prisoner Ombudsman or a coroner's inquest, I believe that it is crucial to act immediately. I also believe this is the first time that this model, which has been used successfully in the community, has been adopted in a prison in Northern Ireland. The objectives of the work are to identify and support those potentially at risk through timely and coordinated support from all sectors; to coordinate local and additional resources through the response period; and to monitor and evaluate the response put in place.

Furthermore, the Prison Service is working in partnership with the South Eastern Trust to review suicide and self-harm policy. The new policy is still in development, but it is likely to adopt a two-strand approach to the management of prisoners at risk. The first strand is called proportional response, and that encompasses the essence of providing keep-safe care through positive staff engagement and immediate response and intervention if required. The second strand is called tailored support,

and that will provide a multi-agency approach to prisoner-specific, medium- to long-term care. All mental health and therapeutic care streams will be managed in partnership with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and facilitated by the Northern Ireland Prison Service through tailored support.

The Department of Health and the Department of Justice are continuing to liaise in respect of a joint healthcare and criminal justice strategy, covering the health and social care needs of people at all stages of the criminal justice journey — whether they are suspects, defendants or are serving sentences — in Northern Ireland. The draft criminal justice and healthcare strategy and action plan have been through consultation, and an analysis of the responses has been completed to inform the final strategy. It is an excellent example of how Departments can work together. I expect it to be finalised, agreed and brought forward for implementation as a matter of urgency.

Minister O'Neill and I have agreed to conduct an immediate review of vulnerable people in custody. Officials from both Departments are working together to define the structure, scope and time frame of that review. I know that Members appreciate the scale of the challenge in respect of mental health in prisons and the need for joined-up partnership working to address that challenge. I hope that Members also agree that, at a strategic and operational level, steps are already being taken to meet the needs of vulnerable individuals in custody.

**Mr Beattie:** I welcome the statement from the Justice Minister. I honestly believe that she is working towards dealing with the issue. It is good to see that she is working with the Health Minister to deal with the issue because it needs a joined-up approach. That must be welcomed. I have spoken to her on a number of occasions; she is absolutely sincere. I applaud her for the work that she has done so far.

I have raised this issue before: the SPAR process that she talked about is effective only if we have the right level and number of prison officers. Sadly, we are lacking that.

I have raised that concern before. The Prison Officers' Association raised the issue of manning levels with the First Minister and asked for action. That was on 10 October, and I do not believe that there has been any action taken.

If I may, I will say another thing to try to add value.

**Mr Speaker:** Mr Beattie, I ask you to come to a question.

**Mr Beattie:** Sorry. Has the Minister considered a system of trauma risk management for immediate management of prison officers after an incident?

**Ms Sugden:** I thank the Member for his question and for his continued interest in the area. We have spoken on a number of occasions, not least on the issues that he raises today. I welcome that support.

Yes, there are issues in prisons with staffing. It is something that some of the representative organisations that I have met have raised with me. Indeed, we are trying to find ways to better facilitate that, but it will not be easy. It will not be a challenge met overnight, but I do understand that there are serious consequences. To give the Member reassurance, I can say that it is something that I have a focus on. I am keen to support prison officers, and we

have had a conversation in recent weeks on how I have been trying to do that. I will announce in the next few weeks further support for prison officers around extending help from the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust (PRRT) both to serving and retired prison officers. I believe that there will be positive benefits from that; namely, helping with our sickness absence rates. Hopefully, that measure will enable us to have the full quantity of prison officers so that we can better care for prisoners.

I am pleased that the Member recognises that the issue is something that I am keen to tackle. We have a number of challenges. I cannot tackle those challenges overnight regrettably, but I am working towards doing it and am keen to listen to prison officers as much as possible to see what we can do to move forward.

**Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice):** I thank the Minister for her statement, albeit it was late. I welcome the content of the report. The community response plan seems to be common sense. I also welcome the review of the suicide and self-harm policy and the work on the draft criminal justice and healthcare strategy and action plan. Even with that multilayered approach, is it still the case that psychologist reports are being, at worst, ignored and, at best, left uncommunicated? Is medication being prescribed quickly enough, and are the drugs dispensed getting to the prisoner patient quickly enough? Will the Minister reassure me and the House that that issue will be looked at seriously and urgently? Will the reviews, strategies and action plans help deal with psychoactive substances? We know them to be a real problem in our prisons, contributing to the desperate behaviour of prisoners and the state of their mental health. Will support for prison staff be ingrained in all these policies and action plans?

**Ms Sugden:** I will address the last question first. There absolutely needs to be support for prison staff, because, ultimately, anything that we do will begin with them. I have said that in the House many times before. Prisoner officers are critical to trying to address this particular problem. I will seek to support them as much as I possibly can, whether that be through training or personal support for them.

The Member raised a valid point about the use of psychoactive substances in prisons. Those, as well as the use of other drugs and alcohol misuse, contribute to a lot of the problems that we are seeing with mental health in prisons. The review of vulnerable people in custody that I announced today will look at those particular issues. It is something that we are keen to address. One death in custody is one too many. It is deeply regrettable that we have had two deaths in a couple of weeks and four over the past year. The nature of prisons is that they are very challenging. I want to do as much as I can to stop this happening again, but I am not sure that it will be the case.

**Ms Boyle:** I thank the Minister and welcome this collaborative approach. What outcomes do you hope to achieve with the Health Minister and the criminal justice system around repeat offenders and those who are going through a revolving-door process in our prisons? They are mainly young people with mental health issues and psychoactive substance addictions before they enter prison.

Most of them, when they enter prison, are locked up for 23 hours a day; we heard that at the Justice Committee on Thursday past. Some of them are using psychoactive

substances as an escape and release from being locked up for 23 hours a day.

**Ms Sugden:** I thank the Member for her question. What I would like to see out of the review and this collaborative working is that health and social care for people in the criminal justice system should be there before, during and after their time in custody. The Member is right to suggest that there are incidents of reoffending because we are, perhaps, not most effectively putting in the appropriate supports for people who find themselves in custody. When they go back into the community, they do not perhaps get the support that they got whilst they were in custody. Therefore, it is one of the vulnerabilities that is manifested when they come out.

This approach needs to be a holistic one between the Health Minister and me and other agencies along the route right throughout the criminal justice system and in the community, where support also needs to be in place. We need to take a critical look at health and social care in prisons. I hope that the work that the Health Minister and I will take forward will reveal some of the areas that we can address effectively.

**Mr Attwood:** Last week, during a long meeting, the Justice Committee looked at a report into one of the tragic incidents in the prison. It was confirmed that — Mr Frew indicated this — it took eight days between a prisoner being prescribed an increase in medication and that being actioned. Given that there is meant to be joined-up work between the health side and the prison side, were the systems that are currently in place today to be stress-tested is the Minister confident that those sorts of incidents would not arise again? Will she give a guarantee that, in taking forward the community response plan, she will involve in that work people from the independent third-sector voluntary and community organisations that deal with self-harm and suicide at the front line and not just involve those who represent public bodies?

**Ms Sugden:** I thank the Member for his question. Absolutely. I think that we can do better in terms of the work between the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, which provides healthcare in my prisons. Since becoming Minister, and with my relationship with the Health Minister, there has been an increase in partnership working. Even in respect of the Programme for Government, when we talk about collaborative working, there is that essence of moving forward. We are in a much better place than we ever were before in terms of working together.

We are announcing today that we will strengthen that even more. We need to be mindful of the fact that whilst people are in our custody they should have the same access to health and social care as they would outside custody. In my mind, that is their basic right. There is a real opportunity to get this right so that people in custody get the service that they are entitled to.

The Member is absolutely right about the community and voluntary sector. The community is not just the statutory organisations; it is the community that people in custody go back to. I believe that the community and voluntary organisations are best placed to provide that support because they know these people best and they know their communities best. There is a real strength in the

community and voluntary sector along with this work, so yes, I can give that assurance.

**Mr Lunn:** I thank the Minister for her statement. It refers to a proportional response and the need for:

*“immediate response and intervention if required.”*

In the recent case of self-harm, prison staff and senior prison staff stood by for over half an hour and watched while a man slashed his own groin and then blinded himself manually. Is the Minister satisfied that, whatever comes out of this review, prison staff will be encouraged to take the initiative and take responsibility when required and stop this sort of thing if it is being observed rather than wait for somebody to give them guidance?

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

**Ms Sugden:** I certainly hope that, whatever comes out of the review, we can provide a more immediate response so that incidents such as the Member described do not happen.

This has to be tackled with a holistic approach. Officers need to be given the right training and skills to deal with this in the immediate environment, and we need to look at the healthcare side to ensure that we do not get to that point.

It has to be a full review of mental health in prisons. Our Prison Service saves lives on a day-to-day basis, and that cannot be overlooked. However, more work could be done, which is why this review comes at a very appropriate point.

### 12.30 pm

**Mrs Cameron:** I very much welcome the statement from the Minister of Justice. We had a lengthy Committee meeting on Thursday of almost five hours, and two hours were spent speaking to the health trust on the Sean Lynch case of serious self-harm. During the meeting, I asked a psychiatrist, Dr Bownes, about psychoactive substances, and I was quite distressed when I realised that mental health is an additional factor to these substances. I specifically asked whether, if a prisoner did not present with mental health issues and took these substances, the outcome could be the same, and the answer was yes. How will the Minister rid the prison estate of these substances, which are attacking brains, which was the answer I was given?

**Ms Sugden:** I thank the Member for her question. Psychoactive substances are completely dangerous and have the repercussions that you have suggested. Tackling drug and alcohol misuse in our prisons is a challenge; indeed, an amnesty has been conducted recently to rid prisons of these substances. The point of the amnesty was to highlight the danger of the substances. This is about educating prisoners about drug use and putting other procedures in place for people who bring substances into prisons. It is something that we need to strengthen, but I am assured at this stage that we are doing what we can. I take the point about psychoactive substances, and the two very much go hand in hand, whether it is the misuse of drugs or mental health problems. It is something that we need to look at, and it will form part of the review we have announced today.

**Mr McCartney:** The complexity of what we are dealing with cannot be overstated. In the last Question Time, I mentioned the assessment of prisoners as they came in, particularly to Maghaberry, and whether it was effective

enough. Also, on resources and the use of resources, the Anne Owers prison review team was very specific that better deployment of resources could be brought into place with the three mini-prisons in Maghaberry. I have stated that I think that that proposal has been, at best, ignored and that there is a degree of resistance to it. Will the Minister revisit it? Perhaps it will allow her some resource as she goes forward.

**Ms Sugden:** I thank the Member for his question. The SPAR process, as I have outlined, is a very immediate short-term approach to tackling mental health in prisons; it was never intended to provide a long-term solution for dealing with prisoners in our care. Certainly, any approach taken forward will need to have more focus on prisoners who present with mental health problems; 75% is not an insignificant number. This is something that we need to take very seriously; indeed, I hope the review that we have announced today alongside the Minister of Health will take into account how we can best tackle this moving forward. I am keen to look at what we need to put in place to ensure that this is not as much of a problem in the future.

**Mr Douglas:** I thank the Minister for her statement. Earlier, my colleague mentioned the psychologist’s report either being ignored or, at best, not being committed to. Will the Minister give the House an assurance that during the review, which I welcome, she will look at this particularly difficult area?

**Ms Sugden:** Yes, I certainly can give that assurance. We need to look at this area — it is deeply complex — and how we can best address it.

I am quite happy to have as full a review as we need to on the issue, and, if that includes providing a report or anything further, I am quite happy to do that, too.

**Mr Butler:** Thank you, Minister, for your statement. I welcome many of the short-term measures that you have embarked on, especially in conjunction with the Health Minister. You talked about the lack of training and the appropriateness of prison officers looking after people who have been diagnosed with mental health issues. Notwithstanding that, those subject to custodial sentences will find themselves looked after by prison officers. Are you satisfied that the training, specifically the induction training that our prison staff get, is appropriate at the moment? If not, are you looking to address that in the short term as well?

**Ms Sugden:** I thank the Member for his question. I am quite happy to look at that. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of the most recent deaths, we sharpened our focus on the current training to try to understand whether it was appropriate in terms of what we can do to try to ensure that, in the short term, such deaths do not happen again. I think that we need a wider review of prison officer training, but, as my statement said, it will not be for prison officers alone to tackle the issue. Prison officers, as you know, are there to do a job of caring for people in custody. We need that work to very much coincide with the service that the trust provides through health and social care in our prisons. I think that it is appropriate that we also look at it as part of the review to see whether there is anything that we can do. I believe that we need to better support prison officers in the job that they do so that they can better care for prisoners in custody. I am happy to look at that from the perspective of looking after prisoners but, most of all, from the perspective of supporting officers in their job.

**Mr Poots:** I understand your apology, Minister, and I am sure that the statement not being received in time was nothing whatsoever to do with you.

Obviously, the Minister inherited a circumstance in which there are not as many prison officers on the ground as there should be. Does she recognise the importance of having an adequate number of prison officers in the interests of the prisoners and, indeed, the prison staff? The mental health issue does not affect purely prisoners; given the stress that prison officers are under, many of them have severe mental health issues and are off sick at the moment.

**Ms Sugden:** I very much recognise that we have challenges in the Prison Service, particularly with sickness absence among prison officers. I am keen to look at and address that. I want to understand the problems in my prisons so that I can best address them. I have been speaking to the various representative bodies, and they have outlined those concerns to me. I cannot tackle it overnight, but I am giving it my immediate focus and will hopefully be able to get some satisfactory outcomes as soon as possible.

**Ms Bradshaw:** Thank you, Minister, for your statement this afternoon. I think that it is very encouraging. I want to focus on those prisoners who are engaging in the process. As Members will know, people with mental health issues have a low mood, and it is very hard for them to engage, let alone sustain their engagement, in therapies and support services. How will you tackle the wider cultural issue in prisons and make the mental health of prisoners everybody's business and responsibility?

**Ms Sugden:** I thank the Member for her question. The fact that, since I have become Minister, we have had an awful lot of focus on mental health in prisons demonstrates my commitment to trying to make it an issue that is very much on everybody's agenda and which is a priority for everyone. You raise a very important point about the complexities of mental health in prisons, given that there are those who do and those who do not engage in the process. I think that, to an extent, that is where the difficulties with tackling mental health issues in prisons come in. I believe that we need to take a more holistic view of health and social care in prisons and that, working with the Health Minister moving forward, we need to have a focus on that. I give an assurance to the House and to the Member that we need to have a focus on it.

I reiterate: 75% is not an insignificant number; in fact, it is quite a significant number, and it would be remiss of us if we did not put a focus on this. It is something that I am keen to do moving forward, and I hope that my statement has confirmed that to the House.

**Mr Beggs:** The recent Prisoner Ombudsman's report indicated that drug misuse has been a factor; indeed, that is an issue that officials highlighted at the Justice Committee on Thursday as inhibiting clinicians and mental health professionals in treating prisoners. Does the Minister recognise that there are regional variations in preferences for drugs? We apparently have a regime that follows the model in Scotland, where cocaine and opiates are preferred. There have been trends in drug misuse in our prisons with psychoactive substances, in particular, becoming more prominent. Will she ensure that we have

modern technology with appropriate testing for the drugs that cause the problem?

**Ms Sugden:** I thank the Member for raising the issue. There is, indeed, a problem with drugs in prisons, but there is also a problem with drugs outside prisons. He is right to suggest that we need to have a focus on it. We very much have to tailor-make our approach to addressing drugs in prisons in a way that is specific to Northern Ireland. As the Member rightly points out, the preference for drugs in Northern Ireland is different from other parts of the United Kingdom.

I am happy to look at it. I recognise that it is a problem, particularly because it goes hand in hand with mental health issues, and it would be remiss of us if we did not look at the problems around substance misuse while looking at mental health problems.

**Mr Ford:** I also thank the Minister for her statement. I particularly welcome her references to the commitment of the Minister of Health to work closely with her on these issues, something that was not always the case in the relatively recent past. Will the scope of the review that she has announced today include the specific issue of the potential establishment of a secure psychiatric facility, or will it deal solely with existing prison facilities?

**Ms Sugden:** We are at the very early stages of the review that we intend to take forward. We need to look at all the opportunities and options within our remit to understand how we can best address the problem. It is not something that we will not look at; indeed, in taking forward the review, we need to look at everything and understand what is best for Northern Ireland.

**Mr E McCann:** I put it to the Minister that there has been a broad welcome around the House for her statement. Does she understand that, out in the community, as we say, many people will take it with a pinch of salt? They will get the feeling that we have been here before. There have been tragedies and scandals, promises of investigations and statements that lessons have been learned, yet, as we have seen in recent days, the same thing happens again.

Given that we have had all the praise for our prison officers, will the Minister explain what consideration of staffing can explain the fact that prison officers watched while one prisoner used his thumbs to gouge his eyes out and others killed themselves? Why can they not be held to account like any other public servant? Is it not arguable that prison officers in Northern Ireland have received a bit too much support —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I think that the Member has asked his question.

**Mr E McCann:** — too automatically, when we should look more objectively at these things?

**Ms Sugden:** No, certainly not. Up to this stage, we have needed to better support prison officers. My saying that we should do that is not just about prison officers; if we better support prison officers, we will better support the prisoners in our care. That is where it begins, because, ultimately, prison officers are at the forefront, day-to-day, of looking after individuals in custody.

I have never been before the House to announce a review such as this, and I am keen to take it forward. Mental health in prisons is an issue that features regularly in discussions in the House, and it would be irresponsible

of me, as the Minister, if I did not address it in a robust and efficient way. One death is one death too many, and I certainly do not want it to be on my conscience that I did nothing about it.

I assure the Member that, alongside the Minister of Health, I am very serious about taking the review forward. I do not think that we can highlight individuals when discussing the wrongs and rights of this. We need to take an entirely holistic approach, and I reiterate that that begins by supporting prison officers because they will better care for the prisoners in our custody.

12.45 pm

## Opposition Business

### Agriculture: EU Funding

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

**Mr McGlone:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly notes with concern the risks to multiple streams of funding posed by withdrawal from the European Union; further notes that over 70% of all European funding to Northern Ireland falls under the common agricultural policy and other rural funds, which provide approximately £350 million each year to farmers, representing 87% of annual farm income; acknowledges that the agri-food sector accounts for 3.25% of Northern Ireland's gross value added, which equates to £1.1 billion at basic prices and approximately 71,500 local jobs and that existing strategies in these sectors, such as Going for Growth, make no provision for the withdrawal of European Union funding; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how she intends to uphold the First Minister's commitment that farmers can be provided for as well, if not better, if Northern Ireland leaves the European Union, and to detail how she will develop a strategy to provide for and secure the long-term sustainability of the agricultural and agri-food sectors to ensure no loss of assistance to farmers arising from the withdrawal of existing European Union funding.*

I speak in support of the motion as a representative of a predominantly rural constituency. I am very aware of the importance to farmers of the current funding that is available to them as a result of our EU membership. I am also aware of the concerns amongst farmers about the future. Those concerns and that lack of security are also about the viability of their farms and livelihoods if the Executive fail to secure replacement funding for what will be lost if we are forced to leave the European Union. That applies not just to our farmers but to businesses and the agri-food sector as they prepare their business proposals. None of these people leaves it to the last minute to develop their proposals for job creation, additional investment and the likes; they prepare them over three, four, five or six years along with their propositions, business plans etc. The availability of funding is integral to that.

As the motion states, over 70% of EU funding to Northern Ireland falls under the common agricultural policy and other rural funds. That amounts to approximately £350 million each year to farmers, which is 87% of the annual farm income. The agri-food sector is worth over £1 billion at basic prices and supports around 71,500 local jobs. We know that the Executive Office is aware of those facts, as they were in their letter to "Dear Theresa":

*"A further key issue for us is the agri-food sector, including fisheries which represent a much more important component of our regional economy than it*

*does for the UK as a whole. This is reflected in the fact that approximately 10% of UK receipts from the CAP accrue to Northern Ireland (accounting for the majority of our EU funding) and a large proportion of our food and agricultural output is exported to other EU and non-EU countries. Our agri-food sector ... is therefore uniquely vulnerable both to the loss of EU funding, and to potential tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade."*

Our Minister of Agriculture, when she welcomed the UK Minister for farming to Northern Ireland in October, said:

*"In 2015, total farming income would have been negative without subsidies".*

The response from the UK Minister for farming did not make it into the local Minister's press release, unfortunately, but, luckily, journalists were present to report that he told the sector stakeholders at the meeting that the agriculture industry would have to:

*"move away from the notion of subsidies".*

When the UK Minister for farming tells the Executive that:

*"We want to ensure a thriving future for a food and farming industry that is innovative, competitive, profitable and resilient",*

Members should know and the farming industry will know that he means that there will be cuts in the funding available to the agriculture sector when the UK leaves the EU.

What we have here is the conundrum of a Government in Westminster who are driven towards low food costs but, at the same time, given what this Minister has said, ostensibly want to remove the subsidy for farming. I do not know how those two equate. I have not met a farmer yet who can answer that question, and they are the practitioners on the ground.

The UK farming Minister would probably prefer there to be no subsidies and, therefore, no cost to the Treasury. That, of course, would devastate our farming industry and our agri-food sector and, indeed, because of its heavy reliance on agriculture, our economy. It would, in particular, decimate our small farmers. Agricultural land and the food it produces would be increasingly under the control of fewer and fewer large landowners, and that is not the type of society we have here. Rural Northern Ireland and, indeed, rural Ireland, by its very history and development, is traditionally smallholding.

As the local Minister of Agriculture said, our farmers are at the heart of our agri-food industry, which has an annual turnover of almost £5 billion and 20,000 employees. We are not just talking about the loss of standing programmes of EU funding; there is also the provision of a package of measures aimed at addressing emerging financial difficulties experienced by farmers, particularly those in the dairy sector. I am sure I am not on my own in attending meetings with farmers, some very substantial, particularly in the dairy sector, where they say they find it very difficult to make ends meet in the production of their quality produce. That sector recently has included the provision of EU milk production reduction aid and exceptional adjustment aid from the EU. Access to those emergency funds would also be lost if we leave the European Union; instead, it will be the responsibility of the Executive to respond to the needs of a farming sector in financial

difficulty, and they will have to find the funds to support farmers in need.

The guarantee on EU funding for the agriculture sector that the British Secretary provided relates only to pillar 1 funding. In its letter to the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the Treasury said it will reassure:

*"the agricultural sector that it will receive the same level of funding that it would have received under Pillar 1 of CAP until end of the Multiannual Financial Framework in 2020".*

The Assembly can, I hope, agree on the scale of the challenge the Executive face with the loss of EU funding in the agriculture and rural sectors. To date, the Minister's response has been to create a Brexit consultative committee. I hope — we will probably hear more from the Minister — that, at this time, thoughts are being given at Executive level at that consultative committee to the development of a strategy — a strategy that does not leave us in a situation where our farmers and our agri-food sector, come 2020, drop off the edge of a cliff financially and otherwise. That has to be avoided at all costs. Irrespective of what people's views are on Brexit or not to Brexit, we must at all costs avoid that situation.

The Executive seek to influence the negotiating position of the British Government in the EU as a whole and with the Irish Government in particular. That must be done. The British Government will decide on their negotiating position on their own, whatever committees the devolved regions sit in on. We will be told what that position is when the negotiations with the EU have concluded. By then, it will be too late. That really will be too late. My colleague Margaret Ritchie and I attended a meeting with Michael Creed recently with members of the Ulster Farmers' Union. We have a supportive friend in Minister Creed and, indeed, in his deputy Minister, Andrew Doyle. We collectively need to work more with them.

The SDLP opposed Brexit. We campaigned to stay in the European Union, and we continue to argue against Northern Ireland being dragged out of the EU against the clearly expressed wish of the people here. The deputy First Minister and his party colleagues can issue as many press releases as they like, but that will not be the argument put forward by the Executive in their discussions with the British and Irish Governments. The Executive have a responsibility, therefore, to plan for the future. The DUP and Sinn Féin have a responsibility to alleviate the concerns of those in the agriculture sector who are fearful for their livelihoods, their jobs and, indeed, their farms.

If the Minister of Agriculture, the Environment and Rural Affairs intends to uphold the First Minister's commitment that, if Northern Ireland leaves the European Union, farmers can be provided for as well, if not better, we need to hear detail. We need to hear how she will develop a strategy, potentially along with her colleagues in the Department for the Economy, to provide for and secure the long-term sustainability of the agriculture and agri-food sectors. If there is to be no loss of assistance to farmers arising from the withdrawal of the existing European Union funding, the Minister needs to set out her red lines for negotiations with the British Government. Farmers and everyone in the agriculture sector need to know what those red lines are or if red lines have been developed.

As the Minister knows, she has a responsibility to protect our farmers and the agriculture sector as a whole from the austerity that this British Government have a record of imposing in other areas of spending. People need to know what the strategy is. The economy needs to know. Agri-food and agriculture families need to know about it. Our rural areas need to know about a pending and developing strategy. Everyone says that to me. Let us start to develop the strategy now and not leave it until it is too late.

**Mr Poots:** It is a privilege to speak on the issue. First of all, Northern Ireland farmers voted overwhelmingly to get out of Europe. That is something that the House needs to reflect on when it debates agriculture and rural affairs.

**Mr Ford:** I am grateful to Mr Poots for giving way. I wonder if he could give us any shred of evidence on which to base the statement that he has just made.

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

**Mr Poots:** I thank the Member for giving me an extra minute. All the polls suggest that around 80% of farmers voted to get out of Europe, which strikes me as overwhelming. If the Member was talking to farmers in his constituency, he will know that that was overwhelmingly the case. When I went round the doors during the election before the referendum, farmer after farmer was saying, "We want to get out of Europe". Why did they want to get out of Europe? Because, over the 45-odd years that we were in Europe, it managed to invent something like 2,800 regulations affecting farming. That is one for every week that we have been in Europe. Farmers have been regulated to death. Farmers could not get on with the work that they needed to do, because they were so busy looking at the regulations. They were in fear of some mandarin coming to their farm as a result of the European regulations.

**Ms Dillon:** Thank you very much; I appreciate you allowing the intervention. Does the Member not agree that numerous agri-food sector stakeholders have said to the Committee, "We need those regulations to remain in place in order to secure the quality of our food moving forward and to be able to gain access to markets"? I also know that from my meetings with stakeholders over the summer months.

**Mr Poots:** I am not sure what regulations the Member wants to keep in place, because many of the regulations that are being applied are not practical and, as a consequence, actually damage the industry. They create an inability for farmers to operate as profitably as they should be —

**Mr Swann:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Poots:** — and they are not contributing to the environment in the way that they should. I note that the Member's name is on the Order Paper: maybe, when he is on his feet, he can clarify whether he voted to leave or stay in the EU.

**Mr Swann:** It was not going to be part of my contribution, but I am happy to say that I voted to leave. I was going to ask the Member about the regulations. He knows as well as I do that farmers often complain that the regulations are not coming from Europe, and the problem is our Department's interpretation and implementation of some of the regulations.

**Mr Poots:** European auditors were over the week before last, ensuring that the regulations were being applied. Northern Ireland has already been fined as a consequence of not applying the regulations as Europe saw fit. In Michelle Gildernew's term as Minister, we were hit very heavily with fines that we have been appealing ever since. Do not be in any doubt that Europe applied those fines.

Where do we go in looking forward? The decision has been made to get out, and farmers backed that decision. Why did farmers back the decision? I attended a debate with Martina Anderson one day, and she could not get it that farmers do not want handouts. Farmers do not want handouts; they want to make a bit of money from the work that they do. They want to be properly paid for their labours, as opposed to waiting for a cheque coming in every December.

#### 1.00 pm

That cheque is very useful and helpful, and it always beats a poke in the eye. Nonetheless, farmers want to be freed up to make a bit of money from their own farms and hard labours, as opposed to being environmental custodians who are paid to do that. They will be environmental custodians, by the way, because they have been doing that for many generations. In that respect, farmers want to get out and sell their produce. The UK imports £21 billion more in food than it exports. Everybody should be able to see the opportunity that exists. If Europe is silly enough to insist on imposing tariffs — I think that Juncker and a few of them are — it will lead to many more millions of pounds flowing into the coffers of the UK and out of those of European countries. In that instance, we would have an opportunity. Say, for example, to make things simple, there was a tariff of 10%. If the price of beef were £4 per kilo here, it would be £3.60 per kilo in the Republic of Ireland; if milk were 25p per litre here, it would be 22.5p per litre there. That would put the Northern Ireland farmer at an advantage, not a disadvantage. People talk about soft and hard Brexit. For the agriculture sector, a hard Brexit would probably work well because of the £21 billion difference between what Britain buys and what it sells to the rest of Europe. That would put Northern Ireland farmers into an advantageous position.

In terms of aid, everybody knows that the deal that was done in 2013 will not be repeated in 2020 because the accession countries are going to get more money. Consequently, the UK would be contributing more and getting less. Farmers were going to be worse off under the 2020 deal in any event. I am glad that we can make our own deal, and we will work with people like George Eustice, who has an ear for what the farming community wants, to get the best deal possible for Northern Ireland farmers.

**Ms Archibald:** I am pleased to contribute to the debate, and I support the motion. I believe that the development of the strategy to ensure the future sustainability and, indeed, survival of one of our most important sectors must be a priority. The contribution of the agri-food sector to the economy of the North is outlined in the motion. Though I will not rehearse it, it most certainly must not be understated. Our farmers depend very much on payments received, which amount to some £265 million per year in basic payments. The single farm payment, and other payments such as those from the agri-environment schemes and the areas of natural constraint (ANC) scheme, ensure that farmers have the means to survive.

Without those, as Mr McGlone outlined, farm incomes would have been negative last year and in four of the five previous years.

Continued levels of support must be ensured to secure the future sustainability of farming and the agri-food industry. For Sinn Féin, the best way to ensure it is through the negotiation of special circumstances for the North to remain as part of the EU in an all-island solution. That has been our consistent position. In that scenario, the North would remain subject to the common agricultural policy and current system of payments, which is in place until 2020, when the new arrangements will be negotiated. There are, of course, many critics of CAP and some criticisms are genuine, though I doubt that many would disagree with its overall objective, which is to:

*“increase agricultural productivity and thus ensure a fair standard of living for agricultural producers; stabilise markets; assure availability of supplies; and ensure reasonable prices to consumers.”*

These are entirely relevant to our farmers still, and many of the stakeholders, as Linda outlined, have presented to the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, again and again, outlining the need for fair prices and market stability. They also highlight the need for continued support to farmers and the importance of environmental schemes.

I am sure that many of the issues that are being raised currently in terms of the priorities for the agri-food sector post-Brexit will form part of the negotiations over the direction of CAP post-2020. However, the difference is the policy objective of those doing the negotiating. The importance of agriculture has always been a priority for the EU. Part of the criticism of CAP is the amount of the EU budget that goes towards it. The same importance and policy priority is not placed on agriculture by the British Government, who have repeatedly argued, including in the previous CAP negotiations, that direct payments do not represent value for money.

In October of this year, George Freeman, the chairman of the Conservative Party policy board, said that once people realise how much cash was being sent spent on farming subsidies, they would want it to be diverted to hospitals, unless Ministers could make a strong case for how the money was being spent. Referring to farming subsidies post Brexit, he said:

*“in no sector is the shake out from Brexit going to be more profound and there is a lot of negotiating to do ... There is quite a big piece of work to be done to explain to the public properly why the British agricultural industry is a key strategic sector for the UK — which I don't think has been explained well.”*

He went on to say that the Government would protect payments to unprofitable hill farmers but other areas were “likely to change”. He said:

*“We are going to end up supporting bits of farming that clearly would not work without some support. I just think the British electorate would say ‘hang on a minute, we understand why marginal hill farmers, and people who could not exist without support, need some help’. But they may have a problem with ‘you mean we*

*have to write a big cheque every year that we used to turn a blind eye to when it was Europe”.*

From our perspective, I guess that, if we were being optimistic, we could take comfort from the recognition in his comments that some types of farming will need to be supported, but the overall sentiment on the level of budget being directed towards farming supports is far from encouraging.

Earlier this month, George Eustice, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Minister, outlined his vision of the future farming policy under five basic criteria, which included promoting food security and maintaining a high standard of animal welfare. In his final criterion, he stated that, if farmers were given a fairer share of the value of the supply chain, they would not need the subsidies that they now depend on. That point is more than a little bit ambitious. It is difficult to see how that could be achieved, certainly in the shorter term. Indeed, many predict that, without subsidies to farmers, food prices would escalate to cover the cost to producers.

There is also the issue of trading and of competing with the EU, as recognised by the House of Commons paper on the policy impacts of Brexit. It highlights the uncertainty around the kind of future CAP that UK farmers will be competing with, as the policy is currently being simplified and will be reformed for 2021.

Therefore, the signals coming from the British Government are not encouraging. The Minister has her work cut out for her to develop a strategy that will secure the future of our agri-food industry under the finances available from the British Government. It is my belief that any future strategy must encourage sustainable production and best agricultural practice, have a strong focus on —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I ask the Member to draw her remarks to a close.

**Ms Archibald:** — the importance of harmonising farming practices with good environmental management and provide adequate support for the sectors of farming that struggle to be profitable on the land available to them. Achieving —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Thank you. The Member's time is up.

**Mr McKee:** I welcome the opportunity to take part in today's debate. No matter what way we voted in the referendum, we all have an obligation to work quickly and effectively to ensure that our farmers are supported after the UK leaves the European Union. It would be easy to assume that most farmers voted “Remain”, given the fact that up to 87% of Northern Ireland's total farming income comes from the single farm payment, but that is not necessarily the case. In fact, during the referendum, I spoke to countless farmers in south Down who were so frustrated with what they considered to be unwarranted and excessive regulation that they were voting “Leave”, even though they knew that there was nothing decided on what a future support model for agriculture would look like.

Many farmers voted to leave for many different reasons. It is therefore unfortunate that some people are unfairly trying to tag them to the phrase “Regrexit” and that individuals, such as the privileged Earl of Sandwich, are taking it upon themselves to make sweeping statements

about farmers having voted without understanding the consequences. Farmers knew exactly the gravity of what they were being asked to vote for, and those who voted "Leave" should not be dismissed so arrogantly, as they probably had more dealings with Europe over the past 40 years than most other groups of people here.

Nevertheless, few sectors of the local economy face being affected as much as our local agri-food industry. It is therefore disappointing that not even the most basic preparations were put in place before the referendum by the Minister, her Department or DEFRA. Whilst I very much welcome the subsequent commitment from Philip Hammond that the Treasury will make up the shortfall in EU funding to farmers, it is nothing more than a stopgap. Last year, the UK received around £3 billion of support, and, of that, almost 10% came to Northern Ireland. Therein lies the danger, however, because if Northern Ireland were to receive only a proportion of future funding through the Barnett formula, we would be looking at receiving only approximately one third of what we receive at present.

The comments of George Freeman, the MP in charge of the Prime Minister's policy board, were concerning, and I hope that they were not a reflection of where the Conservative Party is heading on the issue. He is most likely not the only Member of Parliament who would like to see funding for our farmers being diverted elsewhere, as previous Labour Governments were also in favour of reducing key agricultural subsidies.

There are some people who think that Brexit is an opportunity to end agricultural subsidies. They make all sorts of claims ABOUT how other models work best and ask why one sector should be given support over another. However, the same people often overlook the vast sums of money that could be considered subsidies that are granted to other sectors. For instance, the Executive have already spent well in excess of £60 million on small business rates relief, and our universities receive hundreds of millions of pounds in public funding. I am not arguing against that, but it is important to remember it to dispel the notion that farmers are in some unique and privileged position. The reality is that most developed countries, whether they are in the EU or not, provide some form of public funding for farming communities, and I fully expect that to continue to be the case in Northern Ireland.

A key priority for the UK Government should now be to support and maintain a strong farming industry at home. The advances in our outputs, the continuing penetration into new export markets and the sheer level of innovation mean that the industry, at a high level, is almost unrecognisable compared with only a decade or two ago. For many farmers who continue to work the land, the industry remains uncertain. Price volatility over recent years has demonstrated starkly just how unpredictable making a living from it can be; indeed, over recent times, the only certainty that some farmers had was that, come December, they would receive their single farm payment. There now exists a policy vacuum that needs to be addressed quickly. I ask the Minister to listen carefully to the concerns raised in today's debate.

**Mr Ford:** I should probably start by declaring an interest, as my household is a beneficiary of EU funding.

I welcome this motion from the two colleague parties of Opposition. I am not sure whether it is an indication that on

Opposition days we can expect motions to become longer and longer as both parties get every point they want into them. The motion is, nonetheless, a comprehensive and appropriate one that I will support, although it might have been improved if an amendment that I had suggested, which referred to the potential threats to trade, had been included.

The motion correctly states the size of EU funding to Northern Ireland agriculture as £350 million a year. It does not state the proportion of the UK funding that we receive, although Mr McGlone, in proposing the motion, made the point, which Mr McKee repeated, that Northern Ireland gets 10% of UK funding. That is the first potential threat to Northern Ireland agriculture: if the Treasury were to operate on a start-afresh basis and our funding was allocated on the basis of the Barnett formula, we would be talking about 2.9% and not 10%.

We have the much trumpeted guarantee of the equivalent of EU funding levels until 2020, which, given that it will take until 2019 at the earliest for the UK to leave the EU, is not much of a long-term guarantee. All the evidence is that the UK Government are likely to seek to reduce the funding that they provide to agriculture, so there is a severe likelihood that, after 2020, we will receive something less than 10% of something less than £350 million. If there is any political support for agriculture in the Conservative Government, it certainly does not go to the grass-based farming of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and the less-favoured areas of England; it is entirely concentrated on the arable farmers of southern and eastern England. There is a significant threat.

Of course, there are other issues. It is not just about farming; there are key issues with the other jobs that farmers provide either upstream or downstream. A massive number of jobs will be affected, whether in the small-scale hardware-type businesses that supply farmers and cater for their day-to-day needs or in the major, in many cases multinational, food processors. We all know about the concept of an economic multiplier in jobs being provided, but what we do not always acknowledge is that the multiplier can go downwards as well as upwards. If farming goes down, there will be a severe threat to businesses in our high streets, small local agribusinesses in rural areas and to some significant employers of large numbers of people.

### 1.15 pm

The third threat we face concerns cross-border trade. It is simply not realised how integrated food production has become on this island over the last 40 years. We are a long way from the economic war that de Valera tried to wage in the 1930s, pretending that Ireland could be entirely sufficient without dealing with the UK. Every week, thousands of pigs come north for processing. Virtually every week, thousands of cattle go south. At this time of the year, tens of thousands of sheep go south. Millions of litres of milk go north and south between production and processing. All of those potentially face major difficulties with the likelihood of a hard border being imposed in the event of a hard Brexit. All those people run the risk of suffering in a way that would be just as significant as the loss of direct subsidy, if they cannot trade in the way that they have been used to.

Whilst there is some potential for the development of new processing facilities in a way that would meet the needs

of producers on both sides of the border, all of that is at an economic cost. It is the opportunity cost of failing to maximise the use of the facilities that already exist at the expense of buying others. The potential difficulties in cross-border trade could increase the monopoly powers of some who buy the produce of farmers.

There is also the wider threat of access to EU markets. People may moan all they like about regulations, but, if we are to export, we need to see people adhering to the current level of regulation.

All of that suggests that the motion should be supported, and there is a real need to see the Executive providing us with a lead.

**Mr Irwin:** I am interested in the debate as one who, as a farmer all his life, has had to grapple with the ever-increasing and ever-encroaching grip of the European Union on our agriculture industry and, critically, on our farmers and their families. It is clear that no one in the UUP or the SDLP has listened much to the people they allegedly represent. Certainly, they have not paid much attention to those in the farming community who, like me, are sick, sore and tired of the EU's meddling and bureaucracy. The Opposition — or so-called Opposition — still appear to struggle with the fact that a democratic vote, namely the referendum, delivered a result that will eventually see the UK, of which Northern Ireland is an important part, leave the European Union. Despite some current delays, I believe that the process will gather pace and that the negotiation phase will be an important procedure to ensure that Northern Ireland is best served in a post-Brexit landscape.

Through my busy constituency service, I receive many calls from farmers from across the Province, and many of the matters they bring to me focus on issues regarding EU rules and regulations and the application of those rules. There are never calls with cheers of support for the EU, I can tell you; rather, they are calls regarding the pitfalls and the reams of paperwork in complying with the lengthening list of EU directives. As my colleague said earlier, is it any wonder that polls told us that 80% of farmers were voting to leave the EU?

**Mr Poots:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Irwin:** I will, yes.

**Mr Poots:** Will the Member recognise that another important element of the food industry is fishing — I tried to get Mr McKee to give way, but he would not — and that 80% of Irish fish are caught in British waters, 50% of Danish fish are caught in British waters and the Spaniards are never out of British waters? There is a huge opportunity for the food industry in terms of fishing as we go forward out of Europe.

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

**Mr Irwin:** I thank the Member for his intervention. Certainly, fishermen look forward to being out of Europe. They have suffered horrendously under Europe.

The argument presented by the Opposition hangs its hat on the issues of the EU budget and what benefit the agri-sector gains from EU membership. It is therefore worth noting that Commissioner Hogan has given a basic maths lesson on the economics of EU membership. At the time

of campaigning, the “Remain” camp made a big deal of the impact that leaving would have on support for farmers. It was not difficult to work out that giving €20 billion to the EU and receiving less than €10 billion in return has not been a good deal for the UK. The fact that Mr Hogan now warns of a €3 billion black hole in the European budget is further proof of the ridiculousness of this system. Mr Hogan, in a recent interview, offered only two possible solutions to plug this gap: the generation of new sources of income, which will necessitate new agreements by member states and cost member states more; or a cut in EU expenditure. Surprise, surprise, he suspects that the latter will be the choice.

So there you have it. For years, the UK has been forced to pay vast amounts into the EU while getting a vastly reduced return, and this latest announcement from Mr Hogan is certainly no advertisement for continued membership. The result of our exit from the EU will be that member states end up paying more into the EU to get even less in return or, alternatively, they can decide not to pay any more but still get less in return in order to plug the black hole. It does not sound like a great system, does it?

Brexit has presented a very real and important opportunity to bring about a system that benefits our agri-food industry in Northern Ireland and a system of support based on the realities of food production here. We have a quality of produce that is second to none. Our standards of production are excellent and far exceed the standards in many other countries. Our farm-gate to plate traceability mechanisms are also of an extremely high standard. These are huge positives for our industry in competing in a post-Brexit landscape.

Since Brexit, most farm-gate prices have increased substantially. Pig prices, cattle prices, sheep prices and milk prices have all increased over the last number of months. When I was speaking to the Ulster Farmers' Union the other day, it told me that pensions have been boosted big time because of Brexit. Theresa May has guaranteed support for farmers going forward, and I am content, as a farmer, that the type of support system made available post-Brexit will encourage growth and, crucially, be less bureaucratic. Indeed, these mainstays of any future system have already been committed to by DEFRA, and I know that our Executive, including Minister McIlveen, will ensure that these principles of growth, promotion and assistance are adhered to.

**Ms Dillon:** Neither Mr Poots nor Mr Irwin indicated whether their party will support the motion. Given the wording of the motion, I think that it would be difficult for all parties in the House not to support it, because I imagine that, regardless of our position on the EU referendum, we all want the Minister to do the best she possibly can to support our farmers in the future.

The agri-food sector is, without a doubt, one of the most important, if not the most important, sectors in our economy and, as such, must be protected. I met numerous stakeholders over the summer months and many concerns were raised, from funding to workforce issues. The workforce issue has not been acknowledged yet today. Many of the workforce in the agri-food sector are non-nationals and come from other EU countries. The big concern that a lot of businesses raised with me was about their workforce and how they will sustain that into the future. Concerns were also raised around regulation and legislation, and, as I mentioned, those in the agri-food

sector have raised their concern that the regulations will be changed or reduced, which would affect the quality of our food and the reassurance that we could give about the quality of our food to countries in and outside Europe.

**Mr Poots:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms Dillon:** I will.

**Mr Poots:** There are regulations that require farmers to ask the Department for permission to clean out a drain, to cut down a tree that is more than six inches in diameter or to plough their fields at this time of the year. Does the Member honestly believe that those regulations are good and beneficial for the environment? Most farmers think that they are an absolute nonsense?

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

**Ms Dillon:** Go raibh maith agat. First, it is the sectors out there that tell me we need the regulations. I am not saying that everything that comes from Europe is perfect: there are many difficulties and challenges with Europe. I accept that. However, this is what the sectors are telling me, including the Agri-Food Strategy Board.

**Mr McGlone:** Thanks very much to the Member for giving way for a very brief point. Would the Member accept that a lot of what we are hearing about growth is based on the growth of our export markets and that many of the states that anticipate the exports will demand the same standards, particularly in food regulation?

**Ms Dillon:** Absolutely; that is the very point stakeholders made when I met them.

What this would mean for cross-border movement of livestock and produce is another big concern for all the sectors. Less regulation and red tape for farmers was quickly exposed as a red herring by those I met for all the reasons outlined, including concerns about the quality assurance of our food. Really what they told me is that the one thing we have going for us, as a small region, is the quality of our food and the standards it meets.

Our producers in every sector, whether arable, beef, pork, lamb or poultry, are facing significant challenges due to volatility in the market, and they rely very much on financial support. Farmers are being asked to apply now for funding under the farm business improvement scheme, but, in order to establish the long-term viability of any plan for their farm, these farmers need income security and we have no idea what support, if any, will be given in future. I am deeply concerned about how farmers will be supported into the future, what access there will be to other markets and what tariffs might be in place. We are relying on the British Government to step up to the plate, because we will not have any say on future funding measures.

Let there be no mistake: we are all acutely aware that the Executive are already struggling in the face of Tory cuts, so there will be no excess in the Executive Budget to offer support to farmers. Those in the British Government who campaigned for "Leave" talked about targeting savings at the health service. I do not recall them saying that money saved by Brexit would be targeted to support farmers in the North. Our party's position on the EU referendum has been very clear. One of the reasons why we argued and continue to argue for the North to remain in the EU, in an all-island settlement or however it works itself out, is that

the big losers will be our farmers, agri-food sectors and rural communities, which have not been mentioned today. More people than farmers rely on support from the EU in rural areas.

We need to be clear that the future income of farmers is very uncertain. I call on the Minister to seek assurances and to give detail on what future support might look like. We need that detail soon. Farm businesses cannot forward-plan in the current climate of uncertainty and in an information vacuum. The Minister also needs to review the Going for Growth strategy in the light of the EU result. We have to look again at how other markets will be targeted. There are also other issues such as labelling. All this was raised with me when I met stakeholders, not least the Agri-Food Strategy Board.

**Mr Anderson:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. We all recognise that the agriculture sector plays a pivotal role in the Northern Ireland economy, with approximately 70,000 people employed in the agriculture and food processing sectors. The Minister for DEFRA, George Eustice, has recently noted that food and farming are worth more than £4.8 billion a year to the Northern Ireland economy. I have no doubt that, moving forward, the agriculture sector will continue to play an important part in our economy, providing resources and employment to many of our people.

As a rural dweller myself, I have regular contact with many farmers and food producers, and the view of the overwhelming majority during the referendum campaign was that the United Kingdom would be best served by leaving the European Union. Many made the point that they are massively restricted by European over regulation and that by leaving the European Union a new dynamic could be shaped, providing the agriculture sector with more freedom and opportunities.

Some people are of the view that there is much uncertainty about leaving the European Union, but we have to recognise that, had the people of the United Kingdom decided to remain in Europe, our future financial support arrangements would, indeed, be far from certain.

### 1.30 pm

Since the referendum, there has been a range of positives for the agriculture industry. We have seen, for example, farm-gate prices improve, partly due to exchange rate movements. As such, there have been improvements in the price of sheep, cattle and milk for local farmers. In line with this, I welcome the fact that, in recent weeks, the Treasury has guaranteed structural and investment funds for projects that are signed up to the point at which the UK leaves the European Union. That follows a commitment that was given in August to maintain current levels of CAP support until 2020. I echo the Minister's recent comments on the matter, particularly on the fact that we now have the chance to develop support structures that are more tailored to our needs and not restricted by unnecessary bureaucracy.

I take this opportunity to commend the Minister for her work to date on Brexit. It is encouraging that, during her short time in office, she has met Cabinet Ministers, including the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, as well as engaging with counterparts from other devolved Administrations and the Republic of Ireland. The Minister has always projected the need for Northern Ireland's

voice to be heard and listened to clearly as we move forward. I particularly welcome the fact that she, along with the Economy Minister, has set up a Brexit consultative committee to provide a forum to engage effectively with representatives from agri-food bodies, farming unions, trade bodies and environmental stakeholders. This committee will be useful because it formalises discussions between the Government and key industry stakeholders so that open discussions and debate can be taken account of as policy and negotiating positions are developed.

I am fully aware that future trade and support arrangements will be very important for the agri-food industry. That can be highlighted by the fact that approximately 70% of the output of the food and drinks sector is sold externally. Whilst there will be challenges as we seek to secure the best deal as we leave the EU, it is important that we do not overlook the opportunities that, I believe, will be presented. Open trading arrangements should continue with existing markets. There should be a much more progressive approach to developing new markets across the globe. I believe that we should seek to develop trading arrangements that are advantageous to Northern Ireland. We also now have the chance to create a new support scheme after leaving the EU that should have less red tape and be much less problematic to operate than the scheme that is in place at present.

The people of the United Kingdom have given a clear and indisputable mandate for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. It is now vital that all political representatives, no matter which side they were on during the referendum campaign, focus their energies on securing the best deal for everyone. I know that the Minister will continue to engage with key stakeholders in the weeks and months ahead, ensuring that Northern Ireland's interests are put forward in a constructive manner. I wish the Minister and the Executive well as they seek to ensure the best deal for Northern Ireland.

**Mrs Barton:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important motion. Agriculture is the main land use in Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Across much of the constituency, farming is the most important industry and source of income. We must never lose sight of that. Whilst other areas of rural Northern Ireland can sometimes depend on the public sector, for instance, to support households and the local economy, in the south-west we are seeing a concerted withdrawal of those types of jobs. What we are being left with are local businesses being supported well below the average level by Invest NI and an Executive who are not fully committed to meeting the local infrastructure needs of the area. Whilst I have no doubt that the local well-educated entrepreneurial workforce will continue to make the area work for them, it reaffirms the importance of the area's agriculture industry.

Northern Ireland agriculture is facing a tough new era, and the farmers whom I represent are facing it even more so. Those farmers are primarily grassland-based, producing beef, dairy or sheep. A large percentage of land is under the severely disadvantaged area (SDA) land categorisation. On that point, as the Minister is here, it would be remiss of me not to urge her to expedite the decision on the future of the ANC scheme. Whilst many farmers are beginning to wonder what support will look like after 2020, many farmers in Fermanagh in particular are

already wondering what their support will look like after next year.

It saddens me to say it, but I believe the Executive are displaying a real lack of understanding of what farming on marginal lands really means in a practical sense. No matter the type of farm or land, the vast majority of farmers are united in their anxiety about what post-2020 will bring. It is essential that the local Department and DEFRA at Westminster get the next model right. Whilst I fully understand that that will take time, and the Chancellor, to be fair to him, has provided a bit of breathing space up to 2020, five months after the referendum, claims by our local Department and Minister that it is too early to know are starting to run a bit thin. Whilst it is clear there was a failure by the local Executive to even consider a Brexit vote, that does not really matter any more; what matters now is certainty for local farmers. Right now, there is a dearth of it.

There are over 6,000 farm businesses in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, which is a far greater number than in any other constituency in Northern Ireland. The vast majority of those are in receipt of support from the basic payment scheme. They are not only making a living off the land but tending and supporting it. We have some of the best scenery in the country, but that would be impossible were it not for the farmers, whose animals keep the fields grazed and carefully maintain the vast areas of local habitats. The vast majority of farmers are not simply making a living from the land; they are the custodians of the land. Therefore, it is essential that the UK Government recognise the continued importance of and need to be financially supporting our local farmers. Never before has it been so important for farmers in Fermanagh and South Tyrone to have a representative in Parliament who is prepared to take his seat and work for the greater good of the constituency.

I have one final point I wish to make. The agri-food industry has thrived on the free movement of European labour. We need only think of towns such as Dungannon to realise how dependent local businesses, such as Moy Park, are on access to such labour. As such, I urge the Minister, in her discussions with the UK Government, to ensure that the concerns of those sorts of businesses, as well as those rightly concerned about the border, are reflected.

**Mr O'Dowd:** By this stage of the debate, the facts and figures of the cost of European Union membership, exports etc have been reeled out by various Members. However, I want to put on record that the UK's contribution to the EU is not £20 billion; it is, in fact, £11 billion, with around £5.4 billion coming back. The North is actually a net winner in that, because we benefit more as a region from membership of the EU than perhaps others.

What is at the heart of the debate? What message are we looking to send out? We are all trying to reassure farmers and rural communities that they will be OK. I cannot offer that reassurance, because I simply do not know. You could argue that, if we remained in the European Union, the next CAP round of funding would be a very difficult negotiation. If we had a Government in Westminster that were linked to or had a significant interest in rural and farming communities, we would be in a better place. We do not have a Government in Westminster that are linked to or have a significant interest in farming and rural communities, so we are at a disadvantage going into the

next CAP negotiations. The Irish Government in the past have assisted in those negotiations, but, in the absence of CAP, we are relying on the same British Government, which have not been to the forefront of negotiations on CAP, to look after farming and rural communities.

Are we confident that that will be the case? I am not. I am certainly not confident that we have a Government in Westminster who are interested, as much as every side of this House, in the farming and rural community. One only has to look at those who are now gaining access to Downing Street. Nissan, headed by a French-born Brazilian businessman who runs a Japanese company, has greater access to Downing Street than any member or representative of the farming community. Large international banking organisations headed by citizens from throughout the world have greater access to Downing Street than any representative of the rural or farming community. What does that tell me? It tells me that the future interests and economic drive coming from Westminster will not be based on agriculture and rural communities.

Mr Poots pointed out that there is a £22 billion difference between what we export to Europe and what we import from Europe. How will we fill that gap? How long will it take to rebalance an economy and to turn that round? Who will support farmers in increasing their production as necessary to turn that deficit round? Will the Pootses, the Irwins, the Fords or the McMullans still be in farming after that? I do not know. I suspect that the strategy will be greater and greater movement towards large farm production and to production isolated from the traditional farming landscape that we see in this society, where we still have many smaller rural part-time producers. I suspect that we will see a movement towards larger and larger farms. Who will be the losers in that? Our rural communities will be the losers in that context.

There are uncertainties around remaining in the EU, without a doubt, but there are completely uncharted waters in leaving the EU. We know that 87% of farm incomes are supported through EU contributions and that over 87% of our agricultural produce and agri-food produce is exported. What have we done? We have put at risk 87% of farmers' income, and no one in the House can guarantee that it will be replaced, at whatever level. The tariffs on agricultural produce being exported are crippling, and there is a reason for them being crippling: every nation wants to protect its agricultural and farm producers.

We have placed an almost impossible obstacle in the way of our farming and rural communities. The farming and rural communities out there need to listen to the fact that no one in the Chamber can guarantee their futures. They need to make their voices heard loud and clear on this subject.

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

**Mr O'Dowd:** Reassurances and wish lists are for Christmas. We need reality checks — in the Chamber and outside the Chamber.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** The next speaker is Mr Maurice Bradley. As it will be Mr Bradley's first opportunity to speak as a private Member, I remind the House that it is a convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption. As a cautionary note, however, Mr

Bradley, if you choose to express views that might provoke an intervention, you are likely to forfeit that protection.

**Mr M Bradley:** It gives me great pleasure to speak on the motion today. While this is my maiden speech, I do not intend to digress from this important issue too much, as it is an issue of importance to the people of East Londonderry. I ask Members to bear with me and afford me the opportunity to make a few comments about my journey to this place.

First, I pay tribute to Gregory Campbell MP, my predecessor. Gregory is a well known political figure, especially in East Londonderry, which he continues to represent in Parliament. I am honoured to follow his footsteps into the Assembly, a place that he has been very familiar with since being elected to the 1982 Assembly. Gregory will, no doubt, be missed in this place for his wit and ability as a Member as well as a former Minister.

I ought to say a few things about me. I have worked in the newspaper industry since 1969. I have been active in local football as a player, coach and legislator, and I am a founder member of Coleraine FC Academy. I also served as a councillor, alderman and mayor on the old Coleraine Borough Council for almost 19 years. I am proud to have been elected at the May Assembly election, along with my colleagues, Adrian and George, to represent East Londonderry for the DUP. It is a tremendous honour, and I thank all those who voted for me and the DUP, which retains its pole position as the leading party in the constituency, having the first three candidates elected at the count. I am fully aware that the electorate has put a great trust in me, and I know that there is a great responsibility to represent them on issues such as this one concerning agriculture.

#### 1.45 pm

East Londonderry is a beautiful constituency that stretches inland from Coleraine to Dungiven and includes the beautiful coastal stretch from just beyond the mouth of the River Bann to Lough Foyle. It is a vibrant and friendly place, rich in culture and history, Coleraine being the first known human settlement in Ireland.

Members are only too aware of the importance of agriculture to our economy. Food and farming are worth £4.8 billion a year to Northern Ireland, and the sector employs some 70,000 people. My party, which holds the Ministry responsible for agriculture, knows only too well the importance of securing the best for farmers in Northern Ireland. That is why our Minister, Michelle McIlveen, met the farming Minister, George Eustice, back in October to ensure the best possible deal for our agri-food sector post Brexit.

Our First Minister, my party leader, the Rt Hon Arlene Foster, has, since 23 June, been about putting Northern Ireland first in this debate. As a result, with the appointment of a new Prime Minister, she has ensured that Northern Ireland will play a key part in the negotiations that lead to us leaving the European Union. That is welcome and demonstrates that we are not shying away from responsibility to our farmers and other agri-food sector workers. We all want the best outcome for Northern Ireland, and, in order to ensure that we get that outcome, we must all work together to achieve that rather than use

the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union for political ends.

The United Kingdom is to leave the European Union. That is what the people have said, and, while the House might be divided on the issue, no amount of political point-scoring will change that. Our national Government have guaranteed farming subsidies until 2020, in line with current EU policy. Beyond that, whether we are in the EU or not, the future remains to be determined. However, we must all ensure that our farmers and agri-food workers are not left behind.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I call Mr Gerry Mullan, who will have a full five minutes but no extra minute for interventions.

**Mr Mullan:** Like previous Members who have spoken, as an MLA for a constituency with a strong agricultural presence, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Our agri-food industry is a key driver for the Northern Ireland economy, with the farming and food processing industries generating turnover in 2014 of around £5 billion. The Going for Growth strategy is hugely important, as it is a long-term road map for the future of the agri-food and drinks industries. It would be remiss of me not to thank all the individuals and agencies involved in the strategy, including the Department, the Agri-food Strategy Board and the many local businesses and individuals who are directly involved in the delivery of the strategy. I welcome the progress that has been made in the sector, especially when taking into account the 2016 implementation update concerning the farm business improvement scheme, the business development groups, Farm Family Key Skills and the Food Fortress scheme. All of those are positive developments and must be welcomed.

There needs to be a reality check here, as the agri-food strategy is hugely predicated on access to the single market, EU funding streams and EU programmes in order to meet its targets. The single market is particularly important to Northern Ireland's food and drink industry, as it sells a much higher proportion of its food and drink exports to the EU — 83%, compared with the UK average of 60%. Northern Ireland's food and drink export trade with the EU brings in over £1 billion to the economy. Meat exports account for over a quarter of that export value at £280 million, with dairy and eggs a close second at £240 million. Therefore, the future outside the EU will be extremely tough for Northern Ireland's farming community. There is no point in any political party here today pretending otherwise.

For decades, our farming community has been reliant on EU funding streams to stay afloat in a very unstable and unpredictable market, and it is that exact funding that has facilitated growth in the agri-food sector. CAP payments alone have amounted to some £2.5 billion in the last 10 years, which represents around 70% of all EU money received by the North. Those subsidies —

**Mr Allister:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Mullan:** Yes, I will.

**Mr Allister:** Will the Member comment on the misinformation and gross exaggeration in the motion, which claims that approximately £350 million each year comes to farmers from CAP? If whoever drafted the motion

had troubled to walk into the Business Office and pick up the resource accounts of the Department, he would have discovered that, for the latest year, 2015-16, the figure is £258 million. Why is the motion trading exaggerations and misinformation?

**Mr Mullan:** I thank the Member for his intervention. He has a very short memory. If he remembers a big red bus with figures on the side of it, he will know the meaning of misinterpretation and putting out inaccurate figures.

To continue, those subsidies support 25,000 farms in Northern Ireland and an almost 50,000 strong agricultural workforce, whose futures are now very uncertain. Undoubtedly, we now face huge uncertainty around what relationship Northern Ireland will have with the EU, including the Republic of Ireland, and whether farmers will face crippling tariffs to sell their goods and excessive red tape due to rules around inspections and, as was mentioned, labelling.

**Mr McGlone:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Mullan:** OK.

**Mr McGlone:** The Member mentioned red tape, which has already been raised today as an issue. The Committee has been given research that shows that much of the red tape emanated in the first instance from Westminster, and, to go back to a point made earlier, it is down to its interpretation by the local Department.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I remind the Member that he has only 15 seconds. As I indicated, there is no additional time.

**Mr Mullan:** My goodness. What is clear, Mr Deputy Speaker —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** What is clear is that the Member's time is up.

Question Time begins at 2.00 pm. I suggest that the House take its ease. This debate will continue after Question Time, when Minister McIlveen will be called to respond.

*The debate stood suspended.*

2.00 pm

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

## Oral Answers to Questions

### The Executive Office

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** We will start with listed questions. Before I call the Member to ask the first question; in response to points of order that have been raised in recent weeks, I remind Members that, in accordance with Speaker's rulings, supplementary questions should be related to the topic of the lead question but it is for Ministers and not the Chair to decide whether they will answer questions.

#### Ministerial Code

1. **Mr Agnew** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQO 461/16-21, and his letter to them dated 18 October 2016, whether they are still open to a meeting on expanding the role of the Assembly Standards Commissioner to include investigating alleged breaches of the ministerial code. (AQO 686/16-21)

**Mr McGuinness (The deputy First Minister):** The Member will be aware that a meeting between us has now been arranged. I look forward to hearing his views on how alleged breaches of the ministerial code should be investigated.

**Mr Agnew:** I thank the deputy First Minister for agreeing to meet me. I am sure that he will be aware that that had not yet happened when the question was submitted. He may be aware that I originally proposed the extension of the powers of the Commissioner for Standards in the previous mandate and that, unfortunately, my proposal was blocked by —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member come to his question?

**Mr Agnew:** — the DUP. When the deputy First Minister responded to me on the matter the last time, was he speaking on behalf of himself and the First Minister?

**Mr McGuinness:** My answer today is quite clearly on behalf of the First Minister and me; we have agreed to meet the Member. There have obviously been previous discussions in the Assembly about extending the role of the commissioner but that did not find favour with the Assembly. If there is a complaint against a Minister, the Assembly has the power to gather signatures from 30 people. The matter can then be brought to the Assembly and it will be for the Assembly to decide what action needs to be taken.

The important thing is that I conceded during the previous Question Time that it was an issue for the Member and that we were willing to discuss it. We have agreed to have the meeting. If any others in the House feel as strongly as the Member, we are very willing to include them in that meeting if that is acceptable to the Member.

**Mr Nesbitt:** On the broad question of standards, does the deputy First Minister think that the role of the Speaker has been damaged by current revelations and, indeed, by his statement to the House earlier?

**Mr McGuinness:** I do not think that that is an appropriate question in the context of the question that has been asked by Steven Agnew. I note that there is an opportunity for a Member of the Ulster Unionist Party to ask a question during topical questions. If that person chooses to ask that question at that time, I will answer it.

**Ms Boyle:** Is the Minister satisfied that the current mechanisms relating to alleged breaches of the ministerial code of conduct are fit for purpose?

**Mr McGuinness:** More importantly, the Assembly has decided that they are fit for purpose. The First Minister and I are in agreement that the current mechanisms relating to how alleged breaches of the ministerial code are dealt with, as provided for in the Northern Ireland Act 1998, are fit for purpose. They provide the appropriate level of safeguarding that, when an allegation is made that a Minister had breached an element of the ministerial code, such an allegation will be dealt with appropriately, robustly and fairly.

Members will be aware that the Assembly, rather than the First Minister and I, ultimately has the authority to adjudicate on alleged breaches of the ministerial code. Section 30 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 provides for a motion for a resolution of the Assembly that a Minister or junior Minister no longer enjoys its confidence due to a failure to observe the terms of the ministerial pledge of office. As I said, that mechanism can be triggered with the support of at least 30 Members and can result in the exclusion of a Minister from office for a period of time, a reduction in their remuneration or censure in the Chamber.

The current arrangements have, thus far, found favour with the Assembly, but we are absolutely open to further discussion about that.

#### Racial Equality Legislation

2. **Mr Sheehan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on how they plan to strengthen racial equality legislation. (AQO 687/16-21)

**Mr McGuinness:** With your permission, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker, junior Minister Fearon will answer the question.

**Ms Fearon (Junior Minister, The Executive Office):** Our Department will soon commence a review of the current Race Relations Order and other relevant legislation. We remain committed to achieving racial equality here and want our legislation to be a model for other jurisdictions. Our 10-year strategy sets out an ambitious but achievable programme to take this forward. Clearly, this will be an extensive piece of work, and it is important that we have legislation that is thorough enough to meet current and future needs.

**Mr Sheehan:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra. I thank the Minister for that answer. I take the opportunity to commend the Minister on the work that is being done with refugees. Will she provide an update on the 2016-17 crisis fund?

**Ms Fearon:** I thank the Member for his question and for recognising the good work that is being done for Syrian refugees relocating here. Just last week, junior Minister Ross and I met the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and, just today, we received a letter expressing his

gratitude and commending us on the work that is being done. He was very touched by the experiences of refugees living here and wanted to pass on that message regarding their experience under our operation.

The crisis fund and the minority ethnic development fund are key delivery mechanisms of the racial equality strategy, and the Red Cross is responsible for administering the £100,000 budget of the crisis fund. It is there for vulnerable migrants, destitute refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable groups. It is there for people who are in a crisis situation, providing immediate and very precise help to get them out of a hole by giving them food, clothing, heating, electricity or short-term accommodation. The crisis fund makes a real impact; in fact, it has made such an impact and been such a success that Scotland and Wales are looking to replicate the model.

**Mr McPhillips:** Will the Minister outline why the Executive Office failed to send anyone to respond to various international human rights treaty reporting bodies, one of which concerned racial equality?

**Ms Fearon:** The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has commended the racial equality strategy and our approach to several things. I am happy to write to the Member with more information if he wants to come back to me with specifics.

**Mr Kennedy:** The junior Minister will be aware of criticisms from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, the Equality Commission and others about the non-participation of the Northern Ireland Executive in international reporting cycles, for example the International Covenant —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member come to a question?

**Mr Kennedy:** — on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Will the junior Minister undertake to ensure full participation in future reporting cycles?

**Ms Fearon:** Absolutely. The rights and entitlements that our ethnic minority communities have here are hugely important to us. I have already said that the UN has commended our approach to refugees, so I see no reason why we would not participate fully in upcoming committees.

**Ms Armstrong:** Given that the Executive have not progressed any form of equality legislation since 2007, how can we be confident of progress during this term?

**Ms Fearon:** I thank the Member for her question. One of the key actions identified under the racial equality strategy is a review of current race relations legislation. Legislation has to be a priority, and reviewing that legislation is a massive piece of work, but it is important that we get it right. For me, that will be time well spent. We very much hope to see new racial equality legislation in place in the 2017-18 financial year.

## **PFG 2016-2021: Consultation Responses**

3. **Ms Bunting** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their initial assessment of the responses to the consultation on the Programme for Government 2016-2021. (AQO 688/16-21)

**Mr McGuinness:** The consultation on the draft Programme for Government was launched on 20 October and will run for eight weeks until 23 December. It is clear, even at this early stage, that there continues to be strong support for the use of an outcome-based methodology and developing the programme and the opportunities that it affords for collaborative working and helping to make people's lives better. It is clear that people and organisations are on board with our approach, and we are greatly encouraged by the levels of engagement from every sector. Over 800 responses were received to the earlier consultation conducted on the draft Programme for Government framework, with almost all indicating support for the approach being taken.

The programme agreed by the Executive is highly cross-cutting and collaborative, with joined-up working across departmental boundaries and with dynamic partnerships being formed with local government, the community and voluntary sector and the private sector. It is a new way of doing government, and the Executive are committed to ensuring that it translates into better services and better outcomes for all. We want this to be a Programme for Government in which everyone plays a part. People can do that right now by engaging in the consultation and by telling us about the things that matter most to them and how we can make them better.

**Ms Bunting:** It appears that the collaborative approach has been successful. Will the deputy First Minister outline how he and the First Minister will continue that approach with other organisations, including the business sector?

**Mr McGuinness:** The extensive consultation that took place in the first stage will now continue during the next phase, and we are heartened by the interest and the support that there is in relation to how we move all of this forward. As I have clearly indicated, there is now a further public consultation on the full Programme for Government. That is under way and will run until 23 December. The First Minister's and my aim is to have a final version approved by the Executive and endorsed by the Assembly after we have had the opportunity to consider the funding position around the end of the year. To that end, we will engage with as many groups and individuals as possible on the Programme for Government framework over the course of the consultation.

As with the consultation process, we want as many people as possible to have their say. Work will continue, led by senior officials in relevant Departments, to identify key stakeholders and partners and to further refine the delivery plans to help to ensure that we put in place the collaborative partnership and actions needed to deliver against the desired outcomes. The Executive will also shortly consult on an economic strategy, an investment strategy and a social strategy, and further development of each of those will be coordinated with the Programme for Government and the Budget process.

**Mr Aiken:** Page 25 of the Programme for Government makes it clear that Northern Ireland goes into energy deficit by 2020. Is there any commitment to an early explicit statement by the Executive that the integrated single energy market is being pushed forward vigorously and the North/South interconnector will be built?

**Mr McGuinness:** Of course, that is something that we are tremendously interested in, not just us here but, obviously,

the Government in the South. I suppose the Member will be aware that planning applications have been made North and South and are under consideration. We await the outcome of that with considerable interest.

**Mr Lynch:** Can the Minister outline who was involved in the process to develop the framework for the PFG?

**Mr McGuinness:** The parties to the Fresh Start Agreement last autumn agreed that a Programme for Government framework adopting an outcomes-based approach would be developed. All of the parties on the previous Executive were involved in a detailed process to develop the draft framework, and the parties continued to engage actively throughout the development phase until the framework was concluded after the election. None of those involved in the process expressed reservations during the engagement period, so the parties that are now expressing opposition to the draft Programme for Government framework are either being opportunistic or did not understand the process in which they were engaged. It was significant that the Ulster Unionist Party chickened out of membership of the Executive. It left the Executive, and, of course, the SDLP, which was part of the process of deciding on this way forward, without any objection, decided in the aftermath of the election that it would chicken out of the Executive also.

**Ms Bradshaw:** Why are there no numerical targets against any of the indicators in the draft? How credible does the deputy First Minister feel that the Programme for Government is, if the public are not able to measure whether progress will have been made?

**Mr McGuinness:** The public have declared themselves totally satisfied, in the main, with our approach in relation to the outcome of the first consultation, which drew in something like 810 submissions.

All those matters will be considered as we go forward in the second phase. In the aftermath of that, we will have a further conversation about how we take the whole process forward. I am satisfied that the public are content thus far. I have not heard that criticism from anybody in the group of 810 who made submissions. I am quite willing to listen to what they have to say. In the time ahead, there will be opportunities for people to have their say on these matters.

2.15 pm

## Brexit: Parliamentary Approval

4. **Mr McGrath** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will present a legal challenge to the United Kingdom Government's appeal to overturn the High Court's decision that parliamentary approval must be given before the process of European Union withdrawal can start. (AQO 689/16-21)

**Mr McGuinness:** The First Minister and I are listening carefully to the arguments in the Miller and Dos Santos application before the High Court in London and in the McCord, Agnew and others applications in Belfast. At present, however, all relevant lines of argument are being ventilated by the existing parties.

**Mr McGrath:** The deputy First Minister will be aware that Nicola Sturgeon has respected the majority will of the people of Scotland in supporting the legal case brought

forward to the Supreme Court. We need a wee bit more information other than another case is doing it.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member come to his question?

**Mr McGrath:** Why are this Government not supporting that initiative?

**Mr McGuinness:** In this instance, it is quite clear that the Member is asking a question that he knows the answer to. The answer is quite clearly that, in the run-in to the referendum, our partners in government were on a different side of the debate from us. That is like the fact that the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists, who are now a combined Opposition, are on opposite sides of the debate, with the Ulster Unionist position being that the people have spoken — the context that they speak about is the UK — and that you should get on with it. It is quite clear that the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists are divided on the issue.

Where the First Minister and I are united is on the fact that we were able to write to the British Prime Minister outlining a series of grave concerns that we have about the implications of Brexit for how we protect the interests of the people whom we represent. The good news is that, during the North/South Ministerial Council meeting, which I will speak to when I give a report on it in the Assembly tomorrow, we were able to put in place a high-level working group of civil servants in our Department, the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs to take forward the work that we will have to deal with in the time ahead. From my perspective, we are consistently getting very confusing reports out of London. They are confusing not just for people in the political process but for the general public and people in the business community. As we go forward, it is very important that the British Government at least tell the devolved institutions what their objectives are in the context of a negotiation with the European Union. Thus far, they have failed to do so.

**Mr Stalford:** Does the deputy First Minister agree that it is the sign of a responsible and mature Government that, regardless of whether you were for "Remain" or "Leave", you work with the situation as you now find it?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member come to his question?

**Mr Stalford:** Does he agree that that is what a responsible Government should do rather than, in a similar vein, refusing to meet the future president of the United States of America?

**Mr McGuinness:** As we go forward, the implications of Brexit for all of us and for the people whom we represent, whether it is the business community, the agri-food industry, the community and voluntary sector or our educational institutions, place a massive responsibility on those of us who had the courage to go into government together to ensure that we deal with the set of circumstances before us. As I outlined, we dealt with it by writing to the British Prime Minister. I noted that, on this morning's 'Good Morning Ulster', the leader of the SDLP described that as weak, which is absolutely ridiculous. He then criticised us because of the length of time that it took the Prime Minister to respond. It was the Prime Minister's responsibility to respond; it was not our responsibility. What we have been doing is getting on with the work. We have given instructions to all our Departments to be up

to speed on all this in the time ahead. Our contribution to the North/South Ministerial Council and the formation of a high-level working group shows clearly that we are very active in trying to deal with a set of circumstances that denies us, for example, full information about where the negotiations will go if and when article 50 of the Lisbon treaty is triggered.

**Mr Smith:** What discussions has the deputy First Minister had with the First Minister regarding the Supreme Court appeal? Are they any closer to producing an agreed, joined-up post-Brexit plan for Northern Ireland?

**Mr McGuinness:** I think I outlined during previous answers that the First Minister and I are very much engaged in the process of ensuring that we work with the Irish Government to protect the interests of all the people who live on this island.

In terms of the court case, I will go back to my previous answer to the SDLP. The Member asked a question he knows the answer to. In politics, I think that is OK, because the DUP was on one side of the debate in the run-in to the referendum. We were on the other side of the debate. That is democracy; that is politics. I have to live with that, even if I did not appreciate it. But I have to deal with the outcome of all that, and I think the First Minister and I have been very sensible in how we are trying to deal with the situation and are ensuring that, by working closely together through all of our Departments and with the Irish Government, we do everything in our power to ensure the issues we raised in the letter to the Prime Minister do not affect us negatively. Those are things like the border. We do not want any border between North and South. We want support for our agri-food industry and our education establishment. We want future funding for our institutions.

As regards the common travel area, we can look at the number of businesses in the North that are totally dependent upon people who have come from eastern Europe to work. They work very positively and productively within our businesses. For example, Wrightbus in Antrim has something like over 20% of its workforce from eastern Europe. Those are critical issues that we are very exercised about, and, in fact, rather than sniping from the sidelines, we are actually doing something about them.

**Mr Lyttle:** Does the deputy First Minister agree that a legislative consent motion should be brought to allow the Assembly the opportunity to debate and consider the terms of any article 50 proposal?

**Mr McGuinness:** I speak on behalf of the Office of the First and deputy First Minister. Whether our partners in the Government favour that is a matter for themselves. Speaking personally and on behalf of my party, not on behalf of the DUP, I would absolutely be in favour of a legislative consent motion.

**Mr Allister:** Happily, the deputy First Minister is helpless when it comes to stopping the United Kingdom from leaving the EU. Let me ask him this straight: has he any approval from his partner in the Government, the DUP, for a status for Northern Ireland that would dilute our leaving in comparison with the rest of the United Kingdom?

**Mr McGuinness:** I think the entire process we are engaged in is in a state of flux. Nobody — neither me, the First Minister, the Member who has just spoken nor any other Member — can put hand on heart and say that they

know what the final outcome of all this will be. One thing is for sure: we have a duty and responsibility to protect the interests of the people we represent. Again, speaking personally, I would be in favour of a designated status within the European Union. *[Interruption.]* It is a matter for all the parties. The Member would not, obviously, be in favour of that and believes the overall vote should take precedence over the fact that the people here in the North voted to remain and the people of Scotland voted to remain. That creates a problem for the British Government, and it also creates a problem for the European Union, which is the fact that we have, in these devolved institutions, a very clearly expressed wish by the electorate that they see their future is in Europe. As far as I am concerned, in the upcoming negotiations everything is on the table.

## Brexit: Ministerial Discussions

5. **Ms J McCann** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on discussions in relation to leaving the European Union at the recent Joint Ministerial Committee and North/South Ministerial Council meetings. (AQO 690/16-21)

**Mr McGuinness:** The most recent Joint Ministerial Committee meeting took place on Wednesday 9 November, and the last North/South Ministerial Council meeting took place on Friday 18 November 2016.

At the Joint Ministerial Committee meeting, we outlined a number of the issues that are of particular importance to us. We made it clear that we expect to see engagement on those and other matters intensify and deepen over the coming weeks and that we are determined to work together to champion the interests of the people we represent.

We had a very good meeting with the Irish Government on Friday at the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) plenary in Armagh. I will be making a detailed Assembly statement tomorrow morning, Tuesday 22 November, on our discussions.

Ministers have also had discussions at various NSMC sectoral meetings that have taken place in recent weeks and months, and that engagement is ongoing. Indeed, both Governments have agreed that the North/South Ministerial Council plenary should meet again in the first quarter of 2017. In light of the UK referendum to leave the EU, the focus for Executive Ministers throughout all of these discussions has been to ensure that our unique position is recognised and our requirements are understood on how we can ensure the best possible outcome for all of our people.

**Ms J McCann:** I thank the Minister for his answer. I know that you have already mentioned the different engagements, but can you elaborate on what engagement has taken place with the Irish Government, particularly to identify issues of mutual interest and to exert joint influence on the British Government and the EU?

**Mr McGuinness:** As I said earlier, there is ongoing engagement between officials up to the head of the Civil Service level. Specifically, we are engaging with the Irish Government through the North/South Ministerial Council, and the respective Administrations have been carrying out an audit of border issues. That was discussed at the plenary meeting last Friday, 18 November. We will also engage further on Brexit via the British-Irish Council (BIC). The next BIC meeting is scheduled for next week in Cardiff.

**Mrs Overend:** Can the deputy First Minister explain his assessment of the approaches of the devolved Administrations in Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh?

**Mr McGuinness:** It is not my duty or responsibility to speak on behalf of Scotland and Wales. I only have authority to speak on our own behalf. There are other factors at play, particularly in relation to Scotland, which I am sure the Member is acutely aware of. No doubt, the First Minister and I will have further conversations with our ministerial colleagues during the next BIC meeting. I think I said it was next week; in fact, it is the end of this week. In all of those discussions we are very conscious of the responsibility that devolved institutions have to the people whom they represent. In Wales, the people of Wales voted to leave; in Scotland, the people of Scotland voted to remain; the people here voted to remain; and, of course, the people in England voted to leave. That leaves us with a very challenging situation to deal with. No doubt, the reports that are coming out of London, almost on a daily basis, about the apparent inability thus far of the British Government to have a collective view as to how to approach these negotiations are also exercising the devolved institutions.

**Dr Farry:** The deputy First Minister and I agree on the need for special status for Northern Ireland, but does he also recognise that if this is to get traction with the whole community, including with unionists, it has to be sold in very pragmatic terms around the interests of Northern Ireland and, therefore, be decoupled from wider constitutional aspirations and the issue of a border poll?

**Mr McGuinness:** Obviously, the situation that we are dealing with is hugely challenging; of that there can be no doubt whatsoever. The issue on the constitutional position revolves around the reality that we have a scenario in which we have just been through a referendum which has, in some sense, decided the direction of travel for the British Government — a situation that we have to deal with. As I said in my earlier answer to the Member for North Antrim, as far as I am concerned, everything is on the table. Nobody can put their hand on their heart and say exactly how this negotiation is going to work itself out or where we are going to find ourselves in a year's time or two years' time during the course of any negotiation. All of the reports out of Europe clearly suggest that it looks like it is going to be a hard Brexit, and that seems to be accepted by a lot of commentators and, indeed, many within the political process in London. If it is a hard Brexit, I think it is going to have very dramatic repercussions for devolved institutions, particularly ourselves who are in this unique position of having a land border with a country that is in Europe.

### 2.30 pm

In the time ahead, in the discussions that we will see happen between our officials and between the First Minister and myself and the Taoiseach, the best way forward for us is to work very closely together so that we can reach an outcome that can then be put to the British Government and the European Union as the combined wisdom of both Governments, North and South. The top priority for us is protecting the interests of the people that we represent — I am talking about the people represented by every single Member of this House.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** That ends the period for listed questions. We move on to 15 minutes of topical questions.

### Charter NI: CEO

T1. **Mr McNulty** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the deputy First Minister stands by his call on the Charter NI CEO to stand down. (AQT 496/16-21)

**Mr McGuinness:** This is a very unfortunate situation. The difficulty about where we find ourselves is the impact this is having on a fantastic programme — the social investment fund (SIF) programme — that will bring enormous benefits to people all over the North by getting young people into employment and preparing a pathway for them, supporting families and supporting educational initiatives and many other initiatives that are born from the desire of local communities who make the decisions on what projects they want pursued. The fact that we have had this debate over the last couple of weeks has been very unhelpful indeed.

I was at Altnagelvin hospital this morning with our Health Minister, looking at the new radiotherapy unit. I was asked by the BBC, in the aftermath of that visit, what my position was in relation to our Speaker. I was able to tell them that our Speaker would make a statement at 12.00 noon. The Speaker has made the statement, and I accept it.

I stand by my remarks that Dee Stitt should recognise the damage that has been done to Charter NI and the local community in east Belfast and that he should stand aside. I do not for one minute believe that he will do that as a result of me saying that, but there is a responsibility on him to sit back and recognise the damage that has been done to an organisation that he is part of. He also should think of the bigger picture. In the steering groups and the different initiatives that have been undertaken all over the North —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I ask the deputy First Minister to bring his remarks to a close.

**Mr McGuinness:** I will just finish on this point: there is a considerable concern among many of those groups that their funding could be frozen. That is very, very sad. Of course, it will not be frozen, but that is a big difficulty.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I remind the deputy First Minister of the two-minute rule. If the Department needs time to respond, it can request it.

**Mr McNulty:** Has the deputy First Minister discussed the issue with the First Minister? What action will the Executive take if Mr Stitt continues in position?

**Mr McGuinness:** I have discussed the issue with the First Minister. Our ability to take action in relation to Charter NI is very limited under employment law. However, I reiterate the point I made earlier: the best outcome would be for the person in question to recognise that his contribution in the time ahead would be a negative one and would not be in the interests of Charter NI, the people of east Belfast or the many other groups throughout the North who are working away on delivering tremendous projects for local communities.

## Fresh Start Agreement: Reconciliation

T2. **Mr Kearney** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the deputy First Minister agrees that, given it is 12 months since the Fresh Start Agreement, all political parties and sections of society have an incredibly important role to play in the development and promotion of reconciliation and healing. (AQT 497/16-21)

**Mr McGuinness:** I absolutely agree with the Member. Twelve months on from the signing of the Fresh Start Agreement, it is incumbent on all of us — every political party, the community and voluntary sector and everybody in a position of influence in the community — to recognise the importance of the process of reconciliation. I have been on the record a number of times in recent months stating my view that the next stage of our process has to be reconciliation. Tremendous work is taking place in the community, but people in leadership positions also have a huge responsibility to challenge themselves over whether enough has been done to inspire more and more people in local communities to recognise the importance of reconciliation.

I say that knowing that there are people in our society who are not interested in being reconciled. I think, however, that they are very much a minority and that the overwhelming mood of our people is for the continuation of what is a successful peace process into a phase of reconciliation. I have no doubt that, given the right leadership, more and more people will rally to that flag.

**Mr Kearney:** Go raibh maith agat as an fhreagra sin, a LeasChéad Aire. Minister, do you agree that the reconciliation and healing agenda must be placed at the heart of government and public policy, both in this region and in the context of the all-island institutions?

**Mr McGuinness:** I absolutely agree. It is critical that we in these institutions play our full part in showing leadership to people in the community on what is undoubtedly the best way forward. This is a process that has inspired the ending of conflicts in other parts of the world. We recently had a visit from President Santos of Colombia, who told the BBC and anyone else who was interested in his story that he was inspired by the peace process here. That is a credit to everybody who contributed to that process and, in my view, to every party in the House, but we need to go further. We need to recognise that there are challenges ahead, not least in how, on an ongoing basis, we reconcile what was for a long time a very divided community. My party is certainly up for that, and it is incumbent on all of us to challenge ourselves consistently.

I have gone out very far in challenging republicans, I suppose, over our contribution to reconciliation. Some people do not like what I have done, and I respect their view. One of the arguments put to me is that I should not do that because there is no reciprocation. My answer is that that is not a good reason for me to stop. If you are genuine and sincere about reconciliation, you have to do everything in your power to make it work. I do that work on the basis that we will eventually get it right.

## Charter NI: Employability Scheme

T3. **Mr Beggs** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether, in relation to the Charter NI employability scheme, the deputy First Minister accepts that fewer

people on the ground benefit when there are multiple layers and large administration costs, given that he said that benefits can result from the scheme. (AQT 498/16-21)

**Mr McGuinness:** The Member will be aware that we went out to consultation at the beginning of all of this. It is one of the most consulted-on programmes that we have ever been involved in. The process was open and transparent. The whole purpose of the SIF project was that we would have not a top-down approach but a bottom-up one, empowering people in local communities to decide for themselves what communities required as a priority. Putting in place such a process incurs costs. That is unavoidable if it is to be conducted properly. Our civil servants have been meticulous, even to the point of criticism from some that it has taken too long to put this in place.

We are now in a position in which the £80 million has been effectively allocated to projects. As we go forward, we can consistently ask ourselves whether there are ways that we could have improved that during what was a pilot scheme, for want of a better word.

**Mr Beggs:** The deputy First Minister alluded to the many, many years that it has taken for the funding to reach the ground, and he again says that it is important to get things right. This is language that we have heard before.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Can the Member come to his question?

**Mr Beggs:** Will he accept that the process has been fatally flawed and that there are inappropriate processes and a lack of accountability for the decision-making that went along with it?

**Mr McGuinness:** No, I will not accept that it was fatally flawed; in fact, practically every party in the Assembly, including the Member's, has been involved in the process from the very beginning. It is interesting to note that, even though people have now seized on what is a very sad situation in east Belfast in an effort to criticise the overall SIF programme, when the First Minister and junior Minister Fearon went to Enniskillen last week for the opening of a £900,000 investment from SIF, the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP were tripping over themselves to get into the photographs.

## Google Announcement

T4. **Mr M Bradley** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether, in light of technology giant Google's announcement last week of plans for a new building in London — a vote of confidence in the UK as a technological hub — they envisage any spin-off for Northern Ireland given that the Project Kelvin interconnector in Coleraine provides the most secure connection between Europe and America. (AQT 499/16-21)

**Mr McGuinness:** Obviously, we are keen to see this developed. Project Kelvin does tremendous work. The First Minister was recently in the United States, and I followed that with a visit of my own to the west coast of the United States and met our west coast advisory group, which is a tremendous group of people based in Silicon Valley. We continually seek to ensure that we can attract foreign direct investment that will benefit us in the new digital age that we live in. It is an ongoing body of work for us, for our bureau in Washington and for Invest NI,

and we are very focused on trying to ensure that, when opportunities are created, we can take advantage of them.

**Mr M Bradley:** I thank the deputy First Minister for that answer. Given the connection that we have in Coleraine and the opportunity to sell Northern Ireland plc across the IT sector, I am hopeful that Coleraine could play a role in adding to the sector and attracting much needed investment into the area. Are you aware of any firms interested in investing in the Coleraine project?

**Mr McGuinness:** I am conscious of what is potentially a huge development at Ballykelly, which I think will bring enormous benefits to people in the north-west, including Coleraine, Limavady and my city of Derry. I was there recently speaking to the purchasers of the site. They have huge plans for the site, and I am very encouraged by what I hear. Obviously, we are consistently, through trying to attract foreign direct investment, focusing on an aspect of work that the First Minister and I are agreed on: to ensure that companies that are interested in coming here recognise that there is a big world outside Belfast, including the north-west. We are publicly on the record as having stated that. That will very much be a focus of our Programme for Government in the time ahead in terms of the issue of decentralisation.

The other aspect of Ballykelly is the fact that, for the first time in the history of the state, we will have a Department — DAERA — effectively located outside Belfast on the Ballykelly site. That, in itself, will bring further encouragement to people in the area that we are putting a focus on the need for decentralisation.

## Social Investment Fund

**Mr Lynch:** As my question involves the social investment fund, I declare an interest as a member of the western steering group.

T5. **Mr Lynch** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the deputy First Minister will give reassurance that the social investment fund will be delivered for communities as intended. (AQT 500/16-21)

2.45 pm

**Mr McGuinness:** I do not have a shadow of a doubt that the projects that have been undertaken by steering groups and local communities will make a massive difference in the effort to tackle underachievement, disadvantage and marginalisation. The First Minister and I have visited projects in recent times. Indeed, we were in Fermanagh only last week for the unveiling of a fantastic new extension to Fermanagh House. I have gone to different parts of the North and have spoken to people who are very focused on employability and on getting young people on a pathway to employment. We are talking not about a couple of dozen but hundreds who are involved in these projects all over the North.

It is clear that the social investment fund is making a massive contribution to tackling underachievement. The beauty of it is that it is not us telling local communities how they should go about choosing their projects; the local communities choose the projects themselves. I reiterate the point that, in the face of opportunistic criticism in recent times, all major parties in the Assembly have been represented on the steering groups. It is quite ironic that, in

the aftermath of the controversy in east Belfast, people are taking potshots at those who are doing great work all over the North. That is very unfair.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Unfortunately, there is not time for a supplementary question; time is up.

## Economy

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Question 5 has been withdrawn.

### Broadband: Fermanagh and South Tyrone

1. **Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the discussions his Department is having with broadband and mobile phone providers to increase connectivity in Fermanagh and South Tyrone. (AQO 701/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy):** My Department has ongoing discussions with the communications industry on issues affecting consumers across Northern Ireland, including in Fermanagh and South Tyrone. My officials meet regularly with representatives of the major telecommunications providers, which operate in this privatised and independently regulated market. Ongoing investment by mobile network operators has led to increases in mobile coverage across Northern Ireland, however I recognise that services still need to be improved. In Northern Ireland, 99.3% of premises are in areas where there is outdoor 4G coverage from at least one operator, and 3G coverage is among the best in the UK.

There are regular meetings with BT to discuss the roll-out of broadband under the contracts managed by my Department. In June, BT reported that 5,607 premises have benefited from the Northern Ireland broadband improvement project in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, and 1,390 have taken up new broadband services. BT also reported that the superfast roll-out project has improved services to more than 500 premises in the Fermanagh and Dungannon areas. The contract with BT has a mechanism whereby funding can be reinvested when take-up of services exceeds a certain threshold or underspends are identified. This is currently around £3 million and we have begun clarifying where these funds might be used.

It is important to recognise that where fixed-line broadband is not viable, other technology alternatives are available. In particular, for premises that continue to have access to services of less than 2 megabits per second, my Department offers assistance with the cost of installing a basic broadband service using satellite or wireless technology. It ensures that no household or business that meets the eligibility criteria need pay more than £400 to access a broadband scheme over a 12-month period.

We will continue discussions with the telecoms industry and with other interested parties, especially through the consultation phase of the draft Programme for Government.

**Mr McPhillips:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he outline the approach his Department is taking to recover some of the £258 million clawback owed to the UK Government by BT on broadband contracts? Will he outline whether he will direct these funds to rural areas?

**Mr Hamilton:** The figure that the Member quotes of around £250 million is perhaps the totality of the potential clawback across the United Kingdom. Gain share, or clawback as it is sometimes referred to, comes in when uptake exceeds expectations for the broadband improvement contract that was initially agreed with BT. As I mentioned, the estimated figure for Northern Ireland is around £3 million. We are in a process of identifying where that might be best spent. Obviously, that will have to be consistent with value-for-money principles and targeted to where there is most need. As we have already invested, as I outlined to the Member, in his constituency, which I recognise as an area that has issues with getting acceptable broadband speeds, I am sure that some of that £3 million will be invested in his constituency. At this stage, I am not able to say how much or where, but I am sure that we will target some of that £3 million at Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

**Mrs Barton:** Thank you, Minister, for your answers thus far. Are you aware of concerns raised by the border councils through their Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) report 'Fibre at a Crossroads'? In particular, it outlines many practical solutions to providing greater connectivity and achieving equitability recompense from BT for its failure to adequately support my constituents.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I remind Members to make sure that their questions are short.

**Mr Hamilton:** I thank the Member for her question. A couple of weeks ago, I met a delegation of ICBAN representatives, which was led by my party colleague Councillor Paul Robinson, who came to discuss their 'Fibre at a Crossroads' report with me. We had a useful discussion. I have a lot of sympathy for the points that they made about ensuring that people in border counties, particularly Fermanagh and South Tyrone, and other parts of Northern Ireland have acceptable broadband speeds. While the Member is critical of BT — and I have been critical of BT sometimes in the House — we have been able to make a substantial investment in the broadband infrastructure across Northern Ireland. Some £64 million has been invested across Northern Ireland since 2008. As I pointed out to Mr McPhillips, some 5,600 premises in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency have benefited from the broadband improvement project, and 1,390 have taken up new broadband services.

I also point out to the Member and the House, as I have done on other occasions in the Assembly, that whilst there is a focus, as there is in the ICBAN report, on getting fibre into premises, at this time, alternative technologies such as wireless and satellite broadband are available. Support is provided through my Department for alternative technologies for those who cannot get an acceptable broadband speed through fibre or cannot get fibre at all.

**Lord Morrow:** Have the black spots and gaps in broadband provision in Fermanagh and South Tyrone been identified? Will the Minister give his reaction to the proposed changes by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Minister can choose which question he answers.

**Mr Hamilton:** I very much welcome the news last week that the Advertising Standards Authority has taken a decision to reform or change the rules on advertising broadband speeds. The Member and the House might

recall that, some months ago, I wrote to the Advertising Standards Authority particularly on the issue, which had been brought to my attention by Members such as Lord Morrow, of the perception in parts of Northern Ireland, because of advertisements that appeared on billboards, in newspapers and on television, that broadband speeds of 30 megabytes per second and beyond were achievable. However, in parts of Northern Ireland, such speeds are not accessible. People were buying broadband packages from providers and paying the same as what I pay for having that sort of speed in my home, and I do not think that that is fair. That was the basis upon which I wrote to the ASA, and I am glad that it has identified the problem and will change the rules next year.

This is, in part, an infrastructure problem. The Member mentioned black spots. In respect of the £3 million of gain share that I mentioned in response to Mr McPhillips, we are in contact with councils to get them to do an audit of their area to identify where there are black spots with a broadband speed that is not acceptable. I think that Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, if it has not started, is about to start its audit. I look forward to getting that information back because I believe that councils will be in a good position to identify where there are weaknesses and black spots. That will then help to inform where we spend that £3 million of clawback that we will get as a result of the broadband improvement project.

**Ms Gildernew:** I suggest that the Minister spend some of that £3 million in BT70, because my children are about to divorce me.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member come to her question?

**Ms Gildernew:** I listened carefully to the Minister's answer. What more can he do to maximise connectivity to black spots and hard-to-reach areas?

**Mr Hamilton:** We have made a lot of investment over the last number of years. As I pointed out before, some £64 million has been invested in broadband projects since 2008. That helped to give Northern Ireland the competitive advantage of being the first region with 100% broadband capability in the whole of Europe. We have not maintained that advantage in recent times in spite of the considerable investments that we have made. I want to regain that competitive advantage. It is not just about helping households to get a good speed of broadband; it is also about helping our economy. I have visited some companies, including some in the Member's constituency, that sometimes struggle to get the speed that they require to do business in an increasingly closely connected global economy. I want to make sure that those businesses have that competitive edge. We are looking at options that, although some considerable investment would be required, would give Northern Ireland back its competitive advantage in broadband connectivity.

## Apprenticeship Levy

2. **Mrs Long** asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the introduction of the apprenticeship levy. (AQO 702/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** The apprenticeship levy will be introduced in April 2017. The collection of the levy is a reserved matter for the UK Government. It will impact on all employers with

an annual pay bill in excess of £3 million. Her Majesty's Treasury announced on Monday 14 November 2016 the apportionments for the devolved Administrations. Northern Ireland will be allocated £76 million, £79 million and £82 million over the next three years. However, Her Majesty's Treasury has removed £52 million due to a reduction in funding for existing apprenticeships in England and a further £29 million reduction to the public-sector contribution to the levy, which will result in a £5 million pressure on the overall block grant. Importantly, approximately £80 million was spent by the Executive on work-related training for businesses, including apprenticeships, in 2015-16. Over the past four years, £86.5 million has been invested in apprenticeship training alone.

It is important that employers have access to the appropriate skills training, particularly in the form of apprenticeships. I want to ensure that support for skills is based on a quality offering and value for money. I intend to consult employers and other interested stakeholders to seek their views on the implications of the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in Northern Ireland. That consultation will be designed to take the temperature of the business community and focus thoughts regarding the needs of businesses in terms of skills and apprenticeships.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I call Steve Aiken. *[Interruption.]* My apologies; I call Naomi Long.

**Mrs Long:** Thank you, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker. The Finance Minister and the Economy Minister have set out an approach that will, effectively, mean that businesses will pay the apprenticeship levy but there will be no additional investment in skills as a result. Is there any scope for the Minister to undertake to ring-fence money for additional spending on professional, technical and vocational skills, so that we do not end up with a disgruntled sector that feels that it is paying additional money as an apprenticeship levy but is not getting anything additional in return?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I remind Members to keep their questions brief.

**Mr Hamilton:** I thought that the first answer was so comprehensive that it answered all the Member's questions.

To be completely frank and honest, I think that the apprenticeship levy is a bad thing. It is called a "levy", but it is a pretty brutal and crude tax on businesses in Northern Ireland that, as the Member identified, already pay through other taxes for skills training provided by government and others. The Member is right to point out that, since taking office, I have been in very close contact with the Finance Minister in regard to this. What we receive back from Treasury through that levy/tax is incredibly important for the next steps and what we can provide for employers.

As I mentioned in my original answer, whilst the Treasury, in typical Treasury style, tells us, "Here's £76 million that you're going to get next year", it is taking some £52 million off us with the other hand. When you take the public-sector contribution of £29 million out of that, we are in a net negative position of £5 million. One interpretation of that is that it is eating into the £80 million-odd that we pay annually for skills training for businesses.

I am completely aware of the concerns of many employers. I have been very much in close contact with businesses

about this since taking office. I want to take their temperature — that is the purpose of the consultation — and ask employers and other stakeholders what ideas they might have and what they think of the current skills training that we provide for businesses. It will then be a matter for the Finance Minister and me to discuss, particularly with regard to the Budget that will come to the House before the end of the year, what we might be able to do to ensure that skills training of the highest quality is still provided for businesses in Northern Ireland.

**3.00 pm**

**Mr Aiken:** I thank the Minister for his comments so far. A lot of the questions have been answered, but one of the things that many of the companies that I have been talking to and that you have been talking to —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Can the Member come to his question?

**Mr Aiken:** I am getting to the question.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Can the Member come to his question?

**Mr Aiken:** Despite the considerable disquiet among Northern Ireland businesses about the shortfall in skills training — *[Interruption.]* Wait for it. How does he envisage that our companies will not be penalised —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member take his seat for a minute? I would like the Member to be able to make his point, and I ask him to ask his question.

**Mr Stalford:** Brevity is a skill.

**Mr Aiken:** Thank you very much indeed.

This is the question: how will we ensure that many of the Northern Ireland companies that will pay this tax, particularly the ones that have the majority of their business in Great Britain, will not decide to move their headquarters and training there because they see this as very much a case of double taxation?

**A Member:** Well done.

**Mr Aiken:** Thank you.

**Mr Hamilton:** I think that my bad influence is rubbing off on Members during my Question Time with the lack of brevity in some of the questions, never mind the answers that I provide.

That is one of the concerns that I have always had with the levy, and it was also a concern for the previous Minister for Employment and Learning. At this stage, whilst I have concerns and there are employers who are in the space that the Member talks about, I have not yet heard from anybody specifically saying that that was their intention. As is often the case, it is much more sophisticated than that. Whilst they may feel that they are being double taxed, those employers are based in Northern Ireland for a range of reasons, particularly, in relevance to the question, reasons why they continue to provide training from bases here.

As I said, I do not like this tax or levy. It is punitive and harmful. You can clearly see how harmful it is to Northern Ireland's public finances. I have a challenge on my hands to ensure that we continue, given the reductions, to maintain the level of spending on apprenticeships and other skills training for businesses. Be assured that, given

the centrality of talent and a skilled workforce to Northern Ireland's proposition for inward investment and the growth of local businesses, I will be determined to do that in what will be a very difficult budgetary climate.

**Mr Storey:** I thank the Minister for his comments, particularly for placing on record our concerns on the apprenticeship levy. Will he outline to the House how much his Department invests annually in apprenticeships, given the important role that they play in the economy?

**Mr Hamilton:** My Department continues to invest a considerable amount in apprenticeships and in a reformed apprenticeship programme that seeks to have a higher quality of apprenticeship, learning lessons from places like Germany, Switzerland and Austria. I want to maintain that high quality, regardless of what the Government do on the levy and regardless of what they do, in my belief, in watering down what apprenticeships are in England. I am onside with Scotland and Wales in wanting to maintain very high-quality apprenticeships. We have been investing considerably over the last number of years. In the last financial year, just short of £20 million was invested in level 2 and level 3 apprenticeships, and, with higher-level apprenticeships, which are an incredibly important new part of the offer that we make in apprenticeships, some £1.1 million was invested at levels 4, 5 and 6. Over £20 million annually has been invested in apprenticeships alone.

I visited Deloitte last week, and it has almost acted as a pioneer in taking forward higher-level apprenticeships. It shows that sectors that you would not ordinarily associate with apprenticeships are now getting involved and taking on apprentices at that higher level. If there is a good side to the apprenticeship levy, I hope that it is that it encourages many employers not traditionally involved in apprenticeships to look at the options, and there is, of course, government support for that.

**Ms Archibald:** Last week in his statement, along with the Minister of Finance, the Minister outlined that the apprenticeship levy was of no benefit to the North, and again today he said it was a bad thing. Will you make that case to the British Treasury?

**Mr Hamilton:** Yes. The case has been made, and I know that my colleague the Finance Minister has been dealing directly with the Treasury. I have raised similar concerns through the Department to the various Departments that have looked after the issue. It has now shifted back to the Department of Education. I am seeking a meeting with the Department of Education to discuss a range of issues, but I will, obviously, take the opportunity to raise concerns about this issue as well. It is something we have been lobbying on, and I know other devolved Administrations have been doing likewise. I know they feel very similarly to us about the damage they believe this is doing not only to public finances but possibly to skills training for businesses moving forward.

## Student Engagement

3. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister for the Economy to outline any engagement he has had with the National Union of Students and the Union of Students in Ireland since May 2016. (AQO 703/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** I have not yet met the National Union of Students and the Union of Students in Ireland (NUS-USI),

but I hope to be in a position to do so in future. My officials meet representatives from that organisation on a regular basis to discuss a wide range of issues affecting the higher and further education sectors in Northern Ireland. Officials from my Department's further education division have met the National Union of Students and the Union of Students in Ireland to facilitate the provision of training for newly elected student members of college governing bodies and attend an annual induction event for all new governing body members. My officials have also met representatives of the body to discuss a variety of issues related to higher education.

**Mr McGlone:** Mo bhfuíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his response. Does he not agree that, given his level of interaction with various universities and the like, it is crucial that he meet the students' representative bodies about issues such as education, for a start, but about the likes of services and fees as well?

**Mr Hamilton:** As I pointed out to the Member in my initial response, I have no issue meeting NUS-USI, and I hope to do so in the not too distant future. As the Member will appreciate, my diary is busy and could be filled time and time again with the range of requests I get, but I hope to meet NUS-USI in the not too distant future.

**Mrs Overend:** Will the Minister outline whether he has had any discussions on the back of his engagement with key stakeholders in the higher education sector? What are his views on any increase in tuition fees, considering the shortfall of over £50 million in university funding?

**Mr Hamilton:** I have had a range of discussions with the universities and others about the financing of the sector. I am very clear — I have been on record saying this in the House and elsewhere — that I want to see the higher education sector, which is important not just for education but for the future growth of our economy, financed on a sustainable footing moving into the years to come. There are, clearly, pressures on my budget in higher education, and I want to have a sensible and mature discussion, particularly in the context of the upcoming Budget, about how we might sustainably finance the HE sector in the years ahead.

**Mr T Buchanan:** What is happening with Northern Ireland postgraduate students whose loan applications were incorrectly proposed by the Student Loans Company?

**Mr Hamilton:** The postgraduate students whom the Member mentions have been treated disgracefully. Those were postgraduate loans for English-domiciled students that were introduced by the UK Department for this year. They wrongly approved loans to 85 ineligible Northern Ireland students. A review found that 54 were eligible, but there are still 31 who are ineligible, 18 of whom actually received a payment. They are all important, but those 18 are the particularly important ones, because when those people received that payment they spent that money on equipment, accommodation or whatever it might be to help them to do their postgraduate studies.

Whilst it is a matter for the UK Department for Education, Student Finance England and the loans company, it is their errors that have caused distress. I have written to Jo Johnson, the Minister of State in the Department for Education, and to the Student Loans Company asking them what they are going to do to satisfactorily address the issue, which is not in any way, shape or form the making

of the students from Northern Ireland who have been affected.

**Mr McAleer:** Can the Minister tell us which stakeholders in the further and higher education sector he has met?

**Mr Hamilton:** I cannot give the Member a comprehensive list, but I have met Ulster University and Queen's University, and I am meeting the Open University this afternoon. In the broadest definition of the HE sector, I have met quite a few other stakeholders. As the Member will appreciate, there are a huge range of stakeholders across the HE sector, all of whom I will want to keep in very close contact with, particularly our universities, as I grapple with a range of issues, some of which have been mentioned here at Question Time.

## Electricity Market

4. **Mr Butler** asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the security of supply in the local electricity market. (AQO 704/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** The generation capacity at our three conventional power stations, existing interconnection, including the restored Moyle interconnector with Scotland, and the additional 250 megawatt capacity at Ballylumford that became available in January of this year ensures we have enough capacity to meet all electricity demand forecasts to 2020. Emissions legislation could further impact on the Kilroot coal-fired plant, in particular, from 2020. My Department is working closely with the Utility Regulator and the system operator (SONI) to consider how best to ensure our security of supply after this point. If it is considered necessary, I will agree on further actions to safeguard our electricity supply.

The second North/South interconnector will be considered by the Planning Appeals Commission in February next year, and this project, along with other plans such as the proposals by Evermore Energy for a new gas-fired power station in Belfast, battery storage by AES, the Gaelectric compressed air energy storage project and the Islandmagee gas storage project, has the potential to contribute to our future security of supply.

**Mr Butler:** I thank the Minister for his answer. The Minister will be aware that the Ulster Unionist Party is proposing a motion on energy to the Assembly tomorrow. Will he take the opportunity tomorrow to indicate what his plan B is, should there be a further planning delay in the North/South interconnector?

**Mr Hamilton:** I look forward to the debate tomorrow. It provides the House with an opportunity for a debate that, I hope, is proposed in that spirit. If it is, I will certainly respond in kind. This is a challenging issue. The Committee visited SONI last week and will have got a very clear indication of the seriousness of the issue and the many challenges that face us. If the motion is brought to the House tomorrow in that spirit, I will respond in kind.

The Member is fairly new to the Ulster Unionist Party, but he already has that fatalistic tendency that runs through the Ulster Unionist Party like a stick of rock. He has written off the interconnector before it goes to the Planning Appeals Commission hearing next year. The Member is right: it is an incredibly complex issue. I want it to run through its planning process properly, and we will leave it to that. I am committed to the principle of the

interconnector. It is essential not just for our security of supply in the longer term but, moving forward, for making any integrated single electricity market viable. It is an incredibly important project, and we, as a Department, have a record — not least in terms of the short-term contract that was put in place with AES when the Moyle interconnector was agreed — of stepping in when there have been problems and taking decisive action.

The Member's party is always keen on talking about plan Bs and resigning itself to failure right from the start, but this is not something I will do. I will work away to make sure the interconnector happens, as it is such a vital piece of infrastructure for electricity and security of supply in the short and long term.

**Mr Robinson:** What does the Minister intend to do to support the future development of renewables in Northern Ireland?

**Mr Hamilton:** There is already considerable support for renewable electricity in place, and Northern Ireland renewables obligation (NIRO) support will remain in place until 2037. It has been a successful policy for increasing renewables-generated electricity. In 2005, before the NIRO was introduced, electricity consumption from renewable sources was about 3% in Northern Ireland. That has now grown to 25.4% at the end of last year, and we are well on course to meet our 40% electricity consumption by 2020.

There is already a considerable amount of renewable energy on the grid. There is also a considerable amount with offers, and some more will receive offers. I believe that we will not only meet our 40% target but, when all those offers are met and are on grid, have the ability to generate 100% of peak demand electricity from renewable sources, which is around 1,800 MW per year.

## 3.15 pm

In many respects, it has been a successful policy. It has, in reflecting on what future policy might be, had an impact on the grid, which is a scarce and precious resource. At present, there are no storage options, although I mentioned some possible storage options in my original answer. Of course, as with everything, we need to consider the cost of a replacement for the NIRO. Previously, NIRO costs were spread right across all UK consumers, so Northern Ireland got a reasonably good deal out of that. Any replacement will be across just Northern Ireland consumers, and that will, of course, have an impact on the affordability of electricity in Northern Ireland. I obviously have to carefully consider that in the future development of renewables policy.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** That ends the period for listed questions. We will now move on to 15 minutes of topical questions.

## Universities: Teaching Excellence Framework

T1. **Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister for the Economy to give an absolute guarantee that the teaching excellence framework (TEF) is in no way intended as a link to tuition fee levels in Northern Ireland. (AQT 506/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** The teaching excellence framework, as I understand it, does what it says on the tin. It is about raising the standards of teaching in our universities. One

criticism that I can recall from even before taking up this post is that, whilst universities rightly and understandably continue to focus on research — we want to see our universities continue to do that, and there is some promising progress in that regard — there is a view that there has perhaps been less focus on teaching standards. We all want to see the very good balance between teaching and research remain. I say to the Member that, in terms of future sustainable financing of the sector, the teaching excellence framework is not one of the things that has been considered in that context. What I want to see is the sector, which, as I mentioned previously, is a very important sector not just to education but the wider economy in Northern Ireland, put on a sustainable footing for the future. That is obviously at the forefront of my mind as I consider the issue of financing our universities.

**Ms S Bradley:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he also give a guarantee, although what he said was far short of a guarantee, that the TEF will not be used as leverage to remove the tuition fee cap in Northern Ireland? Will he consider responding to the calls to put a TEF panel in place in Northern Ireland?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Minister can choose which question to answer.

**Mr Hamilton:** I think that I counted about four, but I will do my best. I think that the teaching excellence framework is a good thing in and of itself, and I do not think that we should get it into a situation where it is mired in other debates. I want to see the sector sustainably financed. We need a good, strong university sector in Northern Ireland. I am very mindful and cognisant of the concerns expressed by that sector and how it believes that it is falling behind its counterparts in the rest of the United Kingdom and, indeed, elsewhere. I want to ensure that Queen's University, Ulster University and the Open University, which are doing a good job in Northern Ireland, particularly in their research and how that is aligning better with our economic needs, have the finances now and into the future to allow them to continue to do the good job that they have done already.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Nelson McCausland is not in his place.

## International Trade

T3. **Mr Stalford** asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the steps his Department is taking, as part of an outward-looking economy, to allow Northern Ireland to attract further international trade. (AQT 508/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** The Member will be aware of two things that I have announced in recent times to try to enhance trade. We are starting from a very strong base already. We had a 9.5% increase in exports from Northern Ireland in the last year, and we are the only UK region to post an increase. New figures are due out very soon. That was backed up by the Ulster Bank's purchasing managers' index (PMI). It talked about a "surge" — I think that is the word used — in exports in the last number of months. Not wishing to prejudge those statistics in any way, shape or form, not least because I do not want egg on my face, there has been some good anecdotal evidence on the progress made over the last number of months in respect of exports.

I have put in place a trade accelerator plan that is looking at building on that success. It also has the aim of encouraging more exporters to get into selling their goods and services outside the region for the first time. Even though we have had that 9.5% increase, it has been on the back of a decrease in the number of exporters. There has been really good performance, but we want to see more people selling their goods and services outside Northern Ireland, and the trade accelerator plan is aimed at doing that. It is providing more support for exhibitions, market study visits and trade missions.

We are also in the process of developing an international trade plan, which is entirely about making Northern Ireland an outward-looking trading nation, getting an increased Invest NI presence in key markets and setting up a trade advisory board to assist me in developing new export strategies. We are also undertaking a whole range of different endeavours to try to capitalise on the growth that we have and, indeed, the huge opportunities that will exist in the years ahead.

**Mr Stalford:** Minister, the strong connection that many people in the United States have to Northern Ireland is one asset. There has been change in the political scene in America recently. What assessment does the Minister have of the election of a new president and its ability to impact on Northern Ireland's trade with the United States?

**Mr Hamilton:** The Member is right to note that there has been change in the US, with the surprising and unexpected win of Donald Trump. These are very early stages in Mr Trump's Administration. In fact, he is not in post yet, so he does not even have an Administration in place.

The Member is right: the US is an incredibly important trading partner for Northern Ireland. It is our second biggest export destination, and we sold around £1.5 billion worth of goods to the US in the year ending June 2016. That was a staggering 74% increase year-on-year and a really tremendous achievement by Northern Ireland exporters. It is also an incredibly important source of inward investment, with around 175 US-owned companies operating in Northern Ireland, employing around 24,000 people. The president-elect has said many things, but he is not in post yet and has not taken his agenda to Congress. I wish him every success in his job and think that we should give him a chance, because we all need America to succeed. Northern Ireland has benefited from America's success in the past, and we want to benefit from its success in the future.

The Member and the House will understand that, even if the new president reduces corporation tax, as he has indicated, it is not just for tax reasons that many companies from the US invest in Northern Ireland. It is about skills, and I am increasingly aware of the importance of skills in attracting companies from all around the world. Take, for example, a cybersecurity firm called Black Duck. It is a Massachusetts-based company that has invested in Northern Ireland. It is expanding its business to here, which will create around 50 new jobs. It looked at opportunities in the US but decided to come to Belfast and Northern Ireland because of the skills of the talented people here. It is a much wider issue than tax, and, whilst we hope to reduce our rate of corporation tax to get us into other markets, we have to keep an emphasis on the importance of skills in our economy.

## Universities: Funding

T4. **Mr Mullan** asked the Minister for the Economy to outline whether our universities will be subject to further budget cuts following the Chancellor's autumn statement and in his own budget for 2016-17. (AQT 509/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** The Member is asking me to prejudge two things. He is asking me to prejudge an autumn statement that is to be made tomorrow, although I accept that, if you have read every newspaper that has been published today and listened to every news bulletin, you will probably have much of what is in the autumn statement in your hands or in front of you on the television screen. He is also asking me to prejudge the discussions and deliberations that will take place in the Northern Ireland Executive.

I note from what the Prime Minister has said today that she intends to see an increase of £2 billion in research and development expenditure. That will be a good thing for universities right across the United Kingdom, and, hopefully, for Northern Ireland. That will build on our success that was demonstrated in figures published last week on research and development that showed a 24% increase in R&D expenditure in Northern Ireland. That took us up to around £750 million worth of expenditure by businesses, the public sector and universities. Universities accounted for around a quarter of that total increase, which was around about a 9% increase. If there is money coming from the autumn statement for research and development, I hope that our universities will be able to benefit directly from it.

**Mr Mullan:** Thank you, Minister, for your answers so far. Hopefully, this time, you will not need a crystal ball. Will the Minister outline what assessment his Department has undertaken with regard to EU funding to higher education? There are great concerns in my constituency that a withdrawal of EU funding for research will result in redundancies and in the closure of courses.

**Mr Hamilton:** There is a range of European funds that our universities and colleges have accessed down through the years. This issue will be part of the negotiations that will begin at some stage next year. I understand the Member's concerns, however I point out the guarantees that the Chancellor has given, particularly in respect of Horizon 2020 funding. So, anything that is approved whilst the UK is still a member of the European Union will be guaranteed beyond our exit.

I have said before in the House, and I will repeat it, that Horizon 2020 is a project that is not limited to European Union member states. There are about a dozen states outside the European Union — Turkey, Norway, Israel and others — that have availed of Horizon 2020 funding in the past. In fact, the state that had the highest per capita spend of the predecessor of Horizon 2020 — FP7 — was Israel. So, there are opportunities, even after UK exit from the EU, for us to avail ourselves of funds like Horizon 2020.

## Manufacturing Firms

T5. **Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister for the Economy to join her in welcoming the recent growth announcement by the Upper Bann-based company Almac and to say what support his Department gives to similar manufacturing firms to help them reach their full potential. (AQT 510/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** I join the Member in congratulating Almac on its growth. Here is an example of a firm that is part of a growing life and health science cluster in Northern Ireland, which is outward-looking, is selling more, and had a 50% increase in its exports over the last year. Almac is a core element of that growing and important sector to our economy, so I congratulate it on its success. We want to see local firms growing in Northern Ireland, but we also want to see them expand their reach internationally. Even though this investment is in the US, it will solidify and support jobs in Northern Ireland and, importantly, in the Member's Upper Bann constituency.

The manufacturing sector, in spite of what some in the House, and some outside it, will want to say, is a strong sector in spite of some recent notable setbacks: employment in the sector has increased by over 4% in the last year. Support offered between 2011 and September of this year by Invest Northern Ireland (INI) has accounted for nearly £300 million of assistance; that is 7% more than the assistance that has gone to the services sector. Sometimes, there is a perception that the services sector does better from INI support. That is not the case. That investment of nearly £300 million has promoted 14,000 new jobs over the last five years and has had a total contribution of around £1.9 billion of investment in the local economy. So, a range of support has been made available and will continue to be made available for manufacturers like Almac and others who are growing their businesses, selling outside Northern Ireland, and looking to expand.

**Ms Lockhart:** I thank the Minister for that answer. Will the Minister assure the House that he will continue to prioritise the skills that manufacturing businesses require? It is evident when I am out there that they want us as a Government to look at the skills set that they require.

**Mr Hamilton:** I know that there are issues with a range of companies in the Member's constituency operating in very different sectors. As I have said today and previously, I am acutely aware of the importance of skills to Northern Ireland's proposition not just for inward investment but for the expansion of indigenous companies. So, I absolutely want to ensure that, as we look to a future where we have a reduced rate of corporation tax, that is not the only thing that we are going out to the world to offer. We also have to offer a strong pipeline of skilled workers. That will include helping companies in the Member's constituency as well as those prospective inward investors who, if the evidence to me is anything to go by, are increasingly coming to Northern Ireland. The differentiator as to why they are coming to Northern Ireland over other locations is the skilled workforce that we have.

3.30 pm

## Coleraine Enterprise Zone

T6. **Mr M Bradley** asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the enterprise zone in Coleraine. (AQT 511/16-21)

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I ask for a very quick answer.

**Mr Hamilton:** The pilot scheme for the new Coleraine enterprise zone was formally designated by Her Majesty's Treasury in August 2016, just a few months ago. It offers enhanced capital allowances and is the only enterprise

zone in Northern Ireland that offers 100% enhanced capital allowances for qualifying expenditure in the first year. A company called 5Nines, which operates and develops data centres, already has planning permission for the site. That planning permission goes back to 2013. As a Department, we will put in place a monitoring and evaluation plan to identify emerging benefits that could be derived from the enterprise zone. I see it as an important part of the growing tech sector in Northern Ireland which is employing around 30,000 people. It is growing across Northern Ireland, in the north-west, in Belfast, in Newry and in all parts in between.

## Question for Urgent Oral Answer

### The Executive Office

#### Social Investment Fund: Audit

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Ms Nichola Mallon has given notice of a question for urgent oral answer to the First Minister and deputy First Minister. I remind Members that, if they wish to ask a supplementary question, they should continually rise from their place. The Member who tabled the question will be called automatically for a supplementary.

**Ms Mallon** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what audit has been carried out by the Executive Office on all aspects of the social investment fund to date.

**Mr McGuinness (The deputy First Minister):** All organisations in receipt of departmental funding are subject to governance and financial management checks to ensure their capability to manage public money. This includes, first, a review of the organisational structure to ensure that a board and appropriate management structures are in place and, secondly, a review of the financial and governance processes to ensure that the necessary policies and procedures to manage and account for funding are in place and implemented effectively. This process involves on-site visits and ongoing verification throughout the duration of the project to ensure compliance with policies and implementation of the necessary checks to account for all expenditure. Full checking and validating of spend by lead partners is carried out by the Department, which includes supporting evidence of costs incurred and payments made. The social investment fund (SIF) programme is also subject to normal internal and external audits, which include sample auditing of individual project spend.

**Ms Mallon:** Is the deputy First Minister completely satisfied that no conflict of interest exists in Charter NI or any other organisation funded by the social investment fund?

**Mr McGuinness:** The whole issue of conflict of interest was dealt with by the steering groups. We have to remember that the social investment fund is very much community-led. Given the focus on the community developing and prioritising projects to address local needs, a process to manage any conflicts of interest was put in place. Steering group members were required to declare conflicts of interests when potential projects were being proposed. Where a conflict was declared, the steering group member was not permitted to be involved in any discussion or decision around the prioritisation of the proposal. Steering group members involved in the procurement of service delivery organisations were required to declare any conflict of interest in relation to those bidding. If a conflict was declared, the member was no longer involved in the tender and evaluation process to select a preferred bidder. Procurement was in accordance with public procurement policy, and the social investment fund money is provided to organisations that are working for the benefit of the community. No individuals benefit financially. Therefore, I think that it is very clear that this was dealt with during the work of the steering groups.

**Mr Nesbitt:** The Minister makes much of normal checks being carried out by his Department on governance and

financial arrangements, yet it is clear that his Department has no central registry of which members of the advisory panels attended which meetings. Such a simple thing is not even held by the Executive Office.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Can the Member come to his question, please?

**Mr Nesbitt:** Is that, in his opinion, good scrutiny?

**Mr McGuinness:** I think that, in my original answer, I made it clear that we can be satisfied with the governance of this entire process from the very beginning.

I remind the Member that, during the initial stages of all of this coming to fruition, he was Chair of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, which discussed this matter. All that I can remember is the criticisms, which were legitimate at the time, given that it was a new process, about the length of time that it was taking to bring this to fruition. Never at any stage was there anything from the Member about the controversy that has erupted recently or the questions now being asked about the governance of the entire process. It was the most consulted-on process imaginable. Representatives of the Member's party sat on the steering groups. In the last number of years, I did not hear any of the criticisms that are now being voiced. Those are being voiced only as a result of the controversy — the legitimate controversy — that has erupted over Mr Stitt in east Belfast.

**Mr Stalford:** Further to the question from the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, can the deputy First Minister confirm that Mr Nesbitt's constituency colleague Mr Philip Smith sat on a SIF steering group, as did Ulster Unionist councillors, including some in south Belfast?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member come to his question?

**Mr Stalford:** If there was a lack of scrutiny in the process, the Ulster Unionist Party must take its fair share of the blame in that regard.

**Mr McGuinness:** Yes, I can confirm what the Member has just said. It was quite obvious to everybody from the very beginning that representatives of all the major political parties in the Assembly were participating in the steering groups and in all their decisions on the way in which the process was to be taken forward. Everybody needs to remember that it was agreed by everybody from the very beginning.

**Mr McCartney:** I represent a constituency where there are a number of these projects doing valuable work on the ground. Can the Minister confirm that many of these projects have now moved into delivery phase? Will he take the opportunity today to reassure them, despite some of the claims and suggestions being made, particularly by people who call themselves the Opposition, that none of these projects will be halted? Indeed, they will create more photo opportunities for members of the Opposition in the future.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Before I call the deputy First Minister, I remind Members to keep their questions brief.

**Mr McGuinness:** During Executive Office Question Time earlier, I mentioned the concern among different projects, areas and steering groups that, as a result of the controversy in east Belfast, finance to other groups will be halted. I want to dispel absolutely any notion that we will call a halt to any of the other SIF projects. In many instances, the projects are up and running, and they are

providing valuable contributions to tackling disadvantage and marginalisation in communities. It is very important that we give that reassurance here today.

These are projects that are delivering incredibly for people who are trying to find pathways into employment. They are delivering on educational issues, on supporting families and on a wide range of other issues that we can absolutely stand over and have no concern about whatsoever. It is unfortunate that, as a result of the debate around Mr Stitt, we have ended up with some of the opposition parties calling into question what is happening in other communities throughout the North. That is very unfair.

**Ms Hanna:** The deputy First Minister refers to a register in which steering group members declared their interests and recused themselves from decision-making. Where and when will this register be placed in the public domain?

**Mr McGuinness:** That will be decided very shortly. We are very conscious of the discussions on many of these issues. The question has been raised, for example, of whether minutes were taken in east Belfast. My understanding is that minutes were taken. In the time ahead, decisions will be taken on the minutes and the issue that the Member has just mentioned.

**Mrs Long:** The deputy First Minister cannot claim that he was not aware of my party's concerns about SIF because they are on the record from many years ago. However, perhaps he can answer this specific question. GEMS is the larger, more experienced organisation when it comes to managing and delivering community-based employability schemes. Can he explain precisely what added value Charter NI, this smaller and less experienced organisation, actually brings to the project for the management fee that it is paid?

**Mr McGuinness:** All of that is obviously an interesting conversation to have. *[Laughter.]* At the end of the day, I outlined, in my initial contribution to answering the question from the Member for North Belfast, a complete breakdown of how all this is audited and how we, as a Government, are satisfied. There has not actually been an allegation from anybody, even in the Opposition, that £1 of the £1.7 million was misappropriated in any way. There has been no such allegation whatsoever.

**Mrs Long:** That is not what I asked.

**Mr McGuinness:** We work on the basis that, if there are specific allegations to be made —

**Mrs Long:** That is not what I asked.

**Mr McGuinness:** — people should make them and we can have them investigated. And if there then needs to be a police investigation, we can ensure —

**Mrs Long:** That is not what I asked.

**Mr McGuinness:** I think it is exactly what you asked.

**Mrs Long:** It is not what I asked —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I ask the Member not to intervene from a sedentary position.

**Mr E McCann:** I fully accept that there has not been a wing of money lost, not a wing of that 1.7 million quid. This debate and controversy has been sparked by the case of Mr Dee Stitt and the question of whether he was an appropriate person to be employed at public expense by Charter Northern Ireland, despite his alleged paramilitary

role. Is it not the case that he was employed in that position at public expense not despite his paramilitary role but because of it, and that this reflects British Government policy, effectively endorsed by the Executive, which amounts to paying public money to buy off paramilitaries?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I remind the Member that questions need to be brief.

**Mr McGuinness:** I do not accept that argument at all. There are many SIF projects right throughout the North. I remember, when there was some controversy around this issue, that somebody saw a headline in 'The Irish News' that this was a slush fund for paramilitaries. Where are all these paramilitaries? We can talk about Dee Stitt, but the basis on which he was employed by Charter NI is really a matter for Charter NI. It has absolutely nothing to do with the Executive or the British Government. This was a scheme that the British Government had no involvement in whatsoever; it was brought forward by our Executive on the basis that it would deliver substantial gains for marginalised and disadvantaged communities. The scheme is doing that, right throughout the North. In this one instance, yes, we have a controversy. The controversy resides around, in my view, the ridiculous — almost laughable — interview given by Mr Stitt to 'The Guardian' newspaper, which brought him into public ridicule and, in doing so, created massive problems for Charter NI. Indeed, we end up having to discuss it here today as a result of that controversy.

The Member is absolutely wrong. This is a great scheme that is delivering on the ground, including in the Member's constituency. Again, I dispel the notion that we are going to freeze the scheme. It will continue until such time as the £80 million is spent, productively and in the interests of communities.

**Mr Agnew:** It is intolerable that those who wish to wear suits by day and balaclavas by night are paid from public funds. What lessons have been learned from this fiasco to ensure that the First and deputy First Minister will have the power to act if such a circumstance were to arise again?

**Mr McGuinness:** I suppose that that is one of the more positive points that has been made during this conversation. Obviously, lessons will have to be learned, but, at the same time, I have to place on the public record that there are many people who were formerly associated with the UDA, and there may even be people out there who are associated with the UDA, who have made very powerful and positive contributions to peacemaking and the work of reconciliation.

There are also many people within Irish republicanism who make very positive contributions to peacemaking and reconciliation. It is important that, as we go forward, we do not try to use the situation in relation to Mr Stitt to call into question the motivation of many good people who, for many years — in some instances, decades — bought into supporting this peace process. Cheap shots do not work. We have to deal with the realpolitik of how we resolve conflict and try to involve as many people as possible in the resolution of conflict. If that means working with people who are former paramilitaries or who might even be associated with the UDA, as is the case in the allegation that has been made in recent times, but who are making a positive contribution and are not involved in violence

or criminality of any description, I think that it is very important that we do that.

**3.45 pm**

**Mr Allister:** Is this not a mess of the Executive's own making because of their rejection of open competition in the appointment of lead partners? On the question of whether it is a slush fund, can we have an audit of how many paramilitary convicts are on the SIF payroll, including from the deputy First Minister's IRA fold?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The deputy First Minister can choose which question to answer.

**Mr McGuinness:** As usual, the contribution by that Member is not worth an answer.

**Mrs Little Pengelly:** Will the deputy First Minister confirm that the structures and processes of the social investment fund were cleared, went through and satisfied the full business case process, were cleared by the accounting officer of the Department, were cleared independently of the Department by the Department of Finance and Personnel and were periodically reviewed throughout the process and policy development by the public-sector exemplar, the gateway review process?

**Mr McGuinness:** Yes, I absolutely agree with the Member and, what is more, all that was well known in the Assembly.

**Mr McMullan:** Does the Minister believe that the SIF delivery model represents a unique and innovative delivery model to tackle disadvantage?

**Mr McGuinness:** Yes, I believe that it does. From the very beginning, we were determined that this would not be a top-down process and that it was an opportunity for people in local communities to identify a series of projects that would be funded by SIF to enhance and enrich the lives of the people whom they lived among. I think that it has been a tremendous success, apart from the difficulties with delays and the length of time that it took for what was a new and innovative project. There is absolutely no question or doubt whatsoever that the SIF project is delivering fantastic, worthwhile benefits to local marginalised and disadvantaged communities throughout the North.

**Ms S Bradley:** Considering the deputy First Minister's continued confidence in the governance of SIF, despite the serious questions that have been raised in the House and elsewhere, when does he intend to publish a full list of all organisations that applied to SIF, all those who received money from it and how much they received?

**Mr McGuinness:** When the Member says "serious questions" about this fund —

**Ms S Bradley:** The governance.

**Mr McGuinness:** Even the governance of the fund. The reality is that we are talking about this today only because of a situation that developed over one person in east Belfast. Let us not use that to cast aspersions on the many other good people throughout the North of Ireland who are making fantastic contributions towards enriching the lives of the people whom they represent.

In response to the second aspect of the Member's contribution, we will take into consideration what has been said about how we deal with that in the time ahead.

I have no principled opposition to full transparency for this project.

**Dr Farry:** When I was Minister for Employment and Learning, we funded GEMS through three strands of money to deliver community-based employment programmes without any difficulties. By contrast, when we funded Charter, we had management difficulties.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member come to his question, please?

**Dr Farry:** Can I, therefore, ask the Minister to answer Naomi Long's question: what value added is provided by Charter, a smaller organisation, for its management fee as opposed to the management of GEMS, which is a larger and more experienced organisation?

**Mr McGuinness:** On the work that Charter NI has been doing, one thing that shines through in all the controversy there has been about this in recent times is that nobody has called into question Charter NI's motivation. In fact, all I hear on radio programmes is that nobody is casting aspersions on Charter NI, that it does a fantastic job and that it delivers for the local community. Of course, it is involved in the employability schemes in east Belfast. So, whatever about what has happened, on how Charter NI has conducted its affairs, apart from the controversy around Mr Stitt, nobody that I have heard has raised any questions whatsoever about its contribution towards enriching the lives of people in east Belfast through the different projects, including important employability projects, in that area.

**Mr McAleer:** Can the Minister give his reassurance that the social investment fund is being delivered as intended?

**Mr McGuinness:** Yes, I absolutely believe the social investment fund is being delivered as intended, apart from the controversy in east Belfast. Some individual members of the Alliance Party certainly voiced opinions at the very beginning of the process, but I heard very little from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, which, obviously, looked at the process from the very beginning and declared itself satisfied with the consultation that took place and the transparency in what was a unique process that tried to empower local communities to decide for themselves what best met their needs.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** That concludes this item of business. Can Members take their ease while we change the top Table?

**Mrs Long:** On a point of order, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker. I ask you to review the Hansard report. Standing Order 19(5) says that Members who ask legitimate questions are to receive full answers to their questions. At no time during this discussion did I receive an answer to the substantive question that I put to the deputy First Minister, and under Standing Order 19(5) — *[Interruption.]* Some of your colleagues are trying to usurp your role. Standing Order 19(5) says that I am entitled to a full response. I would be grateful if you would review the Hansard report to clarify whether I have misunderstood things, and, if I have not received an answer, to ensure that I will in writing.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member is an experienced politician and has been here for a long time, so she is well aware that that is not a point of order. She is also aware that it is up to the deputy First Minister to

answer as he sees fit. So, that was not a point of order, but the Member has had an opportunity to put her concerns on record.

**Mr Ford:** On a point of order, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker. Will you explain how, when a Member quotes Standing Orders at you, you can say that it is not a point of order? It clearly is a point of order under any possible terms.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I have made my decision on that, and we will move on. I ask that Members take their ease while we change the top Table.

**Mr Nesbitt:** On a point of order, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker. Mr McGuinness used this discussion to imply that some of the criticisms of SIF from parties such as mine were new and by implication, therefore, to some extent opportunistic. SIF was published in September 2011, and before the calendar year was out, the Ulster Unionist Party published a response to the consultation that contained our critiques and concerns. Our chief concern was the exercise of control by OFMDFM. I appreciate the opportunity to balance the official record.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member's comments have been noted, but that is not a point of order, as he well knows.

**Mr Attwood:** On a point of order, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker. Given the statement made by the Speaker to the House this morning, I ask you to consult with the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers about the ruling you made in response to the point of order raised by Naomi Long. This is a matter of accountability to the Assembly under Standing Orders, and it is a matter you should discuss with the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers — something that has not happened in the past.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member has also had the opportunity to make his comment in the House. We will —

**Mr McCartney:** On a point of order, Principal Deputy Speaker. Perhaps when the Speaker is reviewing the ruling, he will note that two former Ministers spoke here today. Perhaps we can have some record of when they were accused of not answering questions at Question Time.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** That is not a point of order either. We must move on.

**Mr Attwood:** Further to the point of order that I made, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker, are you saying to the House that you are not going to consult with the Speaker on the proper interpretation of Standing Orders?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Speaker has already written to all Ministers on the Executive to remind them about the importance of replying.

**Mr Stalford:** On a point of order, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker. I am a new Member and do not have a copy of Standing Orders in front of me. Perhaps you can direct me to the Standing Order in which it states that the ruling of the Chair in matters of debate and procedure is final.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Certainly. The ruling of the Chair is final.

**Ms S Bradley:** On a point of order, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker. I am also a new Member, and further to the previous contribution, can we then be communicated with if there has been, based on this decision, a change to my understanding of the point of order that Mrs Long raised?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** There has been no change, and we will move on. I am not taking any further points of order. Members can take their ease while we change the top Table.

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

**Mr Swann:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** We are currently taking our ease, but I will come back to you, Mr Swann.

Order. We have now taken our ease. Mr Swann, you have a point of order.

**Mr Swann:** Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. Can you provide clarity to the House about when points of order can be refused to Members asking legitimate points of order?

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I advise Mr Swann that it is a matter for Members to stand and raise points of order, which are generally taken by the Speaker or Deputy Speakers and then considered with their content.

**Mr Poots:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Maybe the Speaker's Office will look at the number of points of order that have been coming in in recent times and the fictitious nature of huge numbers of them. In fact, for the vast majority of points of order, the Speaker is ruling that they are not a point of order. Perhaps that is a matter that needs to be addressed and —

**Mrs Long:** Yours is fictitious. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Order. *[Laughter.]* Order. I am tempted to quote:

*"Let those without sin cast the first stone."*

*[Laughter.]*

We must move on.

4.00 pm

## Assembly Business

### Extension of Sitting

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I have received notification from members of the Business Committee of a motion to extend the sitting past 7.00 pm under Standing Order 10(3A).

*Resolved:*

*That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 21 of November 2016 be extended to no later than 8:30pm. — [Mr Attwood.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** The motion is carried and the House may sit until 8.30 pm this evening if necessary.

Members — *[Interruption.]* Is that a point of order, no?

**Mr Aiken:** No, I am just watching the clock.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I thought that you were keen to join the club.

## Opposition Business

### Agriculture: EU Funding

*Debate resumed on motion:*

*That this Assembly notes with concern the risks to multiple streams of funding posed by withdrawal from the European Union; further notes that over 70% of all European funding to Northern Ireland falls under the common agricultural policy and other rural funds, which provide approximately £350 million each year to farmers, representing 87% of annual farm income; acknowledges that the agri-food sector accounts for 3.25% of Northern Ireland's gross value added, which equates to £1.1 billion at basic prices and approximately 71,500 local jobs and that existing strategies in these sectors, such as Going for Growth, make no provision for the withdrawal of European Union funding; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how she intends to uphold the First Minister's commitment that farmers can be provided for as well, if not better, if Northern Ireland leaves the European Union, and to detail how she will develop a strategy to provide for and secure the long-term sustainability of the agricultural and agri-food sectors to ensure no loss of assistance to farmers arising from the withdrawal of existing European Union funding. — [Mr McGlone.]*

**Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs):** I note the motion and thank the Members for providing the opportunity to discuss this. Mr McGlone is not alone in representing a rural constituency. I, too, represent a largely rural area and one that has a dependency on the fishing industry. I am very mindful of the issues that affect that industry also.

I agree with Members that we need to be strategic in our thinking and develop a strategy to provide for and to secure the long-term sustainability of the agricultural and agri-food sectors in Northern Ireland. Since coming into office, I have taken that very approach. I am very aware of the failings of the current CAP policy but have used whatever powers I have to make decisions that protect the long-term sustainability of our agriculture and food processing sector. That is why I have ensured that more than 90% of our farmers have received an advance to their 2016 basic payments; that is why I have opened up the first phase of the farm business improvement scheme capital element, which will allow our farmers to make long-term strategic decisions; and that is also why I have led trade missions on behalf of the industry to SIAL and China to look at opening new high-value markets for our produce. Harold McKee pointed that out in his contribution and said that he is keen to see that happening. I am actively pursuing that.

Let me provide some context around this issue. A number of Members have referred to this. Current CAP payments are guaranteed up to and including the 2019 scheme year, which is the 2020 EU budget year. After that, there is no certainty as to the type of agricultural support measures that will be adopted by the EU or the budget that will be devoted to them. Let me be clear: even if the UK had voted to remain within the EU, we would give no assurances to farmers on what support they would receive. Added to the fact there are no assurances on the finance within the EU, I believe that the way the scheme was delivered

has lost the confidence of our farmers. It is interesting to note that there has been some recent questioning of the effectiveness of area payments, given that they are untargeted, and calls to consider whether more can be done to assist farmers to cope with market volatility. The EU debate on CAP post-2020 is clearly in its early stages, and it remains to be seen what ideas will be taken on board by the EU Commission.

My colleague William Irwin noted Commissioner Hogan's recent remarks on a potential €3 billion deficit in the CAP budget once the UK leaves the EU. The advantage for us of leaving the EU is that we can design our own policy that gives us the scope to remove the unnecessary bureaucracy that is associated with the current arrangements and make it better suit our local needs.

We know that CAP support payments will no longer apply when we leave the EU. The Treasury has made a commitment to maintain current levels of CAP support to farmers to 2020 for pillar 1 funds, rural development, including environmental programmes, and for R&D projects signed up to before we leave the EU. Mr McGlone was incorrect to state that there is no commitment in place for pillar 2 funds post-2019.

That gives us time to develop a new UK agricultural policy framework. My long-term aim for the industry is to promote a sustainable, competitive, high-performing, knowledge-based agri-food sector that is prosperous and compliant. That means that the sector will be more resilient to shocks and challenges, have high standards of animal health and welfare, deliver for the environment and have increased market access for agri-food products.

It is clear that we are not going to have a system like the one we have currently. Why would we copy a system that is broken and is not working for many of our farmers? This creates the opportunity for us to look at a different type of agricultural policy for the UK that will provide the necessary incentives for our farmers moving forward. Various models are being studied, and on his recent visit to Northern Ireland George Eustice, Minister of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, shared some of his early thinking on future UK agricultural policy, including a move away from subsidies towards insurance-based income support payments. He mentioned the Canadian, Australian and other models that could be considered. He is looking for fresh ideas and is not closing the door on anyone with ideas on what that might look like.

I want to clarify a point made by Mr McGlone. George Eustice did not state that he would scrap all subsidies; he said that he wanted to remove the current broken system and replace it with one that supports productive agriculture, helps manage risk and rewards farmers for sustaining the environment.

The Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone Rosemary Barton talked about farmers living in marginal areas. I believe that a new scheme can be introduced that will allow for farmers to be rewarded for managing sensitive landscapes. On funding for the areas of natural constraint scheme, the Member will be aware that I did not support a transfer of funds from pillar 1 to pillar 2. I am still considering other options, but, given the pressures on budgets, providing additional support will be challenging. I welcome Mr Eustice's vision for a future agricultural policy but will press to ensure that it caters for the needs of

agriculture in Northern Ireland. We do not have to look to what we had before; there is the opportunity for something different. We can develop something bespoke for the United Kingdom.

Many Members have mentioned the bureaucracy coming from EU regulations. Whilst we will need to ensure that we have equivalent standards to allow for trade to continue to grow when we leave the EU, there will be opportunities to bring in legislation that suits the United Kingdom and not the wider EU. Farming by dates on the calendar is not good for either the farmer or the environment. Policies can be introduced that are based on evidence, and some examples were recently published in the land management strategy.

As a region, we will look for some flexibility within the framework offered, because as a region we are unique. The agri-food sector in Northern Ireland is much more important to the local economy than is the case in other parts of the United Kingdom. Around 70% of the output of the Northern Ireland food and drink sector is sold externally, while 29% of raw milk and 39% of lambs produced on Northern Ireland farms are processed in the Republic of Ireland; indeed, there is movement of many agricultural goods and processed foods across the border in both directions every day of the week.

I welcome the report published last week by the Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association (NIFDA), 'Brexit: Challenges and Opportunities for Northern Ireland Food and Drink'. This highlights the importance of our agri-food sector to the local economy. It is helpful to have a view from the industry. Engagement is key in the process, and I look forward to further discussions on the report. Those discussions and the report will make an important contribution to our thinking as we move forward.

The Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone raised the issue of access to migrant labour. The NIFDA report provides up-to-date information on the migrant labourers employed in the agri-food sector in Northern Ireland and calls for continued access to migrant labour. This is something that I will seek to achieve; indeed, I have raised it at meetings with various Ministers. It has not been forgotten. As my colleague from Lagan Valley Edwin Poots has already outlined, the report clearly demonstrates how the United Kingdom relies on the importation of food. According to the NIFDA report, the UK imports £2 billion of poultry products, £1.4 billion of beef and lamb, £1.2 billion of dairy and £1.1 billion of other products. This offers Northern Ireland processors tremendous potential if we do not get a free trade deal with the rest of the EU.

David Ford talked about the treatment of a hard border and the impact on the product that trades between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. When having the debate, we need to take a holistic overview and look not just for potential problems but for opportunities. Future trade and support arrangements will be extremely important for the future prospects of the Northern Ireland agri-food industry. I will seek an outcome where future relationships with the EU and the rest of the world are no less restrictive than they currently are with regard to both tariff and non-tariff barriers. Rather than contemplating the possibility of new barriers to trade and their negative effects, we should strive to retain current access arrangements in the short term and create new export opportunities in the longer term.

Export markets have always been important for our industry, but there is a need to tread carefully to ensure that vulnerable agricultural sectors are not sacrificed for gains in other areas. With the decision to leave the EU, in future the UK will be in a stronger position to pursue trade deals that will be in our best interests. I have already been in China speaking to the Government at various levels and picked up no concerns about their willingness to trade with the UK if we are outside the EU.

Long-term planning is important in any sector and is no less so in farming. Therefore, any change in support mechanisms or levels of support would need to involve a period of transition. Significant thought is being given to a UK agricultural policy framework that delivers the market and non-market outcomes that the agricultural industry is uniquely positioned to deliver. Importantly, agricultural support also requires the use of restrictions on imports to protect the sector from lower-cost producers who face different standards and constraints with respect to tax, employment and the environment. We need to be mindful of countries such as Brazil, New Zealand and Australia.

As I started by saying, we need to be strategic in our thinking and develop a strategy to provide for and secure the long-term sustainability of the industry. Significant work has already been initiated in my Department to progress my priorities, which are to ensure that we replace the common agricultural policy and common fisheries policy with appropriate UK frameworks that underpin the sustainable growth and competitiveness of the agri-food and fisheries sectors and safeguard our continued ability to trade effectively and profitably both inwardly and outwardly.

As Members will be aware, I have had many meetings and discussions with Ministers to discuss the important issues that need to be resolved in the months ahead. In addition to meetings with my Welsh, Scottish and Irish counterparts, I have met the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, James Brokenshire, and the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, David Davis. I have impressed on them the importance of the agri-food sector to our economy and sought an assurance that we would be kept closely and directly involved in the agricultural, environmental and fisheries policy and trade agendas as they unfold over the coming months and years.

I have also met Andrea Leadsom and George Eustice and impressed on them the unique position of our agri-food sector. As I have already indicated, I hosted a visit by George Eustice last month and facilitated his meetings with agri-food, environmental and fisheries stakeholders and departmental officials. My officials continue to engage with officials from Whitehall, the other devolved Administrations and the Republic of Ireland. That engagement will continue as we formulate our negotiating position for leaving the European Union as a whole United Kingdom, ensuring that we maximise the benefits for Northern Ireland. I have also met virtually every stakeholder from the agri-food, rural development, fisheries and environment sectors. As you are already aware, I have set up the joint Brexit consultative committee with the Economy Minister, Simon Hamilton.

Our Departments also engage with a wider range of stakeholder organisations at ministerial and official level outside those arrangements as necessary and in line with the normal course of business.

**4.15 pm**

Our future agricultural policy framework is a particularly important issue for the Northern Ireland Executive, and I welcome the time that the House has spent discussing it. As John O'Dowd said, there would be uncertainties with remaining in the EU, but we are in uncharted waters that provide significant opportunities for not only us in the House but our farmers. I and the wider Northern Ireland Executive will be a strong voice at the negotiating table. I am committed to engaging with those who are in a position to make decisions that will benefit the sector. I want a mature debate about the future framework, not one dominated by funding without consideration of what that funding might be used for. The advantage of leaving the EU is that we can design our own policies that give us scope to remove the unnecessary bureaucracy associated with the current arrangements that Members have referred to today. They will then much better suit local needs.

**Mr Swann:** I thank the Minister for her reply to the debate. Minister, you talked about funding and what it could be used for. That is the crux of the motion from the Opposition today. It is about what will replace EU funding for our agriculture sector. We hoped that the debate would engender answers to the unknowns, what solid proposals are being put forward, even by your Department if not the entire Executive, and how that preparation is being developed.

There is a feeling in the AERA Committee that there is a lot of talk and stakeholder engagement without hard and fast proposals. That feeling was demonstrated by the contributors today. Patsy McGlone talked about the need to alleviate concerns in rural communities. Edwin Poots talked about the threats and benefits of tariffs. There is uncertainty there. My party colleague Harold McKee talked about supporting a strong farming industry at home but said that, currently, there was a policy vacuum as to where we will go once we leave the EU. That is the uncertainty that has an awful lot of stakeholders and our industry asking questions at the moment. The UFU is engaging far and wide on where the industry is going. I think that there is commonality in the House today: we want to support our industry, and, I think, we want to support you, as Minister, and your Department in coming forward with solid proposals that will support our industry.

John O'Dowd talked about the uncertainties and said that we could not give farmers reassurances. Minister, as you rightly pointed out, we cannot give farmers reassurance on what the next common agricultural policy will be. However, we now have an ability to start to give Northern Ireland farmers the reassurance that they need. The debate is no longer about Westminster and Brussels and how we will support our farmers; the debate here and now in this place should be about how we support our farmers and the measures that we will put in place to do that. I had hoped to get a little more out of your response to the debate today. You talked about a lot of things that are being put in place and how markets will interact with the international world, and rightly so. However, the UK will negotiate those trade deals. The debate was asking for reassurances that we could give to our members and farmers, and my colleague from Fermanagh and South Tyrone touched on that. When does the replacement for the ANC scheme come forward? Those are genuine concerns. We had representation from the hill farmers at a recent Committee meeting.

What alternatives are the Executive looking at? I heard about engagement, but I did not hear, "This is what we could do" or "This is what we're looking at". You referred to George Eustice's comments at the DUP fundraising breakfast, where he talked about a move away from subsidies and towards insurance models. The insurance models currently in place in New Zealand and Canada are an underpinning factor of what is there, but they also engage an awful lot of government support. The New Zealand model allows five-year set-asides that are tax-deductible against the Inland Revenue. If you, as Minister, are negotiating with the UK Government on that, we would be keen to hear that. We would be keen to explore how that can be developed and how that can help. The US market also looks at insurance-based systems, but they are highly competitive and highly costly to the farmer, and they rely a lot on the farmer being able to set aside money in the good years. Unfortunately, our farming industry has not had the good years to enable it to put that money to one side. The Canadian Going for Growth model for 2013-18 is a policy initiative that has support measures in place. They look towards a business risk management tool, which puts the farmer under a lot of pressure to put forward a business plan. There has to be some certainty on prices for him to proceed in that way.

**Mr Storey:** I thank the Member for giving way. First, for clarification and for the record, it was not a DUP fundraising event. Secondly, will the Member, in light of all that he says, clarify to the House whether, when campaigning on the issue, he voted to leave the European Union or to remain? Clearly, that would give us an indication of where he is going with this.

**Mr Swann:** I appreciate Mr Storey's intervention. If he had been here for the entire debate, he would already know that I answered Mr Poots on that point. Where it is in relation to this debate, I am not entirely sure.

**Mr Storey:** What was the answer?

**Mr Swann:** I told him that I had voted to leave. I have no problem with that. Check in Hansard, but I have never seen in Hansard where the Economy Minister stated which way he went. Maybe you could answer that as well.

I go back to the hour-and-a-half debate that we have had. It has been positive with regard to support for our farmers. I note that the Minister noted where we were going on that. There has been consensus in the House that we need the guarantee of insurances, and that is what our agriculture industry is asking for.

In the last few minutes of Mr Mullan's contribution, Mr Allister made an intervention in which he queried the validity of the £350 million referenced in the motion. So that it is in Hansard and on the record, I clarify that the single farm payment was £266.3 million and the rural development programme was £83.1 million, giving a total of £349.4 million. The motion refers to "approximately £350 million", so we were not that far off. Mr Allister should check his figures before he starts casting aspersions on our motion.

**Mr Poots:** I thank the Member for giving way. He raised a valid point about the Canadian system and so forth. Has the Member any thoughts on what George Eustice is talking about when he refers to having an insurance policy for farmers whereby there is a minimum price? When times are good, that is OK; when times are bad, we have

a Government-backed insurance policy that ensures that prices never drop in the way that milk prices have dropped over the last two years?

**Mr Swann:** I said in response to the Minister that I had noticed that there were references to where the Minister had gone with regard to insurance policies. They are currently in New Zealand, Canada and certain states of America, but they rely heavily on farmers having good years that enable them to put that money to one side so that they can reimburse members.

**Mr Allister:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Swann:** Yes.

**Mr Allister:** The Member suggested that I had misled the House, I think. May I refer him to the latest resource accounts of the Department for 2015-16? On page 136 and page 139, where the figure is repeated, the total EU aid and single farm payment and other EU programme income for 2015-16 is a grand total of £258 million, £231 million of it in respect of single farm payment and area aids. Far from the suggestion that it is £349 million, the latest figure is £258 million. The question is this: why does the motion exaggerate?

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Order. The Member will know by now that interventions should be a little more pithy.

**Mr Allister:** I will try to be more pithy.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I look forward to reading Hansard.

**Mr Swann:** I will wait for Mr Allister's pith to come forward. He refers to the single farm payment. The rural development programme was £83.1 million. If you add the two together, it comes to £349.4 million.

**Mr Allister:** In what year?

**Mr Swann:** In 2015-16.

**Mr Poots:** It is over five years.

**Mr Swann:** Over five — *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Order. The Member has the Floor; go ahead.

**Mr Swann:** I was winding up before Mr Storey's intervention earlier on. As I said earlier, the contributions to the debate have been positive, and I hope that the House will support the motion to put in place mechanisms that will support our agriculture industry once we withdraw from the EU.

*Question put.*

*The Assembly divided:*

*Ayes 59; Noes 34.*

## AYES

*Mr Aiken, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Ms Dillon, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Ms Hanna, Mr Hazzard, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr E McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone,*

*Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Mr McKee, Mr McMullan, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Mullan, Mr Murphy, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Smith, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McKee and Mr Swann.*

## NOES

*Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Ms Bailey, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Middleton, Lord Morrow, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr Robinson.*

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly notes with concern the risks to multiple streams of funding posed by withdrawal from the European Union; further notes that over 70% of all European funding to Northern Ireland falls under the common agricultural policy and other rural funds, which provide approximately £350 million each year to farmers, representing 87% of annual farm income; acknowledges that the agri-food sector accounts for 3.25% of Northern Ireland's gross value added, which equates to £1.1 billion at basic prices and approximately 71,500 local jobs and that existing strategies in these sectors, such as Going for Growth, make no provision for the withdrawal of European Union funding; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how she intends to uphold the First Minister's commitment that farmers can be provided for as well, if not better, if Northern Ireland leaves the European Union, and to detail how she will develop a strategy to provide for and secure the long-term sustainability of the agricultural and agri-food sectors to ensure no loss of assistance to farmers arising from the withdrawal of existing European Union funding.*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** The House will take its ease while we make changes to the top Table.

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

## Rural Schools: Draft Strategic Area Plan

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for this debate. As two amendments have been selected and are published on the Marshalled List, an additional 15 minutes has been added to the total time. 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. Before we begin, the House should note that the amendments are mutually exclusive, so if amendment No 1 is made, the Question will not be put on amendment No 2.

**Mrs Overend:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly, noting the failure of the attempt at area-based planning for schools in the previous mandate, expresses its concern at the proposals contained in 'Providing Pathways Draft Strategic Area Plan for School Provision 2017-2020'; believes that schools in rural areas will be most at risk from the proposals; calls on the Minister of Education to detail what rural proofing measures were undertaken during the development of the proposed area plan; and further calls on the Minister to introduce legislation for a statutory presumption against the closure of rural schools similar to the protections already in place in England and Scotland.*

It is with great concern that the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP bring this motion to the Floor of the Chamber. The draft strategic area plan for school provision, as put forward by the Minister of Education, is flawed. It is concerning that it is based on the same sustainable schools policy that underpinned the previous area plan and was called into serious disrepute by the Public Accounts Committee only a few months ago. It shows a complete failure on the part of the Minister to seriously address the issues that are faced by primary and secondary schools in Northern Ireland, not least of which is the funding crisis, but, importantly, there are also systemic problems with underachievement and educational inequalities. Instead, it threatens struggling schools with closure, targets rural communities and creates a sense of panic in the schools system that takes the focus away from children in the classroom.

Our first major concern is that the plan is based on bad statistics. In answer to questions for written answer from the Ulster Unionist Party leader, the Minister indicated that 439 primary schools and 104 post-primary schools will be in budget deficit by 2019. According to the sustainable schools policy, that is a measure of sustainability. First, while all those schools will be showing a budget deficit in 2019, 11% of the primary schools on the list are actually showing clear evidence that they are reducing their deficits, so to put them on the list is particularly unfair. Perhaps a little more time and support would allow those schools to get back.

Another important issue is that 80% of the post-primary schools on the list, and 88% of primary schools, are in rural areas — 88%, Mr Deputy Speaker. What are those areas to do if their schools are attacked with closures? Where will those children go? Thousands of children will

be dispersed into alternative schools. Where will they be taught? Out on the tarmac?

The consultation document states that:

*"The education budget has been unable to provide the level of investment in the exiting estate ... that is required."*

The new plan will change nothing. Unless the Minister has a few billion in his back pocket to fund capital development, I do not understand how this is to be orchestrated. What savings are to be made? The plan states that 80% of the budget given to schools is used for staff salaries, but the same amount of teachers will be needed to teach the same amount of pupils. To my knowledge, the only saving that may be made is to the small schools support factor, which sits at 3.82% of the aggregated schools budget. To be honest, the Minister is fooling no one if he is going to insist that that measly sum makes the dispersal of thousands of children worthwhile.

### 4.45 pm

A second concern, and I have said this before, is that any area plan should be proposed with gusto, highlighting fabulous opportunities that should be forthcoming and educational advantages that should be realised. How, as the Minister has suggested, will the closure of schools improve the quality of education? We still have no indication of this. It is simply presumed that bigger schools are better schools and smaller schools are inferior. I suggest that many teachers, principals and, indeed, parents and pupils will be offended by this statement. The Minister suggests in the plan that we continue to face some challenges, and, indeed, there are eight listed in the consultation document. I am not in disagreement with him on the challenges listed. Indeed, I could add a few myself. What I am not clear on is how exactly the proposal, which would see the decimation of rural schools, would solve these problems.

Rather than addressing the funding crisis, the Minister is using it to drive his own agenda of school closures. He is creating a state of panic and fear in rural areas, where parents are wondering whether the school that their children attend will still be around in three, four or five years. If a school is labelled as unsustainable, as the Minister has done, it drives parents and pupils away in fear and plunges the school into a further state of crisis.

Legislation such as that which we are proposing was passed in England in 2006 and in Scotland in 2014, and, in Wales, the current Education Secretary, just last week, announced changes to the school organisation code, which will see the inclusion of a presumption against rural school closures.

The rest of the UK has recognised the special place that rural schools have in their communities. They recognise that pupils in rural areas deserve the same opportunities as children in other areas and recognise the challenges they face, such as small pupil numbers, budget and resource pressures, and greater difficulty in recruiting teachers, head teachers and staff. Rather than punishing rural areas with threats, fear and school closures, the Minister needs to work with schools to find innovative ways of ensuring that a quality education can be delivered in rural areas.

In Wales, 78 rural schools have closed since 2010, which is approximately 20% of the school stock in these areas. Many argue that the presumption against rural school closures has come too late, as some children as young as four and five are travelling for up to an hour to reach the nearest school. I do not want to see that happening in Northern Ireland. I would like to see children in rural areas protected against this. A statutory presumption against rural school closures will go some distance in ensuring that this takes place.

The legislation in England has been in place since 2006 under section 15(4) of the Education and Inspections Act. This legislation does not mean that a rural school will never close, but the case for closure should be strong, and a proposal must be clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area.

When producing a proposal, the proposer must carefully consider the likely effect of the closure of the school in the local community; educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools; the availability and likely cost of transport to other schools; any increase in the use of motor vehicles, which is likely to result from the closure of the school and the likely effects of any such increase; and any alternatives to the closure of the schools.

These are simple checks and balances that can help ensure that closing a rural school is really the only option available and that all other options and costs to the community have been considered. In 10, 20 or 30 years' time, when many of us are long gone, there will be another Education Minister with his own agenda and perhaps another strategic area plan. Legislative measures such as the examples that we have suggested will give long-term transparency and accountability around decisions being made on rural schools, putting simple checks and balances in place to ensure that all options have been considered.

At the end of the day, this is the education of our children that we have in our hands. Indeed, the Minister has more responsibility than any of us, and I hope that he is not afraid of accountability. Is he afraid that a measure such as this will expose flaws in his agenda? If so, he has serious questions that he needs to ask of his proposals. If he is not afraid, he will have no issue with putting protections in place for those living in rural areas.

In conclusion, I hope that this afternoon's debate can be a constructive one. We all want an improved education system for our children. Mature decisions need to be made with regard to planning for the future — mature decisions not masked in fear.

**Lord Morrow:** I beg to move amendment No 1:

*Leave out all after "Assembly" and insert*

*"notes the publication of the Education Authority's 'Providing Pathways Draft Strategic Area Plan for School Provision 2017-2020'; acknowledges the concerns that there will be over the proposals, particularly in rural areas; believes that every pupil, regardless of whether they live in a rural or an urban area, should have access to quality education in a viable and sustainable school, contributing to achieving the draft Programme for Government outcome to give our children and young people the best start in life; believes that the best way to achieve*

*this is through an effective area planning process involving managing authorities and sectoral support bodies; acknowledges sensitivities around the provision of the schools estate in both rural and other areas; and calls on the Minister of Education to bring forward a strategic small schools initiative to ensure accessibility to a quality education, particularly for isolated communities."*

The amendment stands in my name and that of my colleagues on the Education Committee; namely, Carla Lockhart and Phillip Logan.

I do not think that there is a single Member who will disagree with the sentiment in the amendment that every pupil, regardless of where they live, rural and urban, should have access to quality education in a viable and sustainable school in order to give our children and young people the best start in life. I am certain that every one of us could put our hands up for that. Where we differ, of course, is on how that might be best achieved. I and my party, the DUP, feel that the most effective way of achieving that is through an area-planning process involving managing authorities and sectoral support bodies, as stated in our amendment. We do, of course, acknowledge that that must be done in a most sensitive way, particularly for isolated communities.

That is why we are calling on the Minister of Education today to commit to bringing forward a strategic small schools initiative to ensure accessibility to a quality education, particularly for isolated communities. Small rural schools are and have been a vital part of life in Northern Ireland. Indeed, they are the heartbeat of their community. Alas, over the past 40 years, many of our small rural schools have disappeared. As a councillor for some 40 years, I can well remember many battles fought in an attempt to retain those schools, but, owing to lack of children attending, some rural schools were not sustainable. School closures were not confined to rural schools, as some of our village schools were impacted on as well.

I am not saying that a school, either urban or rural, should never be closed. To adopt that position is just to bury one's head in the sand. What I am saying is that, before a school, particularly a rural school, is closed, all the issues must be carefully considered, not least the direct and indirect impact that such a decision will have on its community. Rural schools play a key role in local communities, particularly where small, isolated communities live alongside one another. Such schools are often the focal point for communities, and their proposed closure causes concern among the people who live there. Removing a school from a village will leave a big hole in that community. Rural proofing must be carried out before a rural school is considered for closure, and certainly before a decision is published, as adverse publicity could impact on a school. Many jobs can be lost as a result of a school closing: teachers; local caretakers; groundspeople; school secretaries; classroom assistants; and bus drivers. Sometimes those are part-time posts, but, nevertheless, they are important to the holder of the post and our rural communities. All those positions play a vital and important role in our rural schools.

I represent a very rural constituency. I think that I am right when I say that it is the largest in the UK geographically. It has to be said that, during the long years of the Troubles, many families living in border areas were compelled to

leave their home for security reasons. That impacted on children attending rural, isolated schools, and I have no doubt that the terrorist campaign that was waged was directly responsible for the closure of some of our rural primary schools, particularly along the Fermanagh, Tyrone and Armagh border areas. It is also true that some of the teaching staff in isolated rural areas were brutally murdered. We should all reflect on the impact that those serious incidents had on families and children across the whole community who were connected to the schools affected. My party leader was caught up in a bomb attack on a school bus that she was travelling on when on the school run. I ask you what mindset was at work when a school bus was targeted by terrorists. Hopefully, that sort of activity is now behind us, and we have truly moved into an era in which such incidents are never again repeated.

We must have an efficient, effective, acceptable and trustworthy strategic area plan. It must be one that the Assembly and our community has total respect for and confidence in. It should be the basis for educating all the children from our community, regardless of their social, political or religious background or intellectual ability; it should be all-encompassing and designed to ensure that no one is left behind. I accept that that is a huge challenge, but it is hopefully one that the Assembly, the Minister — I believe that he is — and the Education Authority are up for. I have said that I want to see an education provision where no child is left behind; that is something that I believe in most sincerely. In my book, it must include those on the margins; it has to reach out to the less privileged, if that is the correct terminology; and it must be all-inclusive to include the post-primary, primary and special education sectors. I am convinced that, if that is achieved, a massive step in the right direction will have been taken.

We should all be looking for an assurance from the Minister today that no pupil will be disadvantaged because of the location of their school and that rural communities will receive equality of treatment when accessing education that meets their needs and prepares them for their future. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about the important facet of rural proofing in taking education provision forward. If I may, I will impress upon the Minister that, if and when a school's numbers are assessed as unsustainable, consideration should be given to its retention as it may be vital for the area. I do not for one moment underestimate the challenges that our rural schools face. However, I am persuaded that, with the right approach alongside responsible and creative thinking, our rural communities can enjoy the same effective delivery of education as their urban counterparts.

**Mr Storey:** I thank the Member for giving way. He will agree with me in finding it strange for the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists, to come to the House to talk about legislation and then, in the same vein, about treating everybody fairly. When they were in charge, they introduced article 64 of the Education Reform Order 1989, which we are now encumbered by and which places a duty on the Department to promote and facilitate Irish-medium and integrated schools. Therefore, when it comes to dealing with schools, the Minister cannot act because of how he is shackled by what those two parties signed up to in the Belfast Agreement.

**Lord Morrow:** Unfortunately, inconsistencies are not a new phenomenon in the House. I understand clearly what the Member has said, and I thank him for it.

I am encouraged that Minister Weir has visited many of our schools since he took up his post and will have witnessed at first hand the superb job that principals, teachers and others do. All of them take pride in their schools and give of their best to ensure that, under their charge, their children get the best start in their education. Under the common funding scheme (CFS), school funding is very often a matter of debate. I am of the opinion that the Minister should examine the CFS to ensure that it is fit for purpose and that schools are being adequately funded to deliver the best possible outcomes. Our rural schools are vital for the sustainability of rural communities. I suspect that that will be emphasised by most, if not all, who participate in today's debate, whether they are in favour of the motion or the DUP amendment.

In conclusion, I believe that one thing that we can all agree on is that we want the best possible outcomes for our children and young people as they prepare themselves for a very competitive world. I trust that, as a result of today's debate, we can go forward united in our determination to achieve these outcomes.

**Ms Armstrong:** I beg to move amendment No 2:

*Leave out all after "mandate," and insert*

*"calls on the Minister for Education to ensure that the findings of the Chief Inspector of the Education and Training Inspectorate's report are taken into consideration and applied when looking at the sustainability of rural schools and that a proper, efficient and effective consultation with local rural communities is completed prior to any decision being taken to close or merge smaller rural schools."*

On behalf of the Alliance Party, I confirm that we are unable to support the original motion because it calls for the protection of the schools estate; it is about buildings rather than what is best for our rural children. I live in a rural community; as a child, I attended a rural school; I have a child who attended a rural primary school and who is now at a rural post-primary school. As a rural dweller and an MLA who serves the largely rural constituency of Strangford, I have fought, and continue to fight, for services to be located in rural areas.

#### 5.00 pm

I believe in the sustainability of rural communities. During Question Time, I have questioned various Ministers to ask what they are doing to ensure that rural proofing applies to policies. However, I cannot support the ongoing provision of a school in a rural area if it is not meeting the educational needs of our children. The official Opposition motion calls for the retention of schools in rural areas but does not mention the educational opportunities for children. I want the best for our children and that is not achieved by sitting in a largely empty room, in an underfunded declining education system, struggling to survive in order to keep buildings open.

**Mrs Overend:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms Armstrong:** Not just at the moment. As the chief inspector has said:

*“All learners need, and indeed are entitled to, the highest quality of education and training if Northern Ireland is to aspire to being world class. I believe we have excellent capacity within and across sectors of education and training that will, if appropriately applied, help us to meet and resolve the challenges we face in order to be even better.”*

In some cases, the future of rural schools is called into question because the numbers attending are so low that the school is simply no longer viable. The number of teaching staff is affected and children no longer have access to an education system that will enhance their skills, talents and abilities. It is not good enough to state that a rural school must be protected. The motion calls simply for the protection of the school estate and does not mention the very heart of the issue: what is going to be better for rural children?

**Mrs Overend:** Will the Member give way now?

**Ms Armstrong:** Not just at the moment. In the chief inspector’s report for 2014-16, she states in relation to rural schools in paragraph 33:

*“There is also a small difference in inspection outcomes between smaller and larger primary and post-primary schools, with larger schools tending to do better in inspections than the smallest. For primary schools, this difference only becomes meaningful at low enrolment levels and for rural primaries between those with less than 105 pupils and those above.”*

I do not believe that rural children should be put at a disadvantage, just because some people want to retain a building in an area. The needs of the child should come first.

In the PAC ‘Report on Department of Education: Sustainability of Schools’, recommendation 4 confirms the need for the Department to commission a review of the approved enrolment figure recorded for every school. It is extremely important that the Department has up-to-date records of the current and expected enrolment for each school. This will ensure that appropriate area-based planning is considered and positive action can be taken, well in advance, to support rural schools to take steps to safeguard against falling below the approved enrolment figures and the negative impact that that will have for pupils, or consider alternatives, whatever they may be. At all times, the matter must be based on a child-centred approach, not to protect a building or jobs, and that applies to schools in urban and rural areas. The PAC report recommends, in recommendation 1, that there is transparency, consistency and clarity in decision-making, based on both quantitative and qualitative data. In recommendation 5, it repeats that decision-making should be based on robust evidence and data collection.

If fact-based evidence is available, the Department, the school and the school community, including families and prospective pupils’ families, will have a full picture as to why a rural school may no longer be viable. Schools, particularly primary schools, are deeply seated in the communities that they serve. If evidence suggests that enrolment numbers are in decline, the community must be made aware of the issue and be involved in the decision as to how to provide the best education for children. In recommendation 8, the report confirms the need for an engagement strategy or, as it calls it, a “buying in’ to the

process” or, as I prefer, community consultation. In the Alliance amendment, we clearly state that:

*“a proper, efficient and effective consultation with local rural communities is completed”,*

as part of any consideration to merge or even close a school.

The Department of Education and the Education Authority need to engage in a meaningful consultation and not just pay lip service to local communities. Local communities need to feel that they are part of the process of helping to decide what is best for their young people and what education provision they want to see in the local community. Far too often, schools hear that they are being earmarked for closure without proper support from either managing authority. A one-size-fits-all model will not work; and what works in one rural community may not work in another. That is why it is vital that the community is involved in any discussions about the future of education in their area.

The only rural school in this country that we should give special consideration to is St Mary’s Primary School on Rathlin. The reasons for supporting a primary school on Rathlin are clear. The island is cut off from the mainland regularly, making it impossible for primary-school children to travel to and from school each day. Unlike post-primary provision, there is no boarding option for primary-school children in Ballycastle or the surrounding area. Therefore, it is right that we should support a primary school on Rathlin for the small number of children living there. The school should be protected because of its unique island setting. The motion refers to protections against closure as used in England and Scotland.

**Mr Storey:** I thank the Member for giving way and for mentioning Rathlin, which is in my constituency. So that the Member is well versed, I welcome the fact that Rathlin has increased its pupil intake to 10. It is making progress because the community sees it as its local school and because social housing has been delivered on the island. It is a good news story, and I thank the Member for giving support for Rathlin.

**Ms Armstrong:** We have to remember that the scheme used in England and Wales for small, isolated rural schools was created to protect schools like the one on Rathlin because of their unique geographic location. We do not have areas like the Highlands and Islands of Scotland or north Yorkshire. We have only Rathlin. There are children in Scotland and England who have to travel in excess of 20 miles — sometimes many, many more — to get to a primary school. I ask each and every one of us this question: how many schools do our children pass on a 20-mile journey from home? In my case, it is probably about 10 primary schools. It is not wrong for children to have to travel to school. My daughter travelled over three miles every day to get to her local rural primary school. Many rural children travel to school every day without that journey having a negative impact on their community.

In conclusion, I agree that the Department should do better. Area planning decisions must be based on robust evidence and accurate data to take into account all school enrolments. The PAC report asked that, following a review of enrolments, the Department quantify how much surplus places cost. As the PAC identifies, that would provide a

driver for change as it would identify how much resource could be invested more effectively in the education system. If the Department concentrates on ensuring that children are provided with a quality education system, it can ensure the sustainability of the school estate to allow for the stabilisation of enrolment numbers and provide a wider choice for pupils of educational opportunities and leisure, cultural and sporting activities.

As I said, I will not support the original motion. I believe in children, not buildings. As a mother, I want my child and all children to have access to the best education, and, like many rural families, I am content for my child to travel to access that education. I acknowledge that the DUP amendment recognises the sensitivities around the provision of the school estate, and I welcome the DUP's acknowledgement of sectoral bodies such as NICIE and CnaG, but this is not about buildings and ownership of land. Hard questions need to be asked: why are we keeping a school open? Why are we not putting the pupils' education first? I cannot support its call for a strategic small schools initiative, as I fail to see how different that approach will be from the official Opposition's position of a statutory presumption against closure.

Proper governance does not mean promising populace protection. We need to review the school estate, as outlined in the PAC and the chief executive's recommendations. That includes consulting the community so that they know the impact that small pupil numbers have on the educational opportunities for their children. Armed with facts, people can help to make decisions about education provision in the local area. We need to put the pupil, not buildings, first, and we should not be keeping a school open for the sake of it. The Department must learn from the Education and Training Inspectorate's reports and stop working in silos. We cannot afford to maintain the school estate in the way it is because it is reducing opportunities for our children.

**Mr McElduff:** I will make the first part of my contribution in my role as Chair of the Education Committee, and then I will make some comments from a party political perspective.

The first thing I want to say as Chair of the Education Committee is that the primary-school population is growing, the post-primary population is not growing, and most of that reduction is happening in non-selective schools. It appears that, in the time ahead, the focus — not all of it, but, perhaps, most of it — of the Department and the area planning process may lie in the direction of primary schools, but I stand to be corrected.

In the last mandate, around 26 schools were closed; there were 14 amalgamations involving 31 schools, two thirds of which were primary schools; and the number of vacant desks reduced by just 4,000. The Department had often quoted a disputed number that was much higher. Area planning tends to raise controversial issues, but it is necessary in order to plan school provision efficiently so as to deal with demographic changes and, of course, financial challenges.

Members will be aware of some problems with the process in the last mandate. For example, the primary schools consultation feedback took the Education Authority over one year to analyse. It was not without its problems. There was uncertainty in schools, and some said that

the application of sustainability indicators appeared to be inconsistent. Rural schools felt that, in many cases, area planning was being used to further an official agenda of closing small schools. Others even argued that Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) inspections were being used by the Department to undermine school sustainability and lead to school closures.

The motion references presumption against closure in other jurisdictions. One of those jurisdictions introduced ministerial call-in for controversial school closures etc. This society, uniquely in these islands, has the Minister making the decisions on development proposals relating to very small changes to enrolments in schools.

To conclude my comments as Education Committee Chair, the Committee wants a clear statement from the Minister on the way forward in relation to the small schools support factor. That is vital to the survival of primaries in rural areas with fewer than 105 pupils. The Committee wants certainty that sustainability measures will be applied transparently and consistently to all schools; wants confirmation that all sectors will work together to share educational provision efficiently; wants to support innovative local school-sharing solutions; and wants, obviously, a process that feels fair to all sectors involved in it. Parents with children in special schools are part of the process for the first time, and they want assurance that the added-value nature of special schools will not be lost in an attempt to standardise provision.

As a Sinn Féin MLA, I will say in Irish that we will support the DUP amendment. Tá muid ag tacú leis an leasú seo. I want to make three concluding comments. I submitted a written question to the Minister asking him to outline whether there is a body of educational research and evidence to demonstrate or refute the case that primary schools with more than two year groups in a single class produce poor educational outcomes. The Minister acknowledged that that body of educational research does not exist. Last Friday, when I visited St Mary's Primary School in Strabane, I met a group of principals. They were at pains to point out that composite classes work and produce good outcomes.

**Mr Weir (The Minister of Education):** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McElduff:** Yes.

**Mr Weir:** You will get an extra minute.

The Member mentioned having more than two year groups in a class, and there is the direct reference in paragraph 34 of the ETI report to that, which specifically highlights that composite classes spanning more than two years can be much more challenging for the teacher and limit opportunities for children to develop socially. So there is a degree of evidence, particularly when we are talking about where it goes beyond two year groups.

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

**Mr McElduff:** I thank the Minister for his intervention. That needed to be said, because there is a contest. Among the principals that I met last Friday, there was a howl of protest when that point was made to them in a provocative way to tease out their response. I communicated to those principals that they needed to make arguments based on educational research and evidence.

My final point relates to Irish-medium education, particularly post-primary provision. There is a need for a second post-primary in Belfast, and there is a need for a strong Irish-medium post-primary school in the north-west. Gaelcholáiste Dhoire is shaping up to be that.

**Mr McPhillips:** As an MLA for one of the most rural of these counties, I welcome the opportunity to speak on today's motion. Needless to say, the issue of rural school closures is one that Fermanagh and South Tyrone and its people are unfortunate enough to be accustomed to.

It is my view that the proposals in the draft area plan are a direct attack on rural education provision, and the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists, as the Opposition, have tabled today's motion to let everyone else know that, when government consultations are launched, the decisions have been predetermined and it is just a case of rubber-stamping them. No amount of public engagement or consideration given to the Rural Needs Act will change the fact that that is what makes debates like this so important.

### 5.15 pm

It is with deep regret that we bring the motion to the Assembly. I would have hoped that the value of rural schools to many communities across the North would be self-evident to the Minister. What is clear, however, from the proposals in the Education Authority's 'Providing Pathways' plan is that rural schools are being targeted by stealth. Rural schools represent 55% of Northern Ireland's primary schools and 20% of post-primary schools. Needless to say, the proposals put forward by the Education Authority will greatly impact on them. They are, by their nature, more likely to have smaller, composite classes and fewer people attending sixth form.

The proposals will have a devastating impact on the west, as the organisation of education will serve only the best interests of places like Belfast, Derry and other built-up areas, which leaves rural areas like mine to take the hit. That cannot be allowed to happen. The Minister can be assured that I, as a representative for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, will not sit back and allow the erosion of rural education in my constituency, which will be disproportionately impacted on if the current plan goes ahead. I fully support increasing educational outcomes for our young people, whether in primary, secondary or tertiary education, when there is evidence-based policy. However, just like my Opposition colleagues, I question the motive behind the proposed plan and whether it is really based on finance rather than educational outcomes.

The Minister has failed to show how small class numbers impact on educational achievement. He noted last week that there was some evidence, but he failed to elaborate. In preparation for today's debate, I did some research with others and found an interesting study conducted in Finland, whose education results greatly exceed Northern Ireland's and, indeed, the rest of the European Union states. Finland is in the top 10 world rankings for maths, reading and science, yet just over one quarter of its state-run schools have 50 or fewer students. I do not advocate the need for that number of pupils in the North, but it proves that there are merits in smaller schools, and they can greatly increase educational outcomes with the right guidance and policies stemming from the Executive. What we have seen to date, however, are attempts to erode rural education services as a cost-saving exercise, pretending

to put children's interests first while in reality, behind the scenes, it is a cost-saving exercise.

**Mr Storey:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McPhillips:** In a moment.

I want to mention the impact that rural school closures will have on local communities, as I know that there is a devastating effect on my community. Rural schools are very much part of the fabric of these communities in providing not only education but jobs and consumerism. Removing schools will have much wider implications for the local economy, and transferred redundancies will not resolve that.

I give way to the Member.

**Mr Storey:** Will the Member clarify for the House what he deems to be a sustainable number in a rural school, given that the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) has stated that a figure of 84 could be used, which is a four-teacher school? Does the Member agree with that, and is that how he would define a rural school?

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

**Mr McPhillips:** As has been stated, each school should be determined on its own merits. To take a rural school out of any area is to take the heart out of a community. There are also significant issues concerning secondary schools and sixth forms that are outside today's immediate debate but are equally important. The Education Authority's back-door plan to close rural schools is not based on inadequate education provision or financial mismanagement; it is a cost-saving exercise that, yet again, plans to erode vital local services. I urge support for the motion.

**Ms Lockhart:** I am grateful to be able to participate in the debate. As a party, we want to provide sustainable, high-quality education for all children and young people in Northern Ireland regardless of background, social mobility or location and to see a fair and equitable offering that gives children the very best start in life and enables them to fulfil their potential.

Having been educated in a smaller-school setting in rural Tyrone just along the border area, I know all too well the importance of rural proofing and the need to protect and invest in services that, for many years, suffered as a result of the Troubles. My primary school was particularly small, with my class of seven being one of the biggest. I moved on to a post-primary school that was also small, so I know all too well the needs of rural areas and the need for area-based planning to take into account the specifics of an area and not just to look at the cold, hard figures.

I stand in the House today to commend the systematic and empathetic way the Minister has approached this matter to date, and I have no doubt that, going forward, whilst he will not shirk his overall responsibility, he will do what is best by the school estate and ensure that children have a sustainable and high-quality education service. There is no doubt that a rural school education is unique within a small school setting. The educational and pastoral care are exemplary, and I personally have benefited from those offerings. However, with its benefits also come some disadvantages and challenges for the children and the dedicated teaching staff.

There is no doubt that problems exist in smaller schools, sometimes with the lack of breadth in their offering, be it

curriculum, the formal offering or the extended offering. They sometimes have difficulty attracting and retaining staff to leadership positions, and existing staff having to fulfil several roles sometimes deters them from developing specialisms in particular areas. So, yes, whilst we have to look at the overall picture, it is important that we do not do so through rose-tinted glasses and that we say, "It is the children and their education we are putting first".

We are all responsible politicians — well, most of us — and therefore we all know from our life experience that not everything can stay the same. We must shape a new school estate that meets the needs of the area in which it operates, ensures that the children whom it serves achieve improved educational equality and improves the experience for all its users. I welcome the Programme for Government's commitment to our children, and, to that end, I am utterly confident the Minister will ensure there is an improvement in educational outcomes, a reduction in educational inequality and an improvement in the quality of education provided.

There is no doubt that empty school places and the surplus capacity are having a detrimental impact on our overall budget for schools, and therefore it is imperative that a rationalisation of the school estate happens. We are all too aware that —

**Mrs Overend:** Will the Member give way on that issue?

**Ms Lockhart:** Absolutely.

**Mrs Overend:** Will the Member agree with me that the figures on empty school desks need to be reanalysed and that the schools that were built 30 or 40 years ago do not necessarily have the same number of empty school desks now as they did then, so whenever we base decisions on figures such as those, that should be looked upon first?

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

**Ms Lockhart:** I thank the Member for her intervention. Yes, figures do need to be looked at, but I also draw the Member's attention to a meeting that we sat in just a number of hours ago in one of the Committee rooms when we were told by principals that there is a major problem with funding, that empty school desks and spaces are at the heart of that and that it needs to be addressed. The Member has to take responsibility whenever she brings forward motions like this and should not use our schools and our children as a political football, which is what is happening in this place today.

We are all aware that it is the responsibility of the Education Authority to liaise with the sectoral representatives, and I believe that will be a vital component of a comprehensive plan that meets the needs of the specific area. I know that in my constituency there is a very clear model of how not to bring forward an area plan, and I have only to think back to the mess that was made around the Dickson plan, when a plan was brought forward that was not transparent and on which there was no consultation with communities.

**Mr Storey:** Poor regard for the facts.

**Ms Lockhart:** The Member makes a point about who supported it. That has given us a basis to work from. There must be community consultation with parents, because we are a party that is fundamentally wedded to ensuring that

parental choice is adhered to. I firmly believe that, with a change in strategic leadership and a Minister committed to parental choice, there is an opportunity to ensure that our estate is fit for purpose in the 21st century. It may in some instances cause pain and anguish, but for the long-term sustainability —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** I ask the Member to draw her remarks to a close.

**Ms Lockhart:** — it is vital that we work together to ensure the best possible outcomes for Northern Ireland.

**Ms Seeley:** As my party colleague Barry McElduff has outlined, we will oppose the motion and vote in favour of the amendment from the DUP.

I accept that, as detailed in the draft plan, the nature of the North's education system, with its range of school management types, means that in proportion to the number of children and young people to be provided with places there is a higher number of schools than would be the case elsewhere. An area plan should be welcomed, and in fact I do welcome the vision outlined in the document, but I also appreciate why some are cautious. In an area as small as the North, we need to make decisions based on a vision of the whole of the North and in the interests of our young people and the quality of the education they receive. Any such vision must also have input from pupils, parents, teachers and principals, as well as the managing authorities and sectoral support bodies suggested in the document.

Most importantly, decisions must not be economically driven but pupil centred. Concerns regarding small rural schools should therefore be listened to and taken on board. I personally caution against any correlation between school size and educational attainment. We must acknowledge that small schools exist because bigger schools are simply too far away. However, I welcome the DUP amendment, which calls for the Minister to bring forward a strategic small schools initiative — evidence that the Minister is not only listening to concerns raised since the publication of the report but responding to them.

**Mrs Overend:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms Seeley:** I will.

**Mrs Overend:** Does the Member acknowledge that in May 2013 Sinn Féin actually voted in favour of a statutory presumption against rural school closures? Is she flip-flopping on that now?

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

**Ms Seeley:** I thank the Member for her intervention. Our Education Ministers, including the most recent, John O'Dowd, made decisions based on pupils, their attainment and the value of the education that they receive. I am confident of that.

I want to note in particular the vision outlined for the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon District Council area, which I represent. It includes a commitment:

*"to establish additional learning support and autism specific provision",*

within primary and post-primary schools, although I think this also requires us to incorporate special educational

needs (SEN) and autism-specific training into teacher training courses. There is also a commitment to provide further opportunities for children and young people to learn in specialist settings attached to mainstream schools, and I welcome that. That would further the wholesome development of children with additional educational needs, as well as their peers. The document also commits to ensuring equitable access to the entitlement framework pathways, so that all our students have access to a wide curriculum. This will undoubtedly help keep our young people engaged in education for as long as possible.

Whilst the area plan:

*“will inform the shape of educational provision for: primary schools; post-primary schools; special schools; and learning support provision in mainstream schools”*,

it fails to mention education other than in school (EOTAS) and juvenile centres, and this is a failing. For example, 33 EOTAS centres currently exist and provide education for over 600 pupils. Their experience of education should be included in any vision moving forward.

I want to give a specific mention to SEN provision across the North. It is absolutely vital that we reinstate full-time provision for all children, and in order to do that, as the draft plan states, we have to:

*“improve the geographical accessibility to special educational needs provision”*,

and:

*“provide for projected growth in special educational needs support”*.

Data indicates that 143-plus additional special school places will be required over the next three years. We must plan for that. Children with additional educational needs should enjoy the same full-time provision as those who have no special or additional needs.

Finally, over 69% of schools make provision for preschool children.

Let us work to get that figure to 100%. Post-primary provision is offered in 87% of special schools. However, a number of them do not make 16-plus provision. That is simply not good enough. The final plan must also address that.

I welcome the draft plan but hope that the Minister takes into consideration the areas for improvement. I urge that all decisions are based on the needs of children and young people and not the elasticity of the purse strings.

### 5.30 pm

**Mrs Barton:** I have some serious concerns about the draft area plan, particularly in the context of the area planning process. As my colleague Sandra Overend stated, the Public Accounts Committee also had concerns. In its published report, it stated that there was too much focus on three quantitative criteria for the assessment of sustainability and that the process of addressing surplus spaces under the plan did not meet its aims and the reliability of the data presented in the sustainable schools policy was called into question. The Committee actually stated:

*“the evidence base supporting the sustainable schools policy falls far short of acceptable standards and the*

*Department is basing decisions about the future of schools on inaccurate information.”*

The Committee also said that, despite the reduction in surplus places, the long tail of underachievement had not, in fact, improved at all and that engagement with key stakeholders around area planning was poor. Now, the Minister assures us that, this time, things will be different and everyone is now around the table. However, the truth of the matter is that the Minister can give no guarantees.

With all that in mind, I am extremely concerned and baffled that the Minister is taking a decision to take this old, discredited proposal and try to pass it off to the House as if it were a new and improved idea. If the Minister had been serious about a credible, functional strategic area plan, he would have started fresh with a new sustainable schools policy and area plan that would meet the needs of children and communities, a plan that could really address underachievement, look at inequalities in the system and take a more holistic view of the education system instead of applying blunt instruments such as a school's financial position or its enrolment trends.

**Ms Lockhart:** I thank the Member for giving way. Given the Member's long history in teaching, would she not agree that the pupil:teacher ratio is quite important in budgeting and that, if we were to address that and reduce it, it would leave more money for extracurricular activities and tackling educational attainment?

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

**Mrs Barton:** I believe that the pupil:teacher ratio is most relevant to the teaching of children in the classroom. Certainly, extracurricular activities are important, but, very often, schools bring in grants to assist with those.

In recent years, we have seen many schools being able to turn stats around, as at Movilla High School, where enrolment was suffering and outcomes falling. Now, it has gained its best GCSE results in years, and enrolment is on the up. With help and support, that could be facilitated in many schools across Northern Ireland.

What other options has the Minister looked at? We live in the 21st century, and there are lots of examples across the globe where the use of technology has transformed teaching and learning in rural and more remote areas. Has the Minister considered that? Of course, that would require the Executive to address the issue of broadband connectivity in Northern Ireland, which we spoke about earlier. What about taking serious measures to address the school funding crisis by allowing schools to have better control over their own budget?

**Mr Weir:** I thank the Member for giving way. She may not be aware of this, but, a couple of weeks ago, I wrote to all schools in Northern Ireland to ask whether they desired greater autonomy and for their views on the bureaucratic burdens that are placed on them. Essentially, the idea was to ask them what they would want with that greater level of autonomy. The Member may be a little behind the times when it comes to what is already happening.

**Mrs Barton:** I await those answers.

**Mrs Overend:** Will the Member give way on that issue?

**Mrs Barton:** Yes.

**Mrs Overend:** I am certainly aware that schools have been written to, Minister. I have heard stories from schools about the letter being very vague. They need detail on certain proposals.

**Mr Weir:** The whole point is that the proposals come from them.

**Mrs Overend:** Yes. The answers are not there.

**Mrs Barton:** Schools have been calling for more control over their budgets for years. The overall investment in our education system is embarrassing. Of the four nations of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland spends the least per head on primary and pre-primary education. We must seriously think about investing more in our young people and their future. Adequately and strategically supporting education will have benefits across the board. It will improve the health and well-being of our future population, support the prosperity and economic growth of our country and strengthen rural and urban areas. The list goes on. The current plan proposed by the Executive of school closures —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** I ask the Member to draw her remarks to a close, please.

**Mrs Barton:** — and disinvestment will be disastrous for our young people. I ask you to join me in making a real start to addressing that crisis and supporting the motion as it stands. The face-saving amendment from the DUP —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** The Member's time is up.

**Mrs Barton:** — essentially allows its Minister to get away with doing nothing. We cannot —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** The Member's time is up.

**Mrs Barton:** — support that.

**Mr Swann:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will you provide clarity on the role of officials and special advisers in the Officials' Box during debates? Are they there to support the Minister in his role or Government members in their interventions?

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** Perhaps you can provide some more detail to the Speaker's Office around that for clarity. I am not entirely sure, from here, what you are referring to. I presume that you will provide that detail to the Speaker's Office.

**Ms J McCann:** I begin by echoing what my two colleagues said: we will oppose the motion and support the DUP amendment.

I welcome the general direction of travel of the draft area plan. It puts the needs of children and young people at the heart of the planning process. It states that it wants a broad and balanced curriculum for all our children. Given the number of debates that we have had on education, particularly over the past couple of weeks, it is key that all our children and young people have as much choice as possible in the curriculum. It is not just about academic subjects, although they are very important; vocational subjects need to be part of the curriculum as well. It is about skilling up our children and young people for life by giving them the life skills that they will need. It is not just

about their academic achievements but about giving them the skills to deal with life's problems and difficulties.

The plan also seeks to close the attainment gap. That issue should be of great concern to all of us and the wider community. There is clear evidence — we have heard it time and again in the education debates, and no doubt we will hear it in the next debate — that links deprivation, poverty and exclusion to underachievement and poor educational outcomes. They act as a barrier to learning for some of our children and young people, and that is something that we need to change. It is important that we ensure that young people born into social and economic deprivation or poverty get the support that they need. They are entitled to as much help and support as any other child, no matter what type of family background they come from.

I want to say again — we have had this in debates — about the excellent results in my constituency of West Belfast in educational outcomes. It clearly shows that, when the right intervention is made in those areas, the children shine and their potential comes through. Every child has a right to have its potential fulfilled, and I believe that those interventions and programmes of support help to do that.

My colleague Barry McElduff mentioned the need for another post-primary Irish-medium school, particularly in north Belfast and the north-west. That is crucial because more and more people are learning through the medium of Irish. That is an important issue.

I want to touch on the EOTAS provision, which, in my opinion, is not given the recognition that it deserves. I hope that in the final area planning it will be. I have seen it at first hand with programmes like New Start in west Belfast. We all want children to go to mainstream education, but, for whatever reason, mainstream education just does not suit some children's needs and does not do it for them. Therefore, interventionist programmes that provide one-to-one support and which support the whole family are clearly the right way for some children to have the opportunities in life that other children have. I hope that the final plan will do that.

I also want to say, and the Minister is aware of this, that it is not about buildings. The previous Minister, John O'Dowd, did excellent work on bringing the entitlement framework forward. It is not just about school buildings, but school buildings sometimes can be crucial, particularly in an area where, for instance, they do not have sporting facilities in a school. The Minister will be aware of the campaign in the Colin area of west Belfast for a new school. It is essential that all our children have access to those opportunities. It is about building a community; it is not just about a school. I would like to see those regeneration projects being taken forward in the overall plan. As I said, we have debated all sorts of things over the last number of weeks, for example, nurture units and autism provision.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** Will the Member draw her remarks to a close?

**Ms J McCann:** I want to say that we will be supporting the DUP amendment but not the motion.

**Mr Weir:** I perhaps find myself in the unusual position — following on from the last Member — that quite often in the House when we have new Members there is a maiden speech that has to be dealt with. I do not know if that was a valedictory speech on behalf of the

Member opposite. I met the Member recently on the issues around Colin. Obviously, I am not going to talk directly on this. It would be inappropriate for me to talk about individual schools, although I will wait, perhaps, to see an imaginative proposal from Mr McPhillips who will, maybe, be having a merger between Brollagh and Helsinki in the future. The limits of imagination are not constrained in the House.

I will start with a note of consensus. I might come down to a second item later, but there is at least one item that I agree on with the proposer of the motion. Relatively early on in her speech — I hope that I quote her correctly — she said, “I do not understand”. I agree with her: she clearly does not understand. Most obviously, shown by her intervention on autonomy, in which she complained that I had written to schools asking for their views on autonomy and then complained that it was vague because it did not tell them what autonomy they should be getting. Now, if Members do not see the irony in that then, perhaps, it is no wonder that this motion has gone so astray.

On the process of area planning — it should be made clear, and to be fair to the SDLP they referred correctly to the Education Authority plan rather than the Department plan. However, when I made a statement in the House on this, I made an appeal across the board — it is clear that some have embraced this — that we need to look at this in a mature fashion. Yes, there will be some tough decisions and there will be something that is painful, but, in the same way as there has been a degree of embracing around Bengoa, there is a realisation amongst the vast majority of the Chamber that there is a wider strategic direction that needs to be taken. It is the same with area planning. Therefore, it is very disappointing that that mature response has not been met by the proposers of the motion. Even before the consultation on the draft area plan has concluded, they have rushed to prejudge it and talk about a raft of closures and put up the stockade as regards the status quo.

#### 5.45 pm

The debate has also been characterised by a degree of scaremongering, pretending that every rural school is simply going to close and that there are going to be no opportunities for new thinking on that. The word “panic” was mentioned, and I am sure that, as we acknowledged, there is concern, but it has to be said that in the face of that concern there are some who are trying to deal with it maturely and some who are trying to fuel concern and panic and increase scaremongering. The movers of the motion seem to be falling into that category.

The missed opportunities in area planning in the past were mentioned. There is condemnation in the first line of the motion of the failure to grasp area planning in an effective manner in the previous mandate, and there is some valid criticism there. Lessons have been learned from that, and we are now in a situation where, on area planning, there is a representative from every sector around the table. However, it ill behoves those who criticise failures in area planning in the past that, when there is an opportunity for all of us, afresh, to have area planning in which everyone is involved, particularly those from the community, with a completely open consultation, they immediately take steps to scupper it.

A number of contributors, particularly the proposer of the Alliance Party amendment, put it very succinctly. This should be about pupils rather than school buildings. The school estate should be there to service the needs of pupils and not the other way around. That is what the proposers of the motion seem to have missed. I would accuse them of wanting to put protection around every school in Northern Ireland so that the school estate does not change. To be fair to them, that is not the position that they have taken. They want to have separate legislative protection for all rural schools, but if this is deemed as something necessary to provide a degree of protection, where is the level of protection for any schools outside rural areas? If you are a pupil in Belfast, Londonderry, Portadown, Ballymena or Magherafelt, the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP are happy on their own terms to simply abandon you. You can operate in a different sphere from that of rural schools.

**Mrs Overend:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Weir:** No. I have heard enough from you today. You have given yourself enough rope and I do not want to give you any more.

At times, there has been a range of selective quotations in relation to this. Whenever we look at the criteria that are in place, there is criticism of the sustainable schools policy. I will come to that later when I talk about the amendments. The six criteria for assessing a school's viability are as follows: a quality educational experience; stable enrolment trends; a sound financial position; strong leadership and management; accessibility; and strong links with the community. I would simply pose this question: which one of those six criteria is no longer relevant? It is clear that the question is about more than the numbers through the door or the financial position. We have rural proofing in every Executive policy and in every motion passed in this House. When it comes to protections, mention was made of what we should be seeking and there, at least, is one thing that I will agree with. We should be looking at a degree of balance. Taking any development proposal in a wider context about sustainable schools, there is that level of balance. However, it is also the case that there are problems with the status quo in terms of the school estate.

It has been accepted — I have not heard any particular objections to this — that over the last 10 years, for instance, in net terms, about 100 schools have disappeared in Northern Ireland. There has been an acceptance that something has to be done about the school estate. The case for change is educational and financial. From a financial point of view, you cannot get away from the educational side of it. Mention was made of the inspectorate report and I appreciate that it was too late to give a direct response to the Committee Chairperson, Mr McElduff, in relation to that. Again, the report says that larger schools tended to do better in inspections than smaller schools and in primary schools, the specific difference that was highlighted — where it becomes meaningful — is where we move on the question of sustainability.

Similarly, it referred particularly to composite classes that spanned more than two years, in which ensuring adequate progression in learning and planning becomes more of a challenge and the opportunities for children to develop socially and emotionally are limited. While the focus has principally been on primary schools, there is a small but

significant difference between larger post-primary schools that have more than 500 pupils and smaller schools. There is a clear indication and specific figures show that, for schools with fewer than 105 pupils, there is a statistically significant difference in inspection outcomes. It becomes more pronounced the further down the scale you go. When you get down to 85 or 60 pupils, that has an educational impact. We cannot pretend that that is not the case. There is no doubt that there are some excellent teachers, principals and schools delivering excellent results for their children. That is why the sustainable schools policy goes beyond a simple numbers game and looks at quality. There is no doubt that having very small schools makes it more difficult for some of our pupils.

I cannot deny that there is a financial aspect to this. The teaching cost per pupil in primary schools with fewer than 50 pupils increases by more than 50% when compared with a school of over 100 pupils. This is not driven simply by finance, although we spend £27 million directly on the small schools initiative and another £8 million on principal release, but there is an economic aspect to it. The economic aspect is that it is not a question of storing up money to be taken out of schools; it is about the redistribution of money. It is about ensuring, for example, that, if a school is not needed, transferred redundancies will ensure that teachers who want to go can do so, meaning that we teach our children more effectively and efficiently. Therefore, it is about ploughing the resource into the remaining schools. The financial aspect to this is that the system gives too little to schools, and we need to ensure that we get the best possible delivery for that.

The process has been mentioned, particularly by the proposer of the Alliance amendment and others. In the current consultation on the draft area plan and as we move towards annual area plans and individual development proposals, that process will be open to everyone. I encourage everyone to contribute to it. The focus should be on the needs and desires of the community and, particularly, on the pupils.

The two amendments are mutually exclusive. I will support the DUP amendment. However, I clearly acknowledge the bulk of what was said by the proposer of the Alliance amendment, and I do not have a problem with it. Its position is much more realistic than that of the motion. I accept that there needs to be sensitivity. There will be concerns out there, which is why, as I mentioned in a statement when the area plan was first mentioned in the Assembly, there will be a need to ensure that isolated communities are not simply left too far away from a school.

The proposer of the motion mentioned that she did not want children being driven for more than an hour to get to school. There is recognition that there has to be some practical limitation on distance. I am happy to accept the amendment tabled by my colleagues. I have mentioned it previously, and there will need to be some protection for isolated schools, the most obvious example being Rathlin Island, which has already been highlighted. Like other Members, it is an area that I know well, and, with the best will in the world, whatever the mechanics —

**Mr Lyttle:** I thank the Minister for giving way. I accept his support for the DUP amendment today. Will he accept the important addition that proper efficient and effective consultation with local rural communities will be an important addition to the process?

**Mr Weir:** I am happy to give that assurance. Obviously, as the Member knows, unlike other settings, we cannot simply amend on the hoof, but it is important that there is that proper consultation.

Above all, the status quo needs to change from a financial point of view and an educational point of view. The key driver in all of this — there are sensitivities, and we can ensure that consultation takes place — is the needs of our pupils moving forward. We should look to protect the educational interests of pupils, not the educational interests of school buildings. That is the distinction that I will draw between the amendment that has been put before us and the failings, I believe, of the original motion.

**Mr Lyttle:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion, and I thank my colleague Kellie Armstrong for moving the Alliance Party amendment today.

It is important that we consider the context in which we set ourselves today and listen to educators. We hear from school principals across Northern Ireland that there is a financial crisis facing our schools. Our Education Committee heard from one principal who said that, in 30 years of teaching, he had never known teacher morale to be so low. We have heard that the addition of superannuation costs and National Insurance costs to school budgets are the straw that broke a rather large camel's back. We have also heard that the only remaining reductions that many schools can make are to staff levels and staff hours and that some schools in Northern Ireland face hundreds of thousands of pounds of deficits within the next three years. That impacts on the provision for children with special educational needs, on families and on the educational outcomes that we can achieve for children in our society.

Principals in Northern Ireland also have concerns about the common funding formula, the use of free school meals as a criterion to assess social and educational need and the fact that investment is focused not on early years but on post-primary. Every principal and teacher whom we talk to emphasises that at the forefront of their concerns is not the buildings or the staff but the outcomes that we achieve for children and how we, as an Executive and an Assembly, will lead change to see the necessary reform to address the significant challenges.

Ultimately, the major concern being raised by teachers with our party and the Education Committee is the elephant in the room: we have too many schools, too many unfilled places and an unwieldy and ineffective administration. They clearly want to see wholesale systemic reform, and it will undoubtedly need courageous political leadership and bold cross-sectoral area planning if we are to achieve those aims. Perhaps most importantly — this has been put forward capably by my colleague Kellie Armstrong MLA today — it will need robust, inclusive community consultation and engagement if we are to bring communities along with us on the change process.

We as a party do not believe that we need to see statutory schools protected. There will, of course, be schools, in particular rural schools, that need protection, but we can consider those on a case-by-case basis. My colleague Kellie Armstrong set out the unique example of Rathlin Island, but there are small towns in Northern Ireland with as many as three primary schools. There are good examples of learning area groups coming together to maximise resources through collaboration, but this key

question remains: if we do not rationalise and reform our education system, what else will we ask our schools to cut from our children's education? I do not think that there is any avoiding the fact that tough decisions that will be difficult for political parties and local elected representatives to support will have to be made, if we are to ensure that all children in our community have access to quality education in a sustainable school,

We will, therefore, for the greater good of everyone in this society, need much more responsible political leadership than we have been used to.

**6.00 pm**

**Mr Logan:** The Minister spoke very well about our amendment, and it is clear that the Ulster Unionist Party does not understand the draft strategic area plan. There is one thing that I cannot get over about its motion, and that is that it does not mention pupils or what is best for them. It reeks of all the luxuries of being unaccountable and not having to bear any responsibility.

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

I wish to address our amendment first. Schools are not closed for absolutely no reason. The purpose of the area planning process is to implement the Department's sustainable schools policy. The primary objective of that policy is to ensure that all children get a first-class education in fit-for-purpose facilities, regardless of background or where they live, and make the best use of the resources available for their education. It places the needs —

**Mrs Overend:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Logan:** I am happy to give way.

**Mrs Overend:** Will the Member agree that, in the sustainable schools policy, rural schools are defined as all schools outside Belfast and Londonderry? Earlier, the Minister referred to schools closing in Magherafelt, Newry and elsewhere. That is a nonsense.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Logan:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. With regard to rural schools, there is no separation when it comes to dividing the money. Those schools are rural schools and are as important as urban schools.

**Mr Weir:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Logan:** I am happy to give way to the Minister.

**Mr Weir:** Thank you. There are two definitions of rural. There is the specific definition in the sustainable schools policy (SSP), but the motion makes a general reference to rural. In the Northern Ireland Executive and, indeed, the Assembly, rural areas are defined as settlements of below 5,000 people. There is relevance because it is not specifically or purely tied in with the state of schools but goes wider with the protection of rural areas.

**Mr Logan:** OK. The sustainable schools policy places the needs of our children and young people at the heart of the planning process. Area planning aims to ensure that children and young people have access to educational pathways and a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their needs. It is not focused on achieving a projected level of savings, but, rather, focuses on maximising the impact of available resources by working towards a network of

schools that are educationally and financially viable. The criteria and their associated indicators are not used in robotic fashion to close schools, but concerns about a school's viability are often addressed when enrolments have fallen to an irreversible level. In such cases, the criteria provide a framework for early identification of emerging problems so that possible remedial action may be taken. The annual area profiles published by the Education Authority are based on three of the criteria and enable managing authorities to keep schools that are in danger of becoming unsustainable under review.

The topic is emotive, and, as Lord Morrow pointed out, many stakeholders are involved in a school — pupils, parents, teachers and support staff. When faced with the prospect of potential closure, schools are protective and passionate — rightly so. Schools —

**Mr Swann:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Logan:** I need to make my point and get on. Schools are not closed lightly or without consultation. Instead of putting in protections for rural schools just because they are rural, I believe that there should be a case-by-case approach — we mentioned Rathlin, and rightly so. Schools have to deliver for their pupils, regardless of their size or location. That is why we need a strategy so that small schools can be helped to deliver. Smaller schools face challenges, but, with a pragmatic approach and innovative and creative thinking, it is possible to ensure that education provision is available as close to a pupil's home as possible.

On the motion, if the previous Minister and his officials marched to the top of the hill and retreated, I accept that that is a failure, but we in this party are determined to take the tough decisions that need to be taken. We acknowledge that burying our heads in the sand is not a viable, long-term option.

As regards the concerns over rural schools, the Rural Needs Act 2016, which received Royal Assent in May, placed a duty on public authorities, including councils, to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting and implementing policies. The Department of Education has to meet legal obligations to give due regard to rural needs when reviewing the SSP and the area planning process.

When funding is being allocated, schools in urban areas are treated exactly the same as those with similar characteristics in rural areas. The Minister has stated that he recognises that funding is a significant issue and that all schools face difficult choices and ongoing challenges to ensure that they live within their budgets. We heard from the principals earlier today. That was a very helpful meeting, and it highlighted some of the issues we are trying to get across in our amendment.

As Chris Lyttle mentioned, the Minister wishes to examine the common funding scheme to ensure it is fit for purpose, the best possible support is given to all schools and the maximum advantage is being derived from the moneys allocated. In the common funding scheme, small schools support funding seeks to reflect the needs of smaller schools in delivering the curriculum.

The Education Department's sustainable schools policy is the framework used for assessing viability, and it is a key driver for the area planning process. The sustainable schools policy was rural proofed, and, as the Education

Authority's draft area plan is based on the policy, we can be assured it is rural proofed. Let me be clear about this: what we have here —

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

**Mr Logan:** — is a sensible approach to the schools estate that puts pupils first, with an acceptance that isolated areas cannot be abandoned.

In closing, I also believe there needs to be choice for parents.

**Mr McGrath:** I support our motion as presented today. I suppose the most interesting element I want to take time to recognise is that everybody in the Chamber has the interests of our children and young people at heart. That is something that has impressed me during the debate. Whilst we may differ in some of the ways we want to work through that, we all start from that basis.

I also feel that, when it comes to the amendments, the DUP amendment and our motion are very similar. In fact, when I read through the amendment, the only difference I can see is that ours calls for legislative grounds against the presumption of closure of rural schools. That is not there; a thorough case is being asked for by the DUP. So, I see very little difference. The fact that we are all here today in this playing field and are all arguing in the same direction for our children is good. We even appreciate some of the contributions from the sidelines.

We are not against the need for area planning. We would question, though, the measure by which closures would be decided as suggested in the consultation. There are many different things referenced throughout the consultation about what should be taken into consideration, but, time and time again, the Education Authority makes reference to numbers. It talks about levels at which a school is sustainable. It even gives us it in percentages. It tells us the numbers, and that is what makes me nervous, because, to me, that means a line is being drawn in the sand where it is saying, "That is the level at which we will be making our decisions". It is on that basis that we have our greatest concern for those in rural communities.

Rather than simply identifying schools with enrolment levels deemed to be of concern, with the first step in addressing them being to close the school, the attitude needs to be about how we protect the schools from closure, with closure being the last resort, rather than saying, "Enrolment levels here are low. Let's just simply throw away the keys". That is why I have to question the integrity of 'Providing Pathways', the area planning document.

I take issue with what seems to be an attempt to window dress some of the numbers in a way that makes them seem slightly worse than they are. For example, the document attempts to highlight the schools with low numbers that would face closure. It begins by citing the number of schools, and then it jumps to citing the percentages of those that have less than the desired numbers. I worry about the lack of openness and transparency there, because it makes it sound as though it is a low percentage rather than giving us the exact figure of the number of schools. When you churn that through, you see that it works out at roughly 300 rural schools and 174 urban schools. Under its definition of the figures in the document, it would be less than it wants them to be. That is where it starts to get a little bit worrying, because it is

not just a handful of schools. We are not talking about one in each county; we are talking about 300 rural schools that do not meet the numbers. That is a very high figure.

We are not denying that problems exist and that they have to be addressed. We are simply saying that a more holistic view of how to deal with these problems should be considered, and we think that that more holistic approach is true area planning.

I also think the consultation is particularly weak. Twelve questions completed SurveyMonkey-style with barely enough room for 200 words for a qualitative response does not make you feel as though you are getting a good and proper opportunity to be able to respond.

Schools are at the core of any community, and, particularly in rural areas, communities are built around local schools. Schools connect people, they bring jobs to often remote areas and they instil a sense of ownership and belonging to an area that families live in. I attended a small rural school, and, right at the end of the 1970s, when I started, it was threatened with closure due to having small numbers. It was saved then, and now it is a vibrant, forward-thinking and modern school with over 135 pupils. People are queuing up to attend that school. If we had simply been taking the numbers approach of the late 1970s and early 1980s, it would have been shut down, and it would not have been there. Right around that school a small community has been built. It is used for community facilities, it is seen as a community resource and it is part of that community's identity. If it had simply been asked to look at numbers back in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it would have been closed, and it would not be there. Indeed, a quality school is more than —

**Mr Humphrey:** I thank the Member for giving way. I agree with the Member to an extent. The same thing happened at Springfield Primary School on the edge of north Belfast, between north and west Belfast. When I first got elected to Belfast City Council in 2005, there were 72 pupils: there are now over 176. However, does the Member also agree that, as well as providing a good school, it has to provide a good education and academically deliver for children? Is that not something that the Member needs to draw attention to in his speech as well?

**Mr McGrath:** I thank the Member for his intervention. I think that we can take it as a given that we want the best educational outcome for all of our children in all of our schools, and closing them is not necessarily the way that may result in a better education. Lumping schools together, merging them and having larger class sizes may not be the approach that needs to be taken, and that is the substance of what our motion says. It says that the presumption should be that you do not close the schools. We are not saying that you do not close a school; we are just saying that the presumption should be that you do not close them and that you have to exhaust all other possible decisions and methods that could be taken to provide the education. That is where there is a bit of a difference between the interpretations. It is not saying that you do not close; it is saying that the presumption should be there that you do not close. That is not just to be used in a way where you say that you presume that you are not going to close and then go off and close them; it is about saying that there needs to be a thorough process that you need to follow.

**Mrs Overend:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McGrath:** Yes, certainly.

**Mrs Overend:** That is the same presumption against rural closures that the DUP and Sinn Féin voted in support of in May 2013.

**Mr McGrath:** I thank the Member for her intervention. Her use of history is much better than mine, her having been here before. It is always great to see how quickly people can change their perspective on matters when they are in different offices. I hope that we can stick to the spirit of trying to get good educational outcomes for our children, and a presumption against closure would certainly help that.

As for the amendments, I am a bit concerned about the DUP amendment. I worry about the word “accessibility”. It is not really detailed any further than ensuring “accessibility” to a good education. That accessibility could be interpreted as a school 20 miles, 25 miles or 30 miles down the road and that is where we will provide that education. That would be concerning, because we do not feel that that is fair. It is not accessible to put children through lengthy journeys to and from school.

**Mr Weir:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McGrath:** No, we have heard enough from you today, thank you. I think that is an answer that you used earlier.

No one is saying that a school should be available on every road or on every street, but simply covering up closures by using the term “accessibility” is a bit crass.

I move to the Alliance amendment. Last week, the ETI Chief Inspector’s report was mentioned and how that could be considered in any decisions that are taken forward. I think that, to be fair to the Minister, he would always consider the ETI reports. That is the purpose of them. They make the reports so that you can consider them when you make your decisions in the future, so I do not think that we need to specifically provide legislation for that. It also talks about how you need to consult and how you need to work with communities and how you need to assess with them whether or not a school should be closed. We feel that, if you have a presumption against closure, that will be part of that process of consulting the community, discussing with them, asking them for their views and allowing them to be part of the process. Therefore, we feel that both of the suggestions that are in the Alliance amendment are part of our motion.

We propose the motion to stop a process of rural closures. We have heard anecdotal soundings from within the Department that it wants up to 300 closures. That would be disastrous for our community and especially our rural communities, particularly if it is to be done simply by numbers. Introducing a legislative presumption to keep rural schools open would provide some comfort to teachers, parents and pupils that small schools will not automatically face the chop. It is for that reason that I commend the motion to the House.

**6.15 pm**

**Mr Speaker:** Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I remind Members that, if amendment No 1 is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2.

*Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.*

*The Assembly divided:*

*Ayes 66; Noes 26.*

#### **AYES**

*Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O’Dowd, Mrs O’Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan and Mr Robinson.*

#### **NOES**

*Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allister, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Kennedy, Mr E McCann, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr McGrath and Mrs Overend.*

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly notes the publication of the Education Authority’s ‘Providing Pathways Draft Strategic Area Plan for School Provision 2017-2020’; acknowledges the concerns that there will be over the proposals, particularly in rural areas; believes that every pupil, regardless of whether they live in a rural or an urban area, should have access to quality education in a viable and sustainable school, contributing to achieving the draft Programme for Government outcome to give our children and young people the best start in life; believes that the best way to achieve this is through an effective area planning process involving managing authorities and sectoral support bodies; acknowledges sensitivities around the provision of the schools estate in both rural and other areas; and calls on the Minister of Education to bring forward a strategic small schools initiative to ensure accessibility to a quality education, particularly for isolated communities.*

6.30 pm

## Poverty and Deprivation

**Mr Speaker:** The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour 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 will have 10 minutes to propose the amendment and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members will have five minutes.

**Ms Mallon:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly expresses its concern that, according to the Department for Communities, around 376,000 or 21% of people in Northern Ireland live in relative income poverty before housing costs; notes that, in June 2015, the High Court found that the Executive had breached a legal duty by failing to adopt an identifiable strategy setting out how they proposed to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need; further notes that the Programme for Government consultation document published in October 2016 refers to a new social strategy in relation to these matters; and calls on the Minister for Communities to publish an overarching strategy and long-term plan, including budget allocations, which outlines specific targets and timelines to reduce poverty and deprivation and tackle social exclusion and ensures the application of resources based on neutral criteria that measure deprivation irrespective of community background or other affiliation.*

It is with sadness that I propose the motion, which has, as its genesis, the unacceptable and shameful fact that one in five people living here are living in poverty; that over 125,000 of our pensioners live on low incomes, with over 18,000 of them forced to spend their senior and final years living in severe poverty; and that according to the Department for Communities' own statistics, more than a quarter of our children — that means a staggering 122,000 — are living in relative poverty after housing costs.

It means that one fifth of our population, at every stage in their lives, are living in poverty. Babies are being born into a life of poverty, and the only exit from poverty is at the point of death. I am only too familiar with that injustice in North Belfast, where many people come to my constituency office and share with me their struggles to make ends meet. They are forced to rely on the generousities of charities and food banks. Many of them are living with their children in hostels for indefinite periods, and so many, many more are living in substandard accommodation, literally choosing between heating their homes and eating. All of this is having a devastating impact on their physical and mental health, because a life in poverty is one that cripples your educational and employment opportunities and it literally steals years from your life.

The facts speak for themselves. If you live in one of the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland, you are more likely to experience the horror of infant mortality, as infant mortality rates are 16% higher in the most deprived areas than in the least. Suicide rates are three times higher, self-harm admission rates are four times higher and twice as many people experience mental ill health in our most

deprived areas than in the least deprived areas. For men and women, if you live in one of our most deprived areas, you face fewer years of good health and a shorter life expectancy.

If this reality does not shock us all into action, what will? Certainly, the new Programme for Government; the Children's Services Co-operation Act, for which Mr Steven Agnew deserves great credit; the draft children and young people's strategy; and the requirement for an anti-poverty strategy, albeit following the essential legal challenge last year, provide a new impetus for a concerted Executive action on poverty, and child poverty in particular, which remains consistently high and consistently higher than poverty rates for working-age adults and pensioners. However, these cannot be parallel processes. If we are to seriously tackle poverty, there must be a coordinated and interconnected approach within an overarching strategy.

The first and most fundamental requirement to achieve this outcome is for the overarching anti-poverty strategy to include a proper and agreed definition of poverty that is consistent with international standards on socio-economic rights and reflects material deprivation and an income that falls below an adequate standard of living.

This definition, and, as a direct result, the long-term plan and allocation of resources, must, as the motion points out, be tied to neutral criteria that measure deprivation irrespective of community background or other affiliation. This definition exists. It is exactly the definition provided by Mr Justice Treacy in his ruling last year, when the Committee on the Administration of Justice, the human rights NGO, with the support of the Public Interest Litigation Support service, had to bring a judicial review to force the Northern Ireland Executive to adopt an anti-poverty strategy. Given the importance of his ruling, I hope you will indulge me if I read out just a part:

*"The concept of 'objective need' is obviously central to the statutory provision, the intention of which is to remove or reduce the scope for discrimination by tying the allocation of resources to neutral criteria that measure deprivation irrespective of community background or other affiliation."*

However, you would be forgiven for thinking that this had never happened, because the Programme for Government, and the amendment tabled by the DUP, delete and dismiss this definition and legal ruling. Perhaps the DUP will share with us its rationale for that deletion. A question for Sinn Féin today is whether it continues to support the DUP in this deletion and dismissive approach.

The truth is that you cannot address poverty without clear targets. It is because of the deletion of Mr Justice Treacy's ruling and the lack of detail in targets, timelines and budgets that the SDLP cannot support the DUP amendment. We need targets. If we are to get serious about tackling poverty, we must have targets. This is not just my view; it is the evidenced truth to which all research and experience point.

We are continually asked by the DUP and Sinn Féin, "So, what would you do?". Let me take the rest of my time to delineate some of the critical interventions we believe are required if we are to prevent another generation from being consigned to poverty.

You cannot and you will not lift individual families out of poverty without an enhancement of household income. It is as simple as that. Yet the reality faced by our poorest and most vulnerable is one of cuts to their income when they are already struggling to make ends meet. This is thanks to an Executive that have handed their fate to a Tory Government who, rather than seeing the human impact, see nothing but austerity.

We need to have benefit levels set to a minimum standard sufficient to meet the income needs of families. We need to ensure that when decisions are taken on benefit sanctions, it is very clear that we measure the impact that they will have on the children in those families. That does not happen at the moment.

Other targets that should be included in a robust, overarching anti-poverty strategy include strengthening employment rights, given that 45% of those living in poverty are in work. It must contain plans to keep people in work and help those who are out of work, including our disabled, to find work. Social clauses in procurement have an important role to play. The provision of high-quality, affordable childcare is critical because of not only the evident benefits to the child but the employment and financial benefits that it brings to their parents and, through an increased tax base, to the wider economy. Yet, we still await the childcare strategy. In the meantime, excellent childcare facilities like that provided by the women's centre childcare fund, which also helps to empower mothers in areas of high deprivation, are facing the very real prospect of having to close their doors and turn away those mothers in need.

If we are to successfully tackle child poverty, we need to have coordinated early intervention support to families in crisis, including those affected by bereavement, family breakdown, illness and substance misuse. We need integrated early years support to help ensure that children living in poverty can reach their developmental goals before they start school. We need to reduce the costs of education. We need to reduce educational inequalities so that children in poverty achieve as well as their peers and have an equal chance of a future without poverty. We need to address homelessness for families with children by providing additional resources for housing.

The SDLP and the Ulster Unionists met today with the anti-poverty sector, and I want to thank all those organisations — there were many — that came to meet us to discuss what needs to happen if we are to seriously tackle poverty. It is fitting if I end with a comment that very much found consensus in the room. It was very simple but striking:

*"It is not rocket science. All the research is there. It is about implementing what has been demonstrated to work."*

**Mr Stalford:** I beg to move the following amendment:

*Leave out all after "Assembly" and insert*

*"notes the latest edition of the 'Northern Ireland Poverty Bulletin' detailing the levels of poverty across Northern Ireland; further notes that section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 was the subject of a judicial review in June 2015; and welcomes the Executive's commitment, as outlined in the recent Programme for Government consultation document, to publish a new social strategy that aims to improve the lives of those in poverty through a range of specific interventions that*

*will tackle poverty, social exclusion and deprivation on the basis of the objective need."*

I would like to start with a quote from Seth Godin, an American entrepreneur. He said:

*"Poverty is an iron ceiling, a ceiling four feet off the ground, a ceiling that forces those who live with poverty to spend their days hunched over, on the edge of fear and humiliation"*.

That is absolutely right. It is right that we, as elected representatives, understand and appreciate the moral as well as the political imperative that is placed upon us, as the public's representatives, to do all in our power to tackle poverty and need in our society.

I want to respond to one point that was made by my friend Nichola Mallon from North Belfast. I do not put my faith in any Tory Government to look after the people of Northern Ireland. I put my faith in these institutions and in all of us, as elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland, to do the very best for the people who sent us here. I say to the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists that it is a shame that they lacked the faith in themselves to put their hand to the wheel, join us in government and make a contribution in government to tackling the problems that she mentioned in her speech.

The Programme for Government (PFG) is operating in a new way from previous Programmes for Government. The draft framework was published and that gave people an opportunity to have their say on what they think should be in the final PFG. The final PFG has been put out for consultation and that is reflective, I believe, of the different approach — the outcomes-based approach — that we have considered in the House. I think that people welcome that approach and welcome not only the fact that the Government have focused on outcomes, which are vital when dealing with issues around poverty, but that there has been an increased opportunity for people throughout the country to have their say on what they would like to see in the Programme for Government.

In 2014-15, the average weekly household income increased by 3% from the previous year to £420 per week or £21,900 per year. The percentage of people in Northern Ireland in absolute poverty decreased by 1% in the previous year. There has been a decrease in the percentage of persons of pensioner age in relative poverty in 2014-15 from the height of 30% in 2008-09.

Those are positive developments that, I think, everyone around the House would welcome as such. We must never be complacent, however, and should recognise the scale of the problem we face. Some 20% of individuals in Northern Ireland live in absolute poverty before housing costs. That includes 23% of children, 18% of pensioners and 19% of the working population.

#### 6.45 pm

I have been a public representative since 2005. I do not underestimate for one second the scale of the problem. I know, for example, as a representative of South Belfast — other representatives of South Belfast can attest to this — that, in our constituency, there are islands of deprivation surrounded by seas of plenty. They can sometimes be missed. Taughmonagh, for example, is included in the Upper Malone ward when it comes to the Noble indices

of multiple deprivation. There are real problems in all our communities, and I believe that everyone in the House, whether in government or in opposition, is determined to tackle them.

It is important that the figures are accurate. It is not appropriate to compare Northern Ireland poverty figures with those for the rest of the UK on a before-housing-cost basis, due to the different ways in which water charges are collected in Northern Ireland. The Members who tabled the motion understand that, and I hope that they will reflect on it.

Fuel poverty is an enormous problem: 42% of households live in fuel poverty. That is one of the areas that I would like the Government to focus on when the PFG is published. It cannot be right in this day and age that pensioners who have worked all their life, paid their National Insurance and made a contribution to society should be forced into a position in which they have to choose between eating or heating their home. That is wrong in an advanced industrialised society such as the United Kingdom.

The previous contributor mentioned the need for a multifaceted approach to tackling poverty, and I absolutely agree. That is why it is important that, going forward, the Government continue to have a strong focus on job creation. Job creation is one prong in the battle to defeat poverty. The 'Households Below Average Income' report showed that the risk of working-age adults being in relative poverty is starkly higher for those not in work. Those not in work have a 59% chance as against a 13% chance of falling into poverty. Obviously, one of the focuses going forward has to be on job creation and transforming the Northern Ireland economy into an outward-looking economy that can attract jobs and investment for all our people to enjoy and benefit from, regardless of their background, as the motion states.

It is important to note that, between 2013 and 2015, the Government have enabled over 9,000 people to avail themselves of £30 million of benefits that otherwise would not have gone to them through the benefit uptake team that the Government operate. That is important. Members from all parties will have constituents who come to them unaware of the benefits that they are entitled to. Not only does that money help the families who are entitled to it but it helps the economy because they spend the money in local shops and boost it in that way. It is right that government helps people to access money to which they are entitled.

Nobody in the House is content that any of our citizens, least of all the children or pensioners of Northern Ireland, should be left in poverty. I came into politics to make life better for people; I believe that that is the case for all Members around here. I believe that we are all motivated by a desire to do good for our constituents, make their lives better and improve their standing. It is for that reason and that reason alone that I am content to move the amendment.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I suppose I am not really surprised at the tone in which the debate was opened. I do not think there is anybody in the Assembly who does not have concerns about poverty and deprivation. I want to say that, but, while we are involved in politics in this institution all day long, I think there is an element of playing politics with this issue. I also think the motion falls short, to be quite frank. It falls short on the figures, because it is all done on the

measurement before housing costs. I listened to Nichola Mallon, and I am sure other speakers from the SDLP will say the same; I do not know what the Ulster Unionists will say. It is as though those parties were never in the Executive and poverty has just been occurring since May 2016. I do not believe in taking the approach of looking at before housing costs. It effectively misses out on some 9,000 people who live in poverty and income poverty. That is worthy of consideration. If we are really about tackling poverty and deprivation, you can find those 9,000 among the people who are behind the statistics; they are the people I and others have referred to as the top 10% of the most deprived.

I found one thing regrettable about the opening of the debate. Sinn Féin did not hitch its wagon to any Tories; it never has and never will. I want to make that completely clear. Christopher did that for his party, as is his prerogative, and I will do it for ours. We were collectively adamant about ensuring that the mitigation packages that were brought in as part of Tory welfare reform were about trying to offset the worst impacts of poverty on people, but we will not talk about that, sure. We will also not talk about the impact of partition; we will not talk about that either.

One thing I think we can all agree on is that the notion of people's experience of poverty is particularly acute when you look at access to employment, childcare, benefits and facilities. The premise on which the motion was moved was the Executive fulfilling their duty — section 28E, I think it is referred to — to bring forward an anti-poverty strategy. Everyone knows our position on this; it has been very clear. We support the fact that there should be and will be an anti-poverty strategy in the social strategy.

Christopher moved the DUP amendment. I would like to see it talk about patterns of deprivation as well. Perhaps the Minister in his summing up could refer to that. It is very clear that, as part of the consultation we are in now, particularly on the Programme for Government, a social strategy and what an anti-poverty strategy looks like need to be addressed. We also have to recognise there are some levers that impact on poverty and deprivation that are not within the remit of the Executive. For example, it is shown that one of the greatest impacts on poverty in particular — I am sure many of us have spoken on this previously and will today and for ever more — especially on the working poor, is tax and how benefit policies impact here. You have only to look at the report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies entitled 'Child and Working-Age Poverty in Northern Ireland from 2010 to 2020', which sets out the rising levels of poverty here. That is directly correlated to the British Government's approach to tax and benefits policies.

The Executive have already stated that they will bring forward a social strategy. That will be in line with their legal responsibilities as a result of the outcome of the judicial review. Like many others, I will look forward to not just the Department for Communities but all Departments ensuring that their resources are targeted on objective need.

**Mr Attwood:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I am sorry, I will not, because I am coming to the end.

**Mr Attwood:** You will get an extra minute.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** No, it is OK; I do not need it. Thanks anyway.

**Mr Attwood:** *[Interruption.]*

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I really do not.

I want to talk particularly around —

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

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I want to talk about ensuring that the legal responsibilities are brought forward as part of the Programme for Government. On that basis, we will support the amendment from the DUP; we will not be supporting the original motion.

**Mrs Palmer:** We on the official Opposition Benches take no pleasure in bringing this motion before the House. The facts are incredible: 376,000 people in Northern Ireland, which is a staggering 21% of us, live in relative poverty. That figure is larger than any settlement in Northern Ireland bar Belfast; it is nearly five Bangors, around seven Omaghs and more than triple Lisburn.

The two parties in the Executive have been lead parties of government for almost 10 years. They may try to pass the buck, as we have already heard from the two Members who spoke previously. They can and do try to blame others for their failings. They will blame the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP. They will blame the Conservative Government at Westminster. They will blame the Dublin Government for poaching our jobs and investment. One day they will blame the EU for interfering, and the next day they will blame the impact of uncertainty over Brexit. The only thing that they do not accept is any responsibility themselves. The DUP and Sinn Féin are in government as a partnership; they are two sides of the same coin. They need to learn the lesson that with power comes responsibility. They have had the power for nine years; it is surely time that they took some responsibility. Sooner or later, the realisation will dawn on them that there really is nobody else to blame.

What have they delivered in the decade in which they have been in charge? Look at the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland. Time and time again, the same names appear. For how long will we tolerate those names standing on the most-deprived lists? Even the High Court ruled that they had breached a legal duty by failing to adopt an identifiable strategy setting out how they proposed to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need. We need an integrated strategy to protect the vulnerable; one that looks at welfare, education, housing, health, justice, training and employment, plus the arts, leisure and culture. We must put people at the heart of the intervention strategy. I believe that we could learn some lessons from the Dutch model, which targets government spending at those most in need and seeks to move them out of poverty. We need to end the current reality in which families find themselves in a revolving door of poverty.

The most vulnerable need a voice in this debate. There has to be a genuine will to achieve real change. Instead, the supposed flagship is the social investment fund. It was to be the silver bullet; their big idea to tackle poverty and deprivation. As the last few days have shown, it has fallen far short of those aims. In terms of governance —

**Mr Stalford:** Will the Member give way?

**Mrs Palmer:** No, I will not. I am busy.

First, they could not give £80 million away. Then, when they managed to spend some of it, it turned out that

they were handing millions of pounds of public money to people who have attracted almost daily negative publicity. There has clearly been a major failing over the lack of transparency and openness in terms of which groups could apply for funding. Some groups and organisations that have the skills and capacity to deliver were excluded. There has also been a major failing in terms of how costs such as management fees were paid out.

In my constituency — I know that the Minister is waiting for this — the Resurgam Trust is living proof that the strategic investment fund can do great work. From my own experience, I cannot speak highly enough of the work that it has done. Sadly, however — this is key — Resurgam appears to be the silver lining in a very grey cloud.

In closing, the Executive need to get serious about eliminating poverty, and the first step is taking ownership of the problem. We need a strategy and a long-term plan. It has to be detailed and effective to reduce poverty and deprivation and tackle social exclusion, and, most of all, it has to deliver.

**7.00 pm**

**Mrs Long:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on today's motion, which is calling for action and clarity from the Minister on what he intends to do to tackle poverty and deprivation in Northern Ireland. From the outset, I want to make it clear that we will be opposing the amendment, as it is simply a case of the Minister's colleagues trying to take the approach of the ostrich and burying their head in the sand and pretending that these issues will be dealt with by the Executive's current approach.

The data and figures reveal that there is a significant number of people in Northern Ireland living in vulnerability. Moreover, history does not particularly inspire faith that this issue is going to be alleviated any time soon. I wish that it were possible that we could simply agree on a motion, between all of the parties, in order to actually tackle the issue rather than engage in this kind of fractious debate.

The figures that we have in front of us reveal around 376,000 individuals, that is 21% of our population, living in relative income poverty before housing costs. That is an increase of 1% on last year's figures, or an increase of nearly 20,000 people living in relative income poverty since last year. We need to take that seriously and there has been some debate, and rightly so, in the Chamber already about how poverty should be measured and which measures should be applied. There is, of course, a range of measures that can be taken on poverty. However, the more important debate tonight is about what we are going to do to tackle poverty. That is where the crux of the matter lies.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) highlighted, in its June 2016 'Northern Ireland Poverty Bulletin', that during the period of 2014-15, a quarter of children were living in poverty. That should cause us significant concern. Whilst I agree with the Member for South Belfast about poverty amongst older people, we should not neglect the fact that poverty, particularly amongst children, has a long-term impact as well as an immediate one. That poverty will impact on their current health, well-being and educational attainment in the present. However, it has been shown repeatedly that it will also have long-term effects on life expectancy and employment opportunities. Therefore, it is hugely

important that we tackle the issue of child poverty in particular.

Section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places a statutory duty on the Executive to adopt a strategy to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation. This was then reiterated at St Andrews and, since that time, year after year, we have been told that the Programme for Government, reports, programmes and so on will actually tackle the issue.

To be clear, for those Members who have raised the issue of this year's Programme for Government process, we have not criticised the process that has been adopted by the Executive, on this occasion, in going for outcomes-based measures. We have been supportive of the process. However, we are free to criticise the programme, the content of that programme and, indeed, the lack of content of that programme. The change process does not justify why we would not continue to do what it calls for in the motion, which is to develop a strategy.

As noted in the amendment, the Executive was indeed subject to a judicial review in 2015. However, it should be noted what the court actually said. It noted that we had used the basic template of the 2008 'Lifetime Opportunities' report as proof that it had a strategy to tackle poverty and deprivation. Mr Justice Treacy quite rightly ruled that the Executive was attempting to present an unfinalised and inchoate strategy to tackle a vital and important issue. I think that that needs to come to an end, and it needs to come to an end extremely quickly. As a result of inaction, we are where we are today, where 25% of children, 35% of single mothers and 21% of working-age adults now live in relative income poverty.

Welfare reform changes — some will dismiss the impact of the UK Government, but it should be recognised — have a significant impact on the Executive's ability to tackle poverty. So we need, all the more, an urgent and robust strategy in place to actually assist those who are most vulnerable and economically marginalised and to deal with social exclusion and deprivation. I want to see an action plan, a proper strategy, backed up by detailed targets, goals and budgetary allocations. I am sure that there is no one in the Chamber who would not wish to play a constructive role, working with the Executive and not against it, to deliver a fair and more prosperous society for everyone.

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

**Mrs Long:** I believe that the application of resources based on neutral criteria is the right way to go and does not prevent us tackling pockets of deprivation. I endorse the motion and call on the Minister to bring forward his strategy as a matter of urgency so that we can assist him with his work.

**Mr Speaker:** Before I call Mrs Emma Little Pengelly, I advise her that she has up to three minutes.

**Mrs Little Pengelly:** I will just have to speak very quickly. I am absolutely and genuinely passionate about helping people break free from poverty. It is something that I have had a genuine interest in for some considerable years, but not just as an issue. I have worked at it and tried to bring about a change in the way in which government does policy in order to bring about the positive changes that we want to see.

The issue is this: why do we want to tackle poverty? We want to tackle poverty because it has bad outcomes for people in health and education and has negative impacts on the happiness and healthiness of their lifespan. I have only three minutes, so I will touch very briefly on a number of points raised in the debate. First, I want to speak briefly about the court case that was taken by CAJ. In my view, the challenge to the then OFMDFM at the time under section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 was based on CAJ's misunderstanding of the concept of objective need. It is very important for us to consider that.

In fact, CAJ had a concern that Delivering Social Change funds widened the criteria from simply 10% on spatial deprivation. I had been very critical of the approach of using spatial deprivation as the only criterion for determining objective need, and I want to turn very briefly to that point. There is an obligation on government to distribute funds and services on the basis of need. We all accept that. Of course, that need should be objective. However, there has traditionally been an ignorance or misunderstanding of what it means.

Government distributes services in a number of ways. Universal services are targeted at families and at family and individual needs and on the basis of spatial deprivation, based on NISRA's multiple deprivation spatial indexes. The exact methodology deployed depends on what the objective or outcome is. It is right that the health service target the urgency of the need of the individual: that is objective need. It is right that all children who have an educational need get education universally free at the point of delivery: that is educational need and it is objective need. It is right that those in poverty and unemployment get access to the same benefits in the same circumstances right across Northern Ireland: that is objective need. It is the objective need of the individual.

What it is not is arbitrarily drawing a line under those areas in the top 10% for spatial poverty evidenced by the multiple deprivation areas and excluding all those above the line. A postcode lottery criterion does not work, save in circumstances in which spatial poverty is proven to compound the negative outcomes or in which a necessary cluster of initiative clientele requires geographical targeting.

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

**Mrs Little Pengelly:** In conclusion, I hope that the Minister considers the issues that I have raised about objective need and that Members across the House start to see objective need on a much wider basis than simply spatial need, which was part of the issue in the court case.

**Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities):** I thank those Members who brought forward the motion for giving us an opportunity to engage in debate on what is a very important issue. It is fair to say that we all share the same objectives when it comes to tackling poverty and wanting to help people who need that help. Where we maybe differ is on the means and process by which we want to take that forward.

I take Mrs Long's point about wishing to have a motion on which everyone in the Assembly can unite. Maybe that is something that the Opposition can consider if they wish to engage, certainly with me, on motions that they want to bring forward. I am happy to engage with them, and if we are able to find agreed positions, we can have

agreed motions on important issues such as this. That is something that I will actively consider.

**Mr McCartney:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Givan:** Yes.

**Mr McCartney:** Perhaps when they are considering that, the Opposition will allow us more than an hour to discuss such a topic.

**Mr Givan:** The point is well made about the ability to have a fuller debate about this issue at the end of Opposition day business. It is an offer that I will make to the Opposition parties, because we can agree on how we tackle a lot of these issues. However, the Opposition may not want to go that far in engaging with Ministers and Departments to try to get motions that avoid some of the party politics that inevitably goes on. I understand that, as we try to get one over on each other, but, when it comes to an issue like this, it may be better to find some common ground.

I move to the substance of the debate, and if I leave out some particulars that Members highlighted I will visit Hansard and come back with more detail. The amendment is more worthy of the Assembly's support than the motion. I appeal to the Opposition parties to endorse the amendment so that we can have universal agreement in the House on the issue.

The most recent poverty figures available are for 2014-15 and were published in the 'Northern Ireland Poverty Bulletin'. They showed that 395,100 people in Northern Ireland are living in relative poverty before housing costs; that is 22% of the population. The motion under-represents the scale of the challenge that we have to deal with. It is worth noting that, over the last decade and despite significant investment, the overall number of those in poverty remains the same. For example, the proportion of the population in relative poverty today is exactly the same as when Alex Attwood was the Social Development Minister in 2010.

That is why the approach that we are taking in the Executive's Programme for Government can make a difference. This is where I part company with Naomi Long, as she indicated that the Executive were continuing to do things as they had been done before. However, that is not the case: we are moving to an outcomes-based approach.

We either continue to do the same things in the same way and get the same outcome, or we change the way in which the Government do business; that is why the Programme for Government is being taken forward in a different way. Whilst I recognise that there has been criticism, we need to look at the way in which we addressed things in the past and ask ourselves why the difference that I believe we all want to make has not been made. Hence the change.

It is designed to help to deliver improved well-being for all our citizens. However, Members will be aware that we have moved away from the approach used in the past that used a range of actions and targets that we simply ticked as we went along. That approach failed to reduce the numbers in poverty up until now, so, clearly, we need to do something different.

Part of the different approach will involve the publication of our first ever social strategy. That will, in effect, become the Executive's strategy for promoting opportunity for everyone and tackling poverty and social exclusion. I plan

to bring it to the Executive in the coming weeks. I suspect that it will address many of the issues that Members raised here today, and, I believe, it will go further.

For example, it will identify those in poverty and outline specific interventions to support them. It will also identify those at greatest risk of social exclusion, and again, through specific interventions, look to further support them. Of course, we will do that based on objective need because I am well aware of the outcome of the judicial review last year. Members can be assured that I will address the issues that arose from that judgement.

I have been encouraged —

**Ms Ni Chuilín:** I thank the Minister for giving way. In the context of his comments, it is also looking at the patterns of deprivation outlined in the judicial review of last year. As the Minister said, as part of the consultation on the Programme for Government we will use debates like these and other opportunities for Members to come forward with alternatives that have not been expressed thus far.

**Mr Givan:** The Member raises an important point. Once this goes through the Executive, it will go out for consultation, and there will be a lot more specific detail —

**Mr Durkan:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Givan:** If I can address this point, I will be happy to give way. We will go out for consultation, and that will give Members and the Committee an opportunity to drill down into more detail that will be available to address this. The Member said that poverty, social exclusion and the patterns of deprivation are all inextricably linked, and many of the actions will have a cross-cutting effect that will be in the social strategy. We recognise that some individuals and groups have different needs and face different challenges. To base the strategy on objective need, we will need to focus action where it is most needed.

**7.15 pm**

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Minister for giving way, and I look forward to the new strategy. Will his strategy outline specific targets and timelines to reduce poverty and deprivation?

**Mr Givan:** There will be a lot of specifics on the interventions that will take place. Members will not have too long to wait to engage on the specifics in the social strategy; they will get the opportunity to do that. I am sure that the Opposition parties will welcome that offer of engagement.

**Mr Attwood:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Givan:** Let me make some progress, and, if I have time, I will certainly give way to the Member.

I am encouraged by the recent work that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has carried out. It suggests that our new approach to addressing poverty cannot be income-related alone. A broader definition must consider the whole person and not just what is or is not in their pocket. The Programme for Government is based on a similar whole-of-government approach that looks at multiple aspects of people's lives, reaching simply beyond income measures. Whilst we will be clear about how we measure poverty, we need to recognise, in seeking to address it, that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. We also

need to be realistic about what we can do as a devolved Administration. There is no silver bullet for the issue, and our opportunity to intervene in many cases will be limited. However, we as an Executive have already shown that we can and will intervene, when required, to protect those in greatest need, and our welfare reform mitigation schemes are just one example of the difference that we can make.

I turn to Member's contributions, and I will give way to Mr Attwood in a moment. Mr Stalford raised an issue about fuel poverty. Again, the affordable warmth scheme targets households most at risk of fuel poverty. It provides a range of heating and insulation measures that improve energy efficiency in households that have an annual gross income of less than £20,000. The new targeted scheme replaced the warm homes scheme from April 2015.

Jenny Palmer, my colleague from Lagan Valley, highlighted a number of the issues around that. Let me say that I welcome her comments. I know that she was at the Resurgam Trust annual general meeting last week, as was Trevor Lunn from Alliance and the Alliance councillors. Unsurprisingly, given the good work that Resurgam carries out, all of them — I think Trevor Lunn had to leave early — were more than willing to get photographed with the individuals involved with the Resurgam Trust. So it is something of note that the Ulster Unionist Party, through Jenny Palmer, is now making it clear that the social investment fund does good work, that that is recognised and that there are excellent examples of that. I hope that she will be able to prevail in her party in respect of the way in which she has spoken about what is excellent work. We will see a new facility being opened in the Old Warren that has been funded solely from the social investment fund. I give way to Mr Attwood.

**Mr Attwood:** There is one issue that I struggle with. Given that you seem to accept objective need and Justice Treacy's ruling in July last year, why have you and the DUP — this question is also to Sinn Féin — not accepted what the judge explicitly said? He said:

*"the concept of 'objective need'"*

in statutory provision is to remove or

*"reduce ... the scope for discrimination ... by tying the application of resources to neutral criteria that measure deprivation irrespective of community background or other affiliation."*

Why not say today that that will be part of the social strategy? Say it: yes or no.

**Mr Speaker:** The Minister's time is up. He may consider replying in writing to the Member.

**Mr McQuillan:** I support the amendment. This is a very important topic, and I must speak in favourable terms on the actions of the Executive as demonstrated in the recent Programme for Government. It is worth pointing out that the signatories to the motion were members of the last Executive, so it is important to point out that the figures quoted in the motion relate to the time when their parties were in the Executive. Nevertheless, this is a very important issue that needs to be tackled, and I am confident that the Minister is committed to doing so.

The scale of poverty in Northern Ireland is much the same as it has been for in excess of 10 years. It is worth pointing it out that Northern Ireland is no worse off than England,

where the majority of our nation's population live. Wales comes out the worst, and Scotland does better than the rest.

**Mr Stalford:** I appreciate the Member giving way. We have had a reasonable debate for a reasonable length of time. Does the Member agree with me that it is totally disappointing and wrong that the Chairman of the Committee, the co-leader of the Opposition, could not find it within himself to be present for a debate on poverty?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr McQuillan:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank my colleague for raising that point. I was thinking the very same thing while we were debating the subject.

In my constituency of East Londonderry, as of August 2013, 23% of children were deemed to be living in low-income families. East Londonderry ranked fifth highest of the 18 Northern Ireland constituencies. This is, therefore, an issue that I am keen to see tackled, as I believe that no child should be left behind.

Poverty is primarily based on income levels, which are dependent on the availability of jobs, coupled with the level of skills and qualifications held by the local population, age and how healthy our population is — for example, having a disability can obviously impact on someone's ability to work and their life chances. Unfortunately, we have something of a postcode lottery, as income can depend on where you live and the number as well as the type of jobs that are available locally. East Londonderry has been hit by job losses, as has everywhere in Northern Ireland during the economic downturn. That, of course, has an impact on the standard and cost of living, especially as the price of essential goods is rising.

One way to help to reduce poverty is promoting benefit uptake, and I am pleased that, between 2013 and 2015, benefit uptake has increased due to the work of the Department, with an additional £30 million generated for 9,000 people. I encourage everyone to check their entitlement to benefits.

The Executive placed tackling poverty and social exclusion at the top of their agenda. Both are mentioned throughout the Programme for Government, and, perhaps, those on the Opposition Benches should look at it for themselves.

**Mrs Little Pengelly:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McQuillan:** Yes, go ahead.

**Mrs Little Pengelly:** We have heard some conversation around the Chamber about the court case. Does the Member agree with me that the court case recognised the "plethora" — I think that that is a direct quote — of anti-poverty initiatives and actions taken by the Executive in the last mandate under the last Programme for Government to tackle poverty, not just income poverty but educational, health and other associated poverty? The court case recognised that, and the case was lost simply on the dictionary definition of strategy, not on the basis of the definition of objective need. It recognised the valuable work that the Executive had already carried out.

**Mr McQuillan:** I certainly agree with my colleague. She is far more qualified to speak on behalf of the judiciary than I am.

The key means of tackling the issue is job creation. That is why our Executive have been active in promoting Northern

Ireland abroad as a place to do business. However, the issue of ensuring fairness and equality in the distribution of the new jobs has been identified by the Executive.

I look forward to the publication of the first ever social strategy for Northern Ireland in the coming weeks. It will clearly set out how the Executive will tackle the issues that impact on poverty. It is worth pointing it out that a special edition of the 'Oxford Review of Economic Policy' published in 2013 looked at the record of new Labour in tackling poverty. It concluded that, while it put additional resources into tackling the issue, how you spend money is more important than how much you spend. Governments need an effective means of establishing what works and the patience to see whether policies bear fruit in the long run. I believe that the new social strategy will do that. I support the motion and the amendment.

**Mr Nesbitt:** We have discussed poverty, but, as some Members have mentioned, you cannot do that in isolation without talking about the creation of jobs and good jobs — well-paid jobs — at that. We should be talking not just about poverty but about productivity and, indeed, prosperity. I think that the problem for the Government with prosperity is defined in their Budget document, which refers to the prosperity gap between Northern Ireland and Great Britain as measured by gross value added. The document makes it clear that our GVA per head has:

*"remained consistently at around 75 to 80 per cent of the UK average".*

In other words, if one of our citizens has 75p to 80p in their pocket, a citizen in GB has the full pound. Indeed, the gap closed to its narrowest in 2007, the very year that the DUP and Sinn Féin took over the heart of our Executive Government.

**Mr Stalford:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Nesbitt:** As your friend the Minister of Education made clear earlier, we have heard enough from you. I welcome the earlier intervention from the Member from South Belfast. It was that bizarre mix of Sinn Féin Ourselves Alone and the Dee Stittesque, "I do not trust Her Majesty's Government".

Nichola Mallon made clear the rather shocking statistics with regard to poverty, not least suicides and mental health in her constituency. I know that the parties of the Government like to say to the parties of the Opposition, "What are your ideas?". On mental health, I have been shouting loud and long that we need to do more. Last week, I was in London, and I took the opportunity to take the issue to the Prime Minister, Mrs May, who, heretofore, was unaware that, per capita, we may have the worst rates of poor mental health and well-being in the world. One of the significant reasons why our rates are so bad is that it is a legacy issue of our Troubles. Her Majesty's Government have set a precedent in the Stormont House Agreement of providing funding for legacy issues, with £150 million for truth, acknowledgement and justice. So, the precedent is set. It is not covered by the block grant, there are no Barnett consequentials, and I have asked Mrs May to consider intervening to help with mental health, which impacts on poverty.

Ms Mallon gave us the stats, and I notice that the DUP amendment tries to airbrush statistics out of the equation. It would rather note the latest edition of the poverty bulletin

than express concern, as we do, that 376,000 people, or 21% of our population, live in relative income poverty before housing costs.

I know that the Minister says that we will do things differently in this mandate, particularly in terms of outcome-based accountability. We have had two documents, and the second one is currently out to consultation, but we must end eventually at the point where there are delivery plans, and they must take on the shape of strategies, otherwise, I believe, the Government will end up back in the High Court.

Justice Treacy was very clear about defining a strategy. He quoted the 'Oxford English Dictionary', stating:

*"The Oxford English Dictionary defines a 'strategy' as a 'plan of action designed to achieve a long term or overall aim'."*

He said that it has:

*"to guide, to set a course. It must therefore be implicit in the idea of a strategy that that strategy must be identifiable, it must be complete, it must have a start, a middle and an end, it must aim to be effective, its effectiveness must be capable of measurement and the actions which are taken in attempting to implement that strategy must be referable back to that overarching strategy."*

In other words, stakeholders must be able to lift the strategy and measure the effectiveness of the delivery of government with regard to these issues.

I understand that the Minister and the Executive will publish a social strategy. I believe that it will come towards the end of this calendar year or early in the next, but I also notice that NISRA, only today, opened a consultation on multiple deprivation measures. It wanted to know if we should stick with the seven that we have, namely income; employment; health and disability; education, skills and training; access to services; living environment; and crime and disorder.

I would be very happy to give way to the Minister if he could explain to me whether the publication of the social strategy will await the conclusion of the report on the consultation by NISRA, because the consultation is open until 15 January. So, will we get the results of that before you publish your strategy, or will we have disjointed government where we will publish a social strategy when the measurements that NISRA will apply may well change? Would the Minister care to address that issue?

**Mr Givan:** Obviously, we are at an advanced stage in respect of the social strategy, but the social strategy will go out for consultation. Therefore, if further information becomes available, that will feed into it. The Member seems to be labouring on a range of points to do with recognising need and poverty. I know that that need exists. I do not need to go and stay in someone's Housing Executive house to get a grasp of the needs that there are in our community.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I am grateful to the Minister. I am not entirely clear when we will get the publication of the social strategy, but we shall await the outcome of the consultation on both the social strategy and the NISRA research.

I note, by the way, that the Minister says that we should work together and his door is always open. The last time that I asked for a five-minute meeting with the Minister, he was too busy to see me, and it was an issue to do with tackling deprivation in an area of multiple deprivation in Belfast, but so be it.

### 7.30 pm

On the social investment fund, I wish that some members of the Government and the Government parties would realise that life is not binary; it is not black and white. You do not have to be entirely pro the social investment fund or entirely against the social investment fund. What you can be is totally against poverty in our country. Jenny Palmer summed it up very well by taking those raw statistics and telling us that it is the equivalent of five Bangors, seven Omaghs or three Lisburns.

I fear that the result will be the result. I fear that, when we table motions, Executive parties simply wish to attack the Opposition for attacking the Opposition's sake. Mr McCartney seems to regret that we have only an hour for the debate, but I say to Mr McCartney that the time allocated for Opposition days is set by the Business Committee, on which you and the DUP have the majority of votes. We would very happily have a five-hour, a five-and-a-half-hour or a six-hour Opposition day. We had three debates today, and this happens to be the last. We were outvoted — you have the democratic mandate to do so — but I suggest that, having won the vote at the Business Committee, it is a bit rich to come back and criticise us for not having enough time. We are using all the time that is available to us.

In conclusion, we will not support the amendment, which tries to airbrush some important issues, not just the statistics but the definitions brought forward by Justice Treacy in his High Court ruling in June last year. I know that the Minister wants everybody to coalesce around a single vote. I encourage him and the Government parties to coalesce around the motion. I think that that is a reasonable request.

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The Assembly divided:*

*Ayes 56; Noes 31.*

### AYES

*Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan and Mr Robinson.*

### NOES

*Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Ms Hanna, Mr Kennedy, Mrs Long, Mr Lyttle, Mr E McCann, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Ms Mallon and Mr Nesbitt.*

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly notes the latest edition of the 'Northern Ireland Poverty Bulletin' detailing the levels of poverty across Northern Ireland; further notes that section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 was the subject of a judicial review in June 2015; and welcomes the Executive's commitment, as outlined in the recent Programme for Government consultation document, to publish a new social strategy that aims to improve the lives of those in poverty through a range of specific interventions that will tackle poverty, social exclusion and deprivation on the basis of the objective need.*

*Adjourned at 7.45 pm.*



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# Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 22 November 2016

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

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## Assembly Business

**Mr Allister:** Mr Speaker, I wish to raise a point of order about the viability of a portion of our business next Monday. I apologise that the issue is quite complex and, therefore, ask for some forbearance. I will deal with the point as succinctly as I can.

On Monday, we are due to discuss a legislative consent motion pertaining to the Policing and Crime Bill. One of the components of the Policing and Crime Bill that that consent motion seeks approval for is that referred to as pardons for obsolete criminal offences. Our Standing Order 42A has a very prescribed process for how you get to the point of a legislative consent motion. It requires the laying of a memorandum, but that memorandum can only be triggered by the event which imports into the Bill that portion that you wish to apply by legislative consent motion.

It is my understanding that the aspect of the Policing and Crime Bill which imports, in respect of Northern Ireland, pardons for former criminal offences, only became part of the Bill on 9 November by amendment in the House of Lords, yet the legislative consent motion memorandum was issued and is dated and was laid on 7 November and, therefore, I respectfully submit, is void in that respect because you cannot prejudge or presume the content until it is part of the Bill. Since the legislative consent motion then triggers the referral to the Committee — and if the memorandum which triggers that is itself void — then the reference is void, and the timeline, whereby, within five days of that report, you can debate it, is voided. So, I respectfully suggest that that aspect of the legislative consent motion is not compatible with the very prescribed and specific procedure in Standing Order 42A.

I ask you to rule that it will not therefore be possible on Monday to debate that aspect of the legislative consent motion.

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the Member for raising that. It is important that the Assembly take its decisions to hand authority to Westminster for devolved matters seriously, and that is why I thank you for raising the point. For that particular legislative consent motion, I will consider the issue that you have raised.

## Public Petition: Campaign for Abortion Law Reform in Northern Ireland

**Mr Speaker:** Ms Clare Bailey has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. The Member will have up to three minutes to speak.

**Ms Bailey:** I am handing in this petition from Amnesty International to the Minister of Justice. It is signed by 45,400 people and calls for abortion law reform in Northern Ireland. Amnesty International, academics and many others have carried out extensive research into Northern Ireland's abortion laws, and we have repeatedly been found not to be compliant with the Human Rights Act, to which we are signatories. Even our courts have ruled on the issue, and again we have been found to be in breach of the human rights that we claim to uphold.

Since Marie Stopes opened its doors in Belfast city centre in 2012, people have begun to understand that abortion is not always illegal here and have started to question the issue as a whole, and our laws in particular. Amnesty International's public petition sets out a few facts. Northern Ireland's abortion laws are among the harshest in Europe and violate the basic human rights of women and girls. Abortion is illegal even in pregnancy resulting from rape or incest or where the foetus has no chance of surviving. Only in extremely restrictive cases in which a woman's health or life is in serious danger can she choose to access a termination. Instead of accessing the free, safe and legal healthcare that they need and would get on the NHS anywhere else in the UK, women here are forced by state law to carry the pregnancy to term or to travel elsewhere, with no regard to the psychological or physical impact on them or their family.

Midwives and doctors also face the great threat in our law of life imprisonment for involvement in any termination. Even every stillbirth in Northern Ireland is legally required to undergo a pathologist's post-mortem, and, if the parents refuse that, they face a public hearing with a coroner's autopsy, for which no consent is required. There is nowhere else in the world where that happens.

The petition from Amnesty, which 45,400 people have signed, calls on us to bring existing law into line with international human rights laws and standards, to make abortion available in cases of rape, incest or severe and fatal foetal impairment and to stop the criminalisation of women and girls who access abortion services. The vast majority of people in Northern Ireland trust women to make these decisions in their best interests, and it is time that the House did the same.

*Ms Bailey moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.*

**Mr Speaker:** I will forward a copy of the petition to the Minister of Justice and the Committee for Justice.

## Ministerial Statements

### North/South Ministerial Council Plenary: Friday 18 November 2016

**Mr McGuinness (The deputy First Minister):** In compliance with section 52C(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, we wish to make the following statement on the twenty-third meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in plenary format, which was held in Armagh on Friday 18 November 2016. The Executive Ministers who attended the meeting have agreed that we can make this report on their behalf.

Our delegation was led by the First Minister, Arlene Foster MLA, and me. The following Executive Ministers were also in attendance: Minister Givan, Minister Hamilton, Minister Hazzard, Minister McIlveen, Minister Ó Muilleoir, Minister Sugden, Minister Weir, junior Minister Fearon and junior Minister Ross. The Irish Government delegation was led by the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD.

At the start of the meeting, the Council noted that the bid to host the 2023 Rugby World Cup had been formally launched earlier in the week. Both Governments reaffirmed their commitment to work closely together to deliver a world-class proposal for hosting the tournament.

We had a discussion on the performance of the economy in each jurisdiction. Both Governments remain committed to growing their economy, and Ministers spoke about the initiatives under way in each jurisdiction to support economic growth.

The Council had an in-depth discussion on the implications of the result of the referendum on membership of the EU. It was noted that full sectoral audits had been carried out by Departments of the Executive and the Irish Government to identify impacts, risks, opportunities and contingencies that may arise following the UK's intended withdrawal from the EU. Ministers will continue their discussions at NSMC sectoral level in the coming months, and bilateral discussions will continue, as required, between relevant Ministers and officials.

The Council was advised that the Executive will continue their bilateral discussions with the British Government, and, with the other devolved Administrations, will continue the internal discussions with the British Government in the joint ministerial council. The Irish Government will continue their regular bilateral engagement with the British Government, EU institutions and fellow EU member states.

Ministers noted that senior officials from the Executive Office, the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will continue to meet regularly on a bilateral basis to review developments, serving as a high-level working group on Brexit issues. The Council was advised that, in taking forward their discussions, both Governments will be guided by some common principles.

The Council received an update on the progress being made on the implementation of the various commitments under section E of the Fresh Start Agreement. Ministers noted that a public inquiry into the A5 scheme was under way and that the inspector's report was expected around May 2017. Subject to the successful completion of statutory procedures, a decision can then be made

regarding progression to the construction stage, which remains programmed for late 2017.

The Council welcomed the meeting in October between officials and key stakeholders about the possible options for the Narrow Water bridge project and noted that further discussions would be held in January 2017. It was noted that phase 1 of the reopening of the Ulster canal from Lough Erne to Castle Saunderson is progressing and that the tender for the final stage of phase 1 is expected to issue shortly, with a planned site commencement in the spring of 2017. The establishment of the Ulster canal advisory forum of key stakeholders, which held its first meeting in September, was welcomed.

The Council was advised that Derry City and Strabane District Council and Donegal County Council had agreed a formal partnership agreement that outlines the governance, financial management and administrative arrangements for the €5 million north-west development fund.

Ministers agreed that a further update on the Fresh Start E commitments would be brought to the next NSMC plenary meeting.

The next item on the agenda was the north-west gateway initiative. The Council welcomed that Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council are working to fully implement the arrangements outlined in their north-west strategic growth plan. The Council noted the Irish Government's allocation of €2.5 million to the north-west development fund and that our Executive are finalising their match allocation. The Council was advised that formal governance, financial management and administrative arrangements for oversight and delivery of the north-west strategic growth plan and the associated north-west development fund have been agreed by the two councils. Ministers welcomed the establishment of the north-west strategic growth partnership and that, in accordance with the July plenary decision, senior officials from relevant Departments in both jurisdictions would meet Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council in December as part of the north-west strategic growth partnership.

The Council was advised that officials are working to identify a suitable date for a meeting of relevant Ministers in the north-west.

Finally, the Council approved a schedule of NSMC meetings proposed by the joint secretariat, which includes the next NSMC plenary meeting in the first quarter of 2017.

#### 10.45 am

**Mr Nesbitt:** I thank the Minister for his statement. As a sports fan, I particularly welcome the bid for the Rugby World Cup. I understand that the last event added over £1 billion directly to the UK's GDP. I understand that, to secure the next event, Japan paid a fee of something like £90 million to the Rugby World Cup organisers. Will the Minister detail the costs and potential benefits to Northern Ireland should the 2023 event come our way?

**Mr McGuinness:** I was delighted to be in Dublin last week with our Economy Minister Simon Hamilton, and all of us are very excited that what is effectively an all-island bid to host the Rugby World Cup 2023 has successfully passed the application phase, with South Africa and France also through to the candidate phase, which commenced on 1

November. As the Member will know, details of the Ireland bid were successfully launched on 15 November at the Aviva Stadium, and we will provide stiff competition for the other contenders. I am convinced that we have a strong, compelling bid, with a great team of people who are now working on the final stage, including the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) and its consultants.

The oversight board led by Dick Spring and the interdepartmental group set up in both jurisdictions have worked hard to get us to this stage, and I can give assurances that our Executive will continue to give their support to ensure that we deliver the best bid possible. Our passion for rugby, our visitor welcome and our professional service provide an ideal recipe for the delivery of a successful event.

The previous examples of cost given by the Member are in the ballpark of where we need to be but one thing is absolutely certain: we believe that we can recover that many, many times over as a result of the unique offer that is our all-island approach. We are very confident that the Administrations North and South will be able to put a compelling bid before those who will have to decide. Dick Spring, who is leading it all, exudes considerable confidence that many rugby associations throughout the world will be very attracted to the island of Ireland for the Rugby World Cup 2023. The video that was launched, with Liam Neeson narrating, was very powerful and will help in the bid.

The ballpark figures are in and around what the Member suggested, but it is very difficult to be accurate about the exact cost at this stage. Whatever the cost is, we are absolutely confident that we can recover it many times over.

**Mr Stalford:** I thank the deputy First Minister for the statement. His colleagues in the Republic have given assurances of continued cooperation for the mutual benefit of the people who live in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Will he assure the House that this will continue once the United Kingdom leaves the European Union, as he outlined in the case of the north-west?

**Mr McGuinness:** The big decision that was taken by both Administrations at the North/South Ministerial Council meeting — by the Executive Office, the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs — was to put a high-level working group of civil servants in place to deal with the challenges that clearly lie ahead.

As I said in the Assembly yesterday, given some of the confusion emanating from London at this time, everything is on the table. It is very hard to know, very difficult to put your hand on your heart and say that you know exactly what the outcome is going to be, because the debate moves from a soft Brexit to a hard Brexit. Many people fear the prospect of a hard Brexit and its implications for economic prospects here in the North, and in England, Scotland and Wales. It is still early days. The First Minister and I are very focused on our responsibilities so that we can contribute to the processes that we are now clearly involved in, with the British Government and the Irish Government, to ensure that the outcome is about protecting the best interests of the people whom we represent.

**Mr McGuigan:** I welcome the Minister's statement and the positivity that emanated from the meeting and has continued since, particularly with regard to the discussions on the EU referendum result. The deputy First Minister said in response to the previous question that the

ongoing work between the Executive and the Southern Government will be guided by common principles. Perhaps he could elaborate on those common principles.

**Mr McGuinness:** We all acknowledge that there must be recognition that the situation that we have to deal with is unique. It has to be recognised that we have a land border with another EU member state and that there have been difficult issues relating to that border throughout our history and, indeed, the peace process.

We have to ensure that our businesses retain their competitiveness and do not incur additional cost, which is a very real danger. As we go forward, we also need to ensure that our access to labour, skilled and unskilled, is really important to us, given, as I said yesterday, that Wrightbus, for example, sells its buses to London, Singapore and Hong Kong, and something like 20% of its workforce comes from other EU countries.

Our agri-food industry is totally dependent on people from other EU countries for its success, and, of course, we have very ambitious targets to reach in the development of that aspect of our economy. We also need to take into account the nature of our economy. As I said, agri-food, for example, is vital, and anything that would impact on that sector has to be considered very carefully.

Energy is also a key priority for us, and we have to ensure that it is given adequate recognition throughout the negotiating process.

Of course, the common travel area is extremely important, not just to us but to the Irish Government, and that must also be recognised.

**Mr Eastwood:** I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. Was there any discussion at the NSMC last week about potential future membership for Northern Ireland of the EEA or EFTA?

**Mr McGuinness:** No, there were no detailed conversations about any of that. Obviously, the overarching discussion was about what we need to do in the immediate future and about charging officials from our office, the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs with the responsibility of looking at all these matters and how they might impact on our circumstances.

The Taoiseach described the North/South Ministerial Council meeting that we attended last Friday as the most important meeting that he has ever attended. Certainly, the significance of the Brexit circumstances that we are all faced with is absolutely massive for the island of Ireland, North and South, and the work that is going on in Departments in Dublin and here is extensive. The audit has taken place. All areas are being covered and looked at very carefully with a view to ensuring that, when the officials complete their work under the guidance of the Taoiseach, the First Minister and me, we are best placed to go forward. Hopefully, we can go forward with a common position to put to the British Government and the European Union that is about, in our case, protecting the interests of the people whom we represent.

**Dr Farry:** I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. Will he comment on the reports in this week's 'Sunday Independent', and the subtext at the last meeting of the all-island forum on civic dialogue, that there is a frustration in the Irish Government that, while there is a lot of cooperation on scoping out the practical issues, there

has, to date, been no clear ask from the Northern Ireland Government on what special status would look like going forward and that, if we do not have a clear ask in the very near future, we are in danger of missing the opportunity to sort out Northern Ireland's interests?

**Mr McGuinness:** That is a challenge for all of us. It is not unreasonable against the backdrop of uncertainty and confusion that appears to emanate from London on their objectives in any negotiations with the European Union. Of course, the British Government have not disclosed their hand on the basis that they think that it would weaken their position in the negotiations, which inevitably puts the devolved institutions at a disadvantage.

I do not speak for Wales or Scotland; I speak, along with the First Minister, for the situation that we have to deal with. We have a responsibility to ensure that, as we go forward, there is an ask that best protects the interests of the people whom we represent. That is why the wise decision was made at the NSMC to put in place a high-level working group of the most senior civil servants in both Administrations, under the stewardship of the Taoiseach, the First Minister and me, to chart a way forward.

In the Opposition in the Assembly, there are different opinions, and that is quite legitimate. Even in our Administration, there are different opinions. We have to reconcile all that and, hopefully, come to a position that can find favour with the vast majority of MLAs. I said, during the all-island discussions in Dublin — the offer is still open — that I am willing to engage with the Alliance Party, the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists, because we would be very foolish to think that we should do all this on our own and exclude other parties that have made important contributions over the last 20 years in negotiations that have propelled our society forward.

**Mr Lynch:** The Minister will know that the Ulster canal is an important project in my constituency. Does he see it as an Executive priority?

**Mr McGuinness:** I clearly indicated during my initial contribution that it is a priority. Phase 1 of the reopening of the 2.5 kilometre stretch of the Ulster canal from Upper Lough Erne to the International Scout Centre at Castle Saunderson is ongoing. The work commenced in August 2015, and site investigation works, followed by the dredging of the River Finn and the removal of the dredged material, are now complete. Preparation of tender documentation for the next stage — the construction of the Derrykerrib Bridge in the canal section — is now being finalised. It is planned to issue a tender shortly with a view to work commencing in spring 2017 after any floodwaters have receded, with an estimated contract period of 18 months.

We welcome the establishment by Minister Heather Humphreys and Minister Chris Hazzard of an Ulster canal advisory forum, which met for the first time on 23 September 2016. That will look at the options for advancing the Ulster canal project and examine potential funding mechanisms, including existing funding streams and a leveraging of funding from other sources.

Waterways Ireland, as the lead organisation, in collaboration with local councils and other stakeholders, is progressing the development of the Ulster canal greenway. An application for INTERREG IVa funding for a 22-kilometre section of the greenway between Smithborough, County Monaghan, and Middletown,

County Armagh, was successful, and a letter of offer is expected to issue in the near future. We are moving forward decisively on the Ulster canal.

**Mr Kennedy:** I am interested in the replies thus far from the deputy First Minister. Will he explain why he accepts the democratic will of the people of the United States in a presidential election, when the victor did not win the popular vote, but not the verdict of the people of the United Kingdom in the EU referendum?

**Mr McGuinness:** From our perspective, the decision made in the EU referendum has very profound consequences for us in the North of Ireland, particularly given that the majority of people in the North voted to remain. Quite clearly, that could not have been achieved if it had not been a cross-community vote, which, in my view, was supported by nationalists, republicans and unionists.

#### 11.00 am

Now, whatever about the vote in the United States, the people have spoken, and the outcome is that Donald Trump is their President-elect. We, as a responsible Administration, have to deal with that, as we have done with changes that have happened in other Administrations, whether that be in Dublin or London, as we have seen over the course of the last 20 years. From my perspective, as a responsible politician, working with the First Minister, I have to recognise that we are faced with a situation in which the British Prime Minister has declared that she will trigger article 50 of the Lisbon treaty by the end of March. As someone who has been at the heart of probably some of the most important, historic negotiations that this island has seen over the last 20 years, I have to deal with that reality. Along with the First Minister, and hopefully supported by the majority of MLAs in the Assembly, I have to try to forge a way forward which protects the interests of the people whom we represent. It is no secret where the First Minister is coming from, and it is no secret where I am coming from, but we have to deal with the reality of the situation which is before us. The top priority for us has to be to protect the political and social interaction and economic interest of the people whom we represent.

**Mr Boylan:** Agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I welcome the Minister's statement. I am delighted that he was able to take all the Ministers down to the beautiful city of Armagh. I just want to touch on the issue of the UK referendum. Were there any discussions on the INTERREG programme and the threat that withdrawal of that money will pose to border corridor groups like East Border Region and the work that they have done over the last number of years? Apparently they will be under severe threat now from the process of leaving Europe.

**Mr McGuinness:** The First Minister and I addressed that issue when we wrote to the British Prime Minister. The good news is that we are pleased that almost €120 million has already been approved for INTERREG IVa. We expect the INTERREG programme to be fully committed before the end of the year. Obviously, the longer term is a scenario that we will have to deal with in the course of any upcoming negotiations.

**Mr McPhillips:** I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement and answers so far. It will come as no massive shock that I will be asking about the implications of Brexit as well. The deputy First Minister notes in his statement

that all Departments have conducted internal audits on the possible impacts that Brexit will have. Can he outline whether he will publish these documents? Can he also update the House on what discussions he has had with the Southern Government concerning the future of the border?

**Mr McGuinness:** Well, at the last NSMC plenary meeting on 4 July 2016, it was agreed that a full audit would be undertaken in all sectors to identify the possible impacts, risks, opportunities and contingencies arising in the phases preceding and following the UK's withdrawal from the EU; that this work will, in turn, be submitted to ministerial sectoral meetings for consideration as to the strategic and cross-cutting issues arising; and that final priorities will be agreed by the next NSMC plenary for both pre-negotiation and negotiation phases.

I think that the Member will understand that, given the nature of the NSMC, involving our Administration and the Irish Government, a lot of these documents are confidential. We could not release any of this information without the express agreement of the Irish Government. That is something that has never been previously asked. It is interesting that the Member has chosen to call for that. From our perspective, we will have a discussion. I will discuss that with the First Minister, with a view to making an assessment as to whether it is sensible to see the outworking of processes that civil servants have been involved in put into the public domain. As I reiterate, that cannot be done without the express agreement of the Irish Government.

The First Minister and I addressed the issue of the border in our letter to the British Prime Minister. We have made it absolutely clear that we do not want a border. We want people to be able to travel as they have done in the past. That is also the Irish Government's position. It came up during the North/South Ministerial Council meeting. I think that everybody is focused on ensuring that we go forward with the normality that we have been used to over the course of recent times, with people being able to drive, for example, from the centre of Belfast to the centre of Dublin in just over an hour and a half. Free travel back and forward is absolutely crucial.

**Mr Lunn:** I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. On economic matters, are we now satisfied that the Industrial Development Agency Ireland and Invest Northern Ireland will operate in a fair and equitable manner, that any problems caused by the previous accusation that IDA Ireland is attempting to poach our industrial opportunities have been dealt with and that we can move on?

**Mr McGuinness:** As Members will be aware, the First Minister met the Taoiseach and had a very good meeting in Dublin last week. That is all that needs to be said about it. I think that we are satisfied. The First Minister and I travel extensively throughout the world. We have always had tremendous support from our diplomatic service and the Irish Government diplomats everywhere we go. During the engagements at the North/South Ministerial Council, the Taoiseach reiterated that the Irish diplomatic services will be available to the First Minister and me on our shortly-to-be-undertaken visit to China.

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement and answers thus far. My question is with regard to the north-west gateway initiative. I hope that the Executive can move swiftly to finalise their allocation to the north-west

development fund, regardless of the reason for the delay. It is important that we continue to explore interventions that will alleviate hardship in the north-west area. Does the Minister consider a city deal for Derry with a cross-border dimension to be a possible means of doing so?

**Mr McGuinness:** I assure the Member that the issue of our balance of the €5 million is administrative more than anything else. In terms of alleviating hardship in the north-west, I was delighted yesterday to be, along with our Health Minister, at the new radiotherapy centre at Altnagelvin hospital. The Ulster Unionists tried to stop that radiotherapy centre during their stewardship of the Health Department.

**Mr Kennedy:** That is not right.

**Mr McGuinness:** It is absolutely correct. Of course, when Edwin Poots became the Minister, Peter Robinson and I took the decision to go ahead. Something like 1,500 people will be treated there each year. It is a tremendous boost to people in Derry, Strabane, Limavady, Coleraine and County Donegal to have that facility. We also have —

**Mr Kennedy:** On a point of order.

**Mr Speaker:** Let me take the point of order at the end of questions to the statement.

**Mr McGuinness:** We also have 220 people now employed at that centre. They are people of the highest specialisms imaginable in medicine. The dedication that they have to that centre is absolutely amazing. I pay tribute to everybody — and other political parties, including the Member's — who was involved from the very beginning and right down the line: people like Bairbre de Brún and, of course, the Health Minister now, for progressing something that will bring enormous health benefits to a region that has, unfortunately, had to see people from Donegal travelling to Galway and people from Derry travelling to Belfast. That is now ending. It is a great news story that argues very strongly for how important all-island cooperation is, particularly in the region of people's health.

A city deal is presently under consideration. I know that people were advocating one for Belfast. We are very keen to ensure that any advantage gained by that is also under consideration by us for Derry.

**Mr Attwood:** The deputy First Minister, in reply to a question, referred to a common position to put to the British Government. In the statement, he also referred to being guided by some common principles. Usefully, he has put some on the record today in reply to Mr McGuigan's question — namely, business competitiveness, energy, common travel and access to labour. Will the deputy First Minister and the First Minister lodge a statement in the Library outlining what all the principles might be that would inform the discussions and confirming that the principles will include no loss of funding to the Northern Ireland finances, guarantees on the four freedoms, access to further EU funding and no diminution of any of the standards that we have benefited from because of EU membership and membership of the wider European project, including those relating to environment, labour and human rights?

**Mr McGuinness:** That clearly strengthens the case that I made earlier in the conversation that it would be useful if other political parties who are not in the Government were to make a contribution to the discussion as we go forward.

That is why I made the offer of discussions with the Ulster Unionists, the SDLP, the Alliance Party and whoever else — even the smaller parties in the Assembly — to have a conversation about where all of this needs to go. The First Minister and I have already outlined a number of vital issues in our letter to the British Prime Minister, and, of course, in our conversations at the North/South Ministerial Council, we have dealt with a number of principles. They are not exclusive of where we need to go on what will probably be the most important negotiation that any of us has undertaken in 20 years.

**Mr Allister:** Whatever the hyperbole coming from the talking shop in Armagh, it is clear that the Executive is a house divided on the most seminal issue of our day. The First Minister accepts and supports the reality of Brexit: the deputy First Minister grasps at every straw to try to thwart the will of the people and seeks to talk up the nonsense of special status. I ask the deputy First Minister again the question that he did not answer yesterday, so that we know who is chasing their tail: has he any support from his partner in government for the notion that, post Brexit, there will be a status for Northern Ireland that dilutes our leaving vis-à-vis the rest of the United Kingdom?

**Mr McGuinness:** That is probably one of the few questions ever asked by the Member that did not mention the IRA. Obviously, as we go forward, we are very focused on the responsibilities that we have as First Minister and deputy First Minister. We are all experienced politicians. We understand that we are in the preliminary stages of what will be a momentous negotiation that will affect our futures. There is a very clear indication from the outcome of the North/South Ministerial Council meeting and the formation of a high-level working group under the stewardship of the Taoiseach, the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the South, the First Minister and me that these are all issues that we will have conversations — even negotiations — about over the coming period.

Obviously, we want to be ready for any triggering of article 50 of the Lisbon treaty, so that we are in a position to make an argument that is really about protecting the interests of all the people we represent. What the Member highlights, obviously, is the different positions that the DUP and Sinn Féin had, with others, in the run-in to the referendum debate. The referendum is over, and there are fairly unique circumstances before us. We are more dramatically affected by this than other regions. We will have to have that conversation, and, in conjunction with the British and Irish Governments and the European Union, we will have to chart a way forward that protects the interests of our people.

**11.15 am**

**Mr Speaker:** I will now take Mr Kennedy's point of order.

**Mr Kennedy:** Thank you for allowing a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it in order for the deputy First Minister wilfully to mislead the House and misrepresent the facts of a situation? When Michael McGimpsey was on the Executive as Ulster Unionist Health Minister, he supported and lobbied for the facilities at Altnagelvin Hospital but was, rightly, concerned about resource funding for that centre. In fact, his predictions that the health service was drastically and seriously underfunded have come true, and we still live with those consequences today.

**Mr Stalford:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker —

**Mr Speaker:** Let me deal with the first point of order. The Speaker has no role in adjudicating on the remarks of a Member or a Minister, but the Member has put his concerns on record.

**Mr Stalford:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker, you have just said that the Member has used a point of order to put his concerns on the record. Is there an issue about the deliberate abuse of points of order by Members who, after they have spoken and had their say, deploy them to get a second bite of the cherry, including, not least, a Deputy Speaker of the House?

**Mr Speaker:** I am concerned that, over the past number of weeks, there have been a large number of points of order that have not been adjudged to be points of order. It is something that I intend to address in the coming weeks and months.

That concludes questions on the Minister's statement.

## Rating Policy

**Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance):** Thank you for giving me the opportunity, a Cheann Comhairle, to make a statement on a rates rethink, spurring economic growth. Inniu, tá pacáiste beart á mholadh agam a bhfuil sé mar aidhm aige nuachóiriú a dhéanamh ar eilimintí intíre agus ar eilimintí tráchtála an chóras rátála, d'fhonn spreagadh a dhéanamh ar an ngeilleagar mar bhunús ar shocháil roinnte agus rathúil. Is iad seo mo mholtaí mar Aire Airgeadais agus tá mé ag súil le dul i gcomhairle fúthu leis an Choiste Airgeadais, le mo chomhghleacaithe san Fheidhmeannas, agus leis an phobal i gcoitinne.

Today, I propose a groundbreaking package of measures aimed at modernising the domestic and commercial elements of the rating system in order to stimulate the economy as the foundation of a shared and prosperous society. These are my proposals as Finance Minister, and I look forward to consulting on them with the Finance Committee, of course, with my colleagues on the Executive and with the wider public. Taken together, the measures constitute the biggest shake-up in rating policy in a generation and signal my commitment to a tax system that is fair and supports prosperity.

Rates are a vital source of public revenue. Money raised through rates funds our schools, our hospitals and other essential services. My aim in setting out these proposals therefore is ultimately to arrive at a refreshed, fit-for-purpose rating system in which citizens and commercial ratepayers contribute according to their ability to funding the building of a modern, inclusive and exemplary society. I also intend to ensure that rates act more as an economic spur. The rates system should encourage regeneration, investment and entrepreneurship and at the same time discourage dereliction and decline.

I will begin with the non-domestic rates proposals. I want to replace the existing small business rate relief scheme with a £22 million investment in small retail and hospitality businesses. That move aligns with the findings of the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre's evaluation, which recommended a more targeted approach. In 2010, the small business rate relief (SBRR) scheme was introduced to provide small businesses with temporary respite from the recession. The Ulster University evaluation found that the scheme had served its limited purpose, helping with cash flow at a particularly difficult time.

It also found that the scheme contributed little to economic growth and the £18m that it cost would not provide value for money in the long term. It therefore recommended replacing the SBRR with a more targeted initiative.

I want to target support under the new scheme at the sectors that are key to the survival of our town and city centres. The statistics show that town centre retail spending is down 10% since the beginning of the century. I would like this new initiative to be easily accessible to small businesses, subject to some simple tests around business investment in the form of, for example, new equipment, skills training or the employment of additional staff. In the time ahead, I would also like to enable companies to access this rates relief by accrediting with the Living Wage Foundation.

I also wish to bring forward a business empowerment zone pilot targeted at small-scale regeneration areas

and developed in tandem with other Departments and initiatives. I propose to start in Belfast with two pilots, on the Falls and Newtownards Roads, both areas in need of a greater peace dividend. The west Belfast zone, with special rates relief to encourage business and investment, is likely to stretch from Castle Street through the Gaeltacht Quarter to the bottom of the Whiterock Road. The east Belfast zone is likely to stretch from the bottom of the Newtownards Road through the area now the focus for the EastSide Arts renaissance — CS Lewis Square opens tonight, Mr Speaker — to the Holywood Arches. Those will be confirmed in due course. Having had the pleasure of working extensively in both areas, I know that the will is there to transform those key arterial roads and that a small investment now can reap dividends for years to come.

Another way of revitalising town centres is to make them vibrant living spaces. Therefore, I would also like to take forward a new scheme to incentivise conversion from commercial to residential occupation, by providing a rates incentive for the first occupiers of newly converted premises in our town and city centres. A scheme to encourage people to live in those areas will help to stimulate the night-time economy and assist with issues around footfall that were raised during the consultation.

Another issue concerns the treatment of charity shops. This is a matter where we are striving to get the balance right. Charity shops help to bring people into our high streets or small towns, in particular when times are tough, so we need to make sure that we do not upset the healthy retail mix that exists in many areas. I am all in favour of continuing to single out charity shops on the high street for favourable treatment, but there is a case for limiting their growth. We cannot have our high streets just made up of charity shops. In England, Scotland and Wales, most are charged 20% rates, and local authorities in the South can charge charity shops on the high street. If, for example, we reduced support for charity shops on the high street from 100 per cent to 90 per cent — they pay one tenth of their rates bill — that would represent only a small revenue gain for the Executive. However, it would move us towards the balance principle that everyone on the high street should start to pay something. That was the strong view reflected in the small business rate relief evaluation. I agree with that direction of travel, with the caveat that I would like any future income from charity shops on the high street to go towards supporting entrepreneurship in the social enterprise sector. I look forward to consulting further on the issue.

I would like to address the issue of empty property. Currently, an empty property pays zero rates for three months and 50% thereafter. I want to increase the empty property rate from 50% to 75% of the occupied rate. That remains substantially below what is charged in Scotland, for example, where owners are charged 90% on empty properties, and recognises that our local property market is less buoyant than there. I would also like to remove the initial exemption period of three months. I do not think it necessary, it does not apply to the domestic sector, and it leads to complications in administering it. It is my view that this will encourage the letting of empty properties and increase economic activity. It will, of course, provide additional revenue for the Executive, although, more importantly, it will act as a stimulus for landlords holding empty property to sell up or to offer lower rents and get properties occupied by businesses.

Aligned with that objective, I propose to introduce the rating of empty factories, a class of property that has never been subject to rates. As well as bringing in extra money — up to £2.2 million a year — into the Executive's finances and the public purse, it will encourage owners to subdivide or let empty factories. It will also remove any doubt about what is a warehouse and what is a factory. Coupled with both changes, I will move forward with proposals for anti-avoidance measures, making landlords liable for rates when they let their premises out to charities on short-term agreements.

At a cost of £58 million, industrial derating is a very generous support to the manufacturing sector. However, manufacturing is a vital part of our economy, providing well-paid jobs often in locations where employment opportunities are lacking, and is highly export-orientated. Given that and the challenging economic circumstances faced, I intend to maintain industrial derating.

A measure that I would like to remove is the new mines seven-year exemption that has been in place since 1852. I see no good reason for retaining the new mines exemption.

I also wish to remove the university halls of residence exemption that was put in place by direct rule Ministers in 2007. This step has already been consulted on, and it will ensure consistency of treatment between those that are managed privately and those that are managed by universities. Indeed, all other students living away from home pay some rates, so this is only fair. Furthermore, I do not believe that it will inhibit the viability of new purpose-built halls of residence, given that student demand is outstripping supply, as the appearance of so many privately run halls testifies. If evidence emerges that university halls of residence need an additional incentive, I will be happy to return to the issue and look at it again.

We are moving towards a system that widens the tax base and shares the load. However, many businesses find themselves in serious hardship due to matters completely outside their control and beyond normal business risk. Victims of flooding are one example. I do not want to see those who find themselves in hardship in such circumstances being closed down because they simply cannot pay their rates bill. The legislative apparatus already exists for hardship relief, but few businesses benefit from it. I have therefore asked my officials to review the operation of the scheme to ensure that it provides help for more of those who are in need.

My intention to commence a new non-domestic revaluation exercise to take effect in 2019 is a clear response to the calls from the business sector. Coming only four years after the revaluation in 2015, it will make our non-domestic rating system more responsive to changes in the wider world, allow it to flex with economic conditions and help to avoid the shocks that occurred last time round. As before, the process will be revenue-neutral. The objective of the measure and, indeed, the whole package is about balancing the tax base, balancing the rates burden and balancing the books after a hard time for business and government finances. I would also like to reassure businesses by enshrining in law revaluations every four years. That happens in many advanced economies throughout the world.

As for the level of the regional rate that will be set as part of the Budget and in recognition of the new era for

local government, I would like to give councils the choice of striking their own non-domestic district rate, thereby breaking the historic link that exists with the domestic district rate. Such a move could help councils to attract new businesses and retain old ones.

Fairness underpins much of what I am presenting today, and that extends to the domestic rating system. When the capital value system was being designed, it was designed on the basis that you paid in direct proportion to the value of your home. However, the application of the £400,000 cap means that those in houses with a higher value pay proportionately less than those in middle- or lower-value homes. To me, that is inherently unfair. Take Bill Gates's house — I know that many people would like to take the house of Bill Gates — he pays \$1 million a year in property tax on his \$100 million Washington state home. If he lived here, the rates on that home would be less than \$5,000 a year.

Significant measures are already in place to safeguard elderly pensioners who are asset-rich but income-poor and remain in a high-value family home. We have a generous low-income rate relief scheme that was put in place before the cap came along. In a phased introduction, I wish to charge a regional rate levy of approximately 55% of the rates due on a property to the full value of a home in order to raise an additional £4 million in revenue.

### 11.30 am

The first thing that I would like to do with domestic rates is to reduce and then remove the early payment discount. I will reduce the allowance to 2% in the context of the Budget settlement and then consult on the proposal for the removal of the provision altogether. The £6 million that the measure costs the public purse cannot be justified in these difficult financial times.

As with the business rates system, I want the domestic rating system to incentivise good behaviour. I have asked my officials to consider reopening the low-carbon new homes scheme and refashioning it as an energy efficiency incentive by providing an extended domestic rates holiday for the first occupants of new houses that meet the required standard, thus also helping our construction sector. That will need more research into standards and value for money, but that work is under way.

Finally but not insignificantly, I want to advance proposals to significantly reduce the landlord allowance paid to all landlords in the public and private sectors. It was the subject of consultation, and I intend to reduce it to 5%.

Today, I have outlined the immediate challenges. Beyond those, research is well under way into developing a levy on derelict properties. With the help of the councils, we have identified 1,800 problem properties, and I have commissioned the Economic Policy Centre at UU to provide us with independent policy advice. I recognise that there is a range of reasons for derelict properties lying vacant, and we need to be sensitive to those so that we do not hinder orderly development activity. However, if the policy is well designed and discerning, it would help to encourage the regeneration of and investment in our urban areas, areas that have become blighted by properties that are simply lying idle. It could also serve to increase the supply of development land for housing.

All in all, the changes that I have put forward today — the package — are driven by a need to increase the fairness

of the system by ensuring that those who can contribute do so and that the tax burden is broadly shouldered. They also involve a better and more strategic targeting of reliefs to support social and economic development. Taken together, the measures will lead to a revenue gain for the Executive and our councils. Current estimates are up to £16 million a year recurring for the Executive, which is money that will help to deliver the Executive's Programme for Government for all our citizens. Councils stand to gain by up to £10 million a year, which will help them to deliver better outcomes in local services, as well as their new role in place shaping, building communities and economic development.

Last month, I was asked by other parties in the Chamber when I would make hard decisions on rating matters: I trust that you will all agree these are hard issues that I am tackling today. The decisions that I make, however, will not be made alone. I have further consultations to undertake with the general public and the Finance Committee, and I will require the agreement of the Executive and the Assembly when the required legislation needs to be passed.

Leagann an pacáiste misniúil moltaí atá á nochtadh agam inniu bunús láidir síos le forbairt a dhéanamh ar chóras nuaimseartha rátaí atá cothrom, a dhéanann athbheochan ar lárionaid ár gcathracha agus ár mbailte, a spreagann fás ar ár mórshráideanna agus a chuidíonn le rathúnas. The package of bold proposals that I have set out establishes a solid basis for developing a modern rates system that is fair, revitalises our city and town centres, spurs growth in our high streets and, indeed, supports prosperity.

**Ms Hanna:** I thank the Minister for his statement. This is our first sight of it, but there are some interesting and very sensible proposals. We will have to look at the numbers because there will be losers as well as winners, but I look forward to exploring that.

Briefly, I want to ask about lifting the domestic rates cap. As a social democrat, I support the concept of levying those most able to pay, although I would prefer it to be done through income tax. This will disproportionately affect people in my constituency, many of whom are on good but modest incomes and are paying for everything. What consideration has the Minister given to a package of convergence measures such as were put in place to address the position of those affected by a rates bump after local government reform?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I thank the Member for her question and for focusing on the two constituencies most affected by the removal of the rates cap: South Belfast, which I also have an interest in, and North Down. You will note that I talked about a phased introduction. I am very sensitive to the fact that, even if someone lives in a million-pound house, they also have to balance their books and their budget and no one wants to receive next April, for example, a dramatically increased rates bill. We are doing two things. First, we are saying that this is a levy, so it will not include 100% of the rates bill; it is only the 55% that we control as central government. That is the first relief to those in larger houses. Also, it is a phased introduction, and we will take our time to do it. I think it might happen over two rating periods over two years.

It is unfair that those who live in houses that are valued at £150,000 or £200,000 are subject to a regressive taxation system — property tax. I look forward to the day when I — or the Finance Minister who follows me — control income

tax, but, until that day, we need to take decisions over the taxes and rates that we control. This decision is timely and will bring extra money into the coffers to deliver services not just in South Belfast and North Down but right across the jurisdiction. I look forward to getting the full support of all the parties in South Belfast, in particular, and North Down for the measure.

**Mrs Little Pengelly:** I welcome the statement, although I echo the words of our fellow South Belfast MLA that some of it will create concern in the constituency, particularly around the domestic cap. We look forward to consulting on that and hearing the views.

As the Minister will be aware, the Committee is examining business rates and taking evidence on that. We will be out and about and intend to visit Portadown and Warrenpoint to see the situation on the ground. Will the Minister commit to coming before the Committee, specifically on the issue of rates, during the consultation to outline his thinking in more detail? In addition to that — the Minister referenced this in his statement — will he confirm clearly that this represents his thinking on the direction of rates reform and that he intends to bring all these proposals and any revised proposals following consultation back to the Executive for their agreement and decision?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Madam Chairwoman, thank you for your question. I know that you were able to come along this morning for a short briefing on the proposals. We need to nail our colours to the mast on the removal of the cap. We are either for it or against it, and we will then get into the discussion of how it will be administered.

I have had the experience in my constituency of politicians from another party rapping the doors of people who may be inclined to vote for me and telling them, "Don't vote for Máirtín Ó Muilleoir because he wants to remove the rates cap". I hope that that does not happen with this issue. I know that the Member has less association with the person involved in doing that than some people might think she has, but that happened. People need to nail their colours to the mast. I hope that the SDLP, in particular, in that light —

**Ms Hanna:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it in order to ask the Minister —

**Mr Speaker:** No. I will take points of order at the end of the Minister's statement.

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I hope that people will nail their colours to the mast, and I look forward to the day when the SDLP is not rapping doors in South Belfast and saying to people, "Oppose Máirtín Ó Muilleoir because he will remove the rates cap". I think that it is fair, and I say that to the Chairwoman of the Committee as well.

I look forward to the opportunity to go to my beloved Finance Committee to discuss business rates. I offered that the last time, but you will remember that my offer was spurned and we spent three hours talking about other matters. The offer stands, however, and I look forward to discussing these matters with the Finance Committee.

Again, we need to nail our colours to the mast. Do we agree with the evaluation carried out, which said that the existing scheme was too broad and diffuse and had not delivered any results? Do we then believe that it should be replaced with a targeted approach that is focused on small retail and hospitality that is linked to tourism? Let us

be clear: these are the proposals of the Finance Minister, and they need the support of the Assembly. This is the ultimate authority on all the proposals that I lay out today. There will be a discussion, you can be sure, with the Finance Committee. There will be a discussion with the stakeholders — some of that has started already — and there will be a concerted effort by my team to win people over, and, where there are genuine concerns, we will want to address them.

There will be improvements. I have laid out the broad parameters here, but I have no doubt, from looking at some of the very wise and sage Members around here, there will be improvements on what I am proposing in the time ahead.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Before I move beyond South Belfast into another constituency, while, quite understandably, the focus will be on what rates we are raising, it is also worth noting that every £1 million extra that the Executive can raise is 30 extra teachers or 30 extra nurses. Therefore, I welcome the fact that the Minister is looking at proposals that will raise further revenue for the Executive.

I want to move to non-domestic rates. How will the vision that the Minister set out at the start of his statement impact on towns and villages across Upper Bann and other constituencies in making our towns and villages more attractive places for small businesses to do business?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I thank the Member for his question. I have had the pleasure, since my appointment, of visiting Lurgan and Banbridge. I have not been to Portadown, another large town in your constituency. In those town centres — and particularly, in fact, before my appointment, in Portadown — I have seen too many empty shops and too much dereliction on the high street. It is my intention that the measures that we introduce today, in concert with the business associations and with other Departments, particularly the Department for Communities, will lead to a turnaround. We did introduce what I refer to as the spray-and-pray approach, where everybody got some rates relief, in 2010, but now we are trying to have a more targeted approach. I think that we need to speak to the councils because this is clearly focused, for the first time ever, on a package of rates measures that focuses on hospitality, which, of course, is linked to tourism. For many years the Executive have been putting the focus on tourism, yet we have not joined up our thinking on rates. We are doing that now.

I say to Mr O'Dowd that it is my hope that this will be a spur for economic growth that will set us on a path of more prosperous town centres and more prosperous high streets. You will note, when we go through some of the detail, that it is my intention that, for this new targeted rates relief scheme and support scheme for retail and hospitality, there should be a higher net asset value (NAV) for the properties right up to £25,000. That will bring in many of the pubs, many of the cafes and many of the retail businesses in Portadown, Lurgan and Banbridge. It will probably not include them all — some of the bigger ones — but it widens the net considerably and gives people a real lift in the time ahead. I look forward to my invitation to go back to Banbridge, Lurgan, Portadown and other parts of your constituency, and I look forward to working with the business organisations, the councils and the other Departments to make sure that we all row in behind this idea to get the maximum lift from it.

**Mr Smith:** Thank you, Minister, for your statement. I look forward to studying this in more detail at the Finance Committee. I look forward to welcoming the Minister to the Committee again. Hopefully, it might be a little less entertaining and more insightful than his last visit. From his statement, it appears that this has yet to be agreed by the Executive. Did the Minister not consider replicating the Scottish or English model for non-domestic or business rates by removing all SMEs from rates below maybe £10,000 or £6,000 respectively, with tapers down to even higher levels?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I thank the Member for his question. I do not know whether my next appearance will be insightful or entertaining, but I am looking forward to getting back in. I know that the Finance Committee has a very busy agenda. The Member, and anyone who has served for longer on the Finance Committee, will know that there have been torturous attempts at some stages to try to really get to grips with this. How do you get the balance right? We need to raise rates to fund our services, but, at the same time, we do not want rates to be punitive and deter business. That is not always easy.

I have looked at the other models. In particular, you will know that in England last year they removed rates for properties below £10,000 NAV. I think that up to half a million businesses may have been involved in that, and they could fund that. We really cannot afford to give people 100% rate relief at that level. We do not have the rates base and the property base compared with the power of the south-east of England, the power of Heathrow Airport and the power of London. We do not have that rates base. What I am proposing here for the retail, hospitality and tourism link businesses that fit the criteria will make a real difference. I envisage those that have a NAV of less than £10,000 getting 50% off their rates, which is an increase on what was there previously and will make a real difference.

#### 11.45 am

The Member and I start out on the same basis that we want to create a system that will really change the landscape for retail and hospitality. In these matters, we do not go to the Executive first and then have the Executive tell the Assembly what to do. I am coming to the Assembly. You are absolutely right that there has to be more detail. I have to go to the Committee. I have no doubt that I will be bidding for, and I am confident that I will receive, the support of Executive colleagues. However, we cannot put the cart before the horse. I think that we are going the right way about this.

Replicating what England did would blow a £60 million hole in our finances, and we just cannot afford to do that, but I am sympathetic to the businesses in smaller towns, some of which you represent. I have been in Comber, Dromore and places like that, where I see too many empty properties. This will make a real difference to retail and hospitality businesses in those areas.

**Dr Farry:** I give credit to the Minister for setting out what is a very ambitious agenda. He talks about nailing colours to the mast on the issue of rates capping. If he checks through the Assembly and Executive voting record on this, he may discover that Sinn Féin is actually doing a U-turn. On the specific issue of business empowerment zones, given the current ongoing deadlock around the transfer of regeneration powers to councils, is there not a danger that

the Executive are taking a very mixed, contradictory and incoherent approach to how we can best regenerate our towns, villages and cities across Northern Ireland?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I thank the Member for his question and for resisting the temptation to oppose removing the cap because, of course, along with mine, his is the other constituency that is really affected by the removal of the rates cap. I thought that it was really important to stop faffing around and to try to focus on actions that will result in better outcomes for our people. For some time now, I have been dismayed by the continuing levels of unemployment and poverty in some of the areas that we look at, especially in Belfast but also in some areas outside Belfast. It is particularly the case in the heart of east Belfast and the heart of west Belfast. At the same time, I have been heartened and buoyed by the renaissance that I see in both those areas. I mentioned that opening tonight is C S Lewis Square beside the EastSide Visitor Centre and the Connswater greenway and not so far from Ballyhackamore, which is doing very well, and Holywood Arches, which may be captured by this. I see great opportunity and great signs of revival.

I know that the Member would not like me to wait until we have all our ducks in a row before striking. In this case, I am striking and trying to send out a strong message that we can make a difference by using property taxes and rates. I believe that we can do that in west Belfast, in the Falls and right up the Newtownards Road, but it needs to be done with the cooperation of other Departments.

I am sure that you have seen it in your constituency. I do not know if Bangor has just adopted a business improvement district (BID) model, but I know that the BIDs are starting to make a difference in Newry, in its cathedral quarter and city centre. This, to a degree, is us taking the BID model and trying to partner west and east Belfast to make a real difference. I look forward to the Member's input in the time ahead, but, like him, I would rather not hang around. I would rather come forward with some bold proposals. Then, let us get them enacted. It is a pilot. If it does not work, we will do something else. However, at least we can hold our heads up and say, "We know that these two areas have not received the peace dividend that we would like them to have received, and, today, we are trying to make a real difference".

**Mr Wells:** First of all, I suggest to the Minister that he is going to have trouble with his decision to scrap the cap on domestic rates. He also made a very significant comment in his statement. He said that he is abolishing the industrial derating of vacant factory premises. He will know that there are many factories in Northern Ireland where genuine attempts have been made to rent or sell the property but that for various reasons — sometimes the property is at an interface or the industry is simply not viable — it cannot be done. If the individual owner of that property can show that he or she has made every attempt to sell or rent the property, will they still have a large rate bill landing on their desk?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I thank the Member for his question. I do not know whether he was wishing me well, giving me his best wishes or issuing just a word of caution around removing the rate cap.

**Mr Wells:** It was a warning.

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** He was giving me a warning, but I travel in hope and with some confidence. In relation to the issue of empty factories, you are absolutely right: it is a conundrum. We have stepped back and presumed that if a factory is empty, there is nothing we can do about it. Then a case was brought forward by the CEO of the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council relating to a derelict factory. It was the opinion in that case and in others that, in fact, the realisation of a landlord that there is no penalty at all in having a factory sitting empty does not encourage movement or action, but it is difficult.

The Member will have heard, at the end of my statement, reference to a tax on derelict land. That has the same difficulties. Sometimes, people say to me, "I am sitting on derelict land; it is not that I do not want to sell it, I just cannot get a buyer for it". The issue is not without complexity or challenges, but I urge the Member to move forward with an open mind. If we could prove to him that introducing a tax or rates on empty factories would help to convert them into productive assets, I hope that we would then get his support. We have a fair bit of evidence gathering to do before he comes to that decision, but I hope that he will proceed with an open mind as we negotiate these issues.

**Mr McAleer:** I thank the Minister for his statement. Will he outline how these proposals will benefit councils?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Go raibh maith agat as an cheist. I thank the Member for his question. The House knows that I am an advocate for local councils and for increased powers for them, a fact that has been in the news recently. I believe that they are great partners. There are now 11 ambitious councils with very strong growth plans for the future. When the measures are implemented, they will immediately create a nice little windfall for councils. They will benefit by an extra £10 million, which perhaps they will use to borrow additional money, improve services or invest in their council areas. Think of the money that Belfast City Council spends on the Visit Belfast Welcome Centre. I know that, similarly, there are plans for the relocation of the Visitor Information Centre in Derry. Belfast City Council puts money into its convention centre, the Waterfront Hall and other facilities. Those are really focused on tourism and trying to grow the economy by bringing in visitors. Now we say to them, with the new rate relief measures, that we are also focused on hospitality.

I will mention one other measure announced today, and that is about trying to convert some retail premises into accommodation. It still pains me to walk through Belfast city centre, in particular, and to see premises above shops that are not used, are just empty, and in which people could live. Also, in some of our towns and villages, there are retail spaces that are not coming back, and they, too, could be converted into accommodation to help people live in town or village centres and, in the case of Belfast, the city centre. I think that those are big benefits to the councils, but we can magnify and multiply them if councils work closely with us as we implement those measures.

**Mr Humphrey:** I thank the Minister for the statement he has made. I very much welcome the review of non-domestic rates for businesses. A boost to local businesses, particularly small businesses, is vital. Has the Minister been in touch with and liaised with Belfast City Council, the chamber of commerce in Belfast and traders' associations, particularly around the two pilot schemes

that he mentioned on small-business empowerment zones. I must say to the House that I am concerned that there is a zone in east Belfast, which runs from the foot of the Newtownards Road to the Holywood Arches, and one in west Belfast, which runs from Castle Street in the city centre the whole length of the Falls Road to the bottom of the Whiterock Road. That is hardly fair or equitable, and the outcomes cannot be compared.

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I thank the Member for his question, and I take on board the point he makes. It is a pilot scheme, so let us see whether it has a dramatic impact on both those areas. I know that neither scheme is in your constituency. If they work, I wish to try a rural pilot. How can we get out into the villages and towns, particularly the villages? I was speaking to Kilkeel Harbour Works on Thursday night. How can we do more work in the small coastal towns and villages?

I urge the Member, as difficult as this may be, to approach it with an open mind and a good heart. Let us see where the advantages are. If there are advantages for west and east Belfast, and we learn lessons, let us roll out those advantages in north Belfast, and, Heaven forbid, we might even roll them out in south Belfast as well.

**Mr Kennedy:** Will the Minister return to the issue of the proposed rating of empty factories and provide clarification on the size of factory and whether his proposals will include industrial units? The Minister will know that many business and factory owners also own vacant units that they hope to develop at some point, subject to opportunities being provided for them. Could the imposition of rating charges on such units serve as a negative to owners and reduce their ability to provide employment opportunities?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I thank the Member for his question. I go back to a word that he uses: opportunities. I see this as an opportunity. We have to proceed with care. As I said in the introduction to my statement, we want to encourage and spur economic growth, and we want to discourage dereliction, but that needs to be handled carefully. Of course, empty business units are already liable for empty property rates — 50% of rates. Thus far, we have not got it right. I have visited too many places where I see empty factories that have effectively been abandoned because there is no onus on anyone to try to sort out the problem. With the Member's support and help, we will tease our way through this. Together, we can seize opportunities, and one of those opportunities is to bring back into productive use the empty factories that I see across the landscape.

**Ms Seeley:** The Minister has touched on this a little, but will he detail how he hopes today's measures will encourage tourism?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I thank the Member for her question. It is a fact that the Minister for the Economy has been working assiduously over recent months on a new tourism strategy. It is a matter of fact that the Executive have invested very strongly in our tourism infrastructure. All parties, I think, have agreed to that. Think of the Gobbins, the Peace Bridge — also a piece of tourism infrastructure — or Titanic Belfast. We have made tourism the jewel in the crown of our proposition as a region, yet, at the same time, we have not joined that up with rates policy.

When I was in Ballycastle recently, I saw at least two closed-up pubs. I travel to other areas. There has been a big decline in the number of pubs in recent years, for

a number of reasons, which include the changing habits of people. I would like to see the tourists who come here to follow the 'Game of Thrones' tour, for example, and who end up in Ardglass or north Antrim be served by the people who want to open cafes, restaurants, pubs or other premises, and whom we have encouraged to do so. I saw that when I visited Portrush at the invitation of Minister Givan. Down on the harbour, we had the pleasure of seeing a small cafe called Babushka, where we met 10 Chinese bloggers who were in having fish for their breakfast. They were enjoying breakfast and blogging about the wonders of that part of the world. We are trying to join up our thinking. We know that tourism is important, but now we are giving an added incentive and lift to those who have taken a risk and set up businesses in the hospitality sector.

**Ms Bunting:** How does the Minister plan to address the legitimate concerns that some of us have that, far from being a fair system that supports prosperity, it is a system in which he is penalising some small businesses to the benefit of others? They all contribute to the economy and all employ people. How does he propose to define "retail"?

#### 12.00 noon

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I thank the Member for her question. I suppose it goes back to the basis of our new thinking. In 2010, we introduced a small business rate relief scheme. That was helpful to many small businesses, and I am sure that many of us know the owners of small businesses. We will be six, seven or perhaps eight years on when — I hope — we introduce our new measures, and it is time for a more targeted approach.

In other places where they have had to designate businesses as "retail" or "other", they have found a way to do it, and I am confident that we will be the same. Offices will lose out, and they are important. Therefore, having supported for seven years an average payment of £700, we are moving on to a system where we will target our resources elsewhere. I am going to spend more money: the last small business rate relief scheme cost around £18 million, and I intend to spend £22 million on this.

There is a lot of work for Land and Property Services (LPS) to make calls on. I have not made them, but I am sure that, in consultation with the Committee, we will make calls on dog-grooming services, hairdressers and so on. How do they differentiate from a payday lender? Is that someone whom we wish to allow into the scheme? I would not wish to see that.

There is a lot of work to be done. It will not lead to any decrease in activity on the high street; it will lead to an increase. I am very happy to look with all stakeholders, including Members, at how we define retail and hospitality businesses and differentiate them from other businesses that have benefited over the past six years and got a nice little lift from us to make sure that they survive these times.

**Mr Mullan:** I thank the Minister for his statement. I was glad to note that in your statement, Minister, you recognise the valuable contribution that charity shops make to our society by attracting shoppers onto our high streets and through the very valuable work that they do to support the most marginalised and most vulnerable in society. You intend to carry out further consultations on the matter. Can you give me an idea of what kind of consultations you have

carried out and what length of consultations you intend to carry out? This is a very big issue for charity shops in my area.

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I thank the Member. The Member has brought this issue up before. We will move into consultation on all these measures rapidly. On many of the issues, I hope to move into consultation before Christmas.

We will not take anything forward before we thrash it out among ourselves. Do I believe that charity shops could pay 10%? I do, but I am happy to be informed by Members. As you know, the rate is 20% in Wales, Scotland and England, and it should not be any more than that. However, I believe that we have to stop the proliferation of such shops. We have just over 350 of them; I think that we are OK where we are, and I certainly do not want to see more. Could they make a small contribution of £15 a week? Yes, they could. However, I am happy to discuss that with yourself and see where it goes.

Another little idea that the Member will be interested in is whether we could use that money with the third sector, the charity sector, to encourage social or third-sector entrepreneurship. People are trying to find other ways of raising money for voluntary groups and charities. That is my preference, although only a small amount of money would be raised through it.

When we went out to consultation on the small business rate relief scheme, businesspeople had a principle that everybody should pay something, which I agree with. So, if you are on the high street, you should pay something. That is my opinion; it does not have to be an awful lot, but, in principle, everybody should pay something.

The last thing that I say to the Member, although it does not affect his constituency, is that an issue that we could tackle is that of higher-value units being let to charities — say a unit with an annual rent of £100,000 — thereby allowing landlords to dodge responsibility for paying empty property rates. There is much more sympathy for the towns and villages where charity shops are a key part of the mix.

I look forward to working with you. There will be plenty of opportunity through the Committee, the Assembly and the consultation to make views heard. It was a vigorous debate the last time, and I am sure that it will be again.

**Mrs Cameron:** I thank the Minister for his statement and his answers so far. Following on from the previous question, the Minister has highlighted a direction of travel in respect of charity shops that would see a reduction in the exemption to 90%. I fully understand the need to have a balance, in our town centres in particular. I am thinking of the likes of Antrim in south Antrim. Just for clarity, will the Minister be consulting with the charity sector to include their views in any consultation?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I could go further than that: not only will we be consulting with them but I can assure you that we cannot do this without the support of Members. That is where I am minded to go. I will be informed by the consultation but it will be the Members of the House who will decide whether we should introduce any rates for high street charities.

**Mr Lunn:** I thank the Minister for his statement. It is encouraging to hear a Minister saying he is going to stop faffing around and take some hard decisions, so I welcome that.

I am still on charity shops, Minister. Is the Minister minded, as part of the consultation, to examine what constitutes a charity shop? I have no wish to put the boot into them but some of the current charity shops are acting in direct competition with fully fledged shops that are paying fully fledged rates. The Minister talks about balance and a constructive approach but I question, in terms of procurement of stock and the way they operate, whether some of them are actually what was meant to be a charity shop at the beginning of all this.

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Thank you. Yes, we do need to look at that. It needs to be a fair system.

I have just noticed that we have a large group in — from Cullybackey, I think — the guests of Robin Swann. I hope that this is going to help villages as well.

I know that in Lisburn charity shops are part of the mix. I also know that it is the opinion of the charity sector leaders and businesses I meet that they should not be competing directly by selling new retail items from their shops. We need to get the balance right. If someone is paying full rates next door to a charity shop then it is our understanding that the charity shop should be selling goods that are not in direct competition. I think that it breaches the spirit of what we are trying to do with charity shops.

Let us look at it as we move forward. We should not exaggerate it either, Trevor. I am not sure that 10% is a stern or tough action but it is a positive one in that we are saying, "Look, you're occupying a productive asset and we think you should make a contribution".

I have one last point: there are unscrupulous landlords who dodge the empty property rate by putting a charity into the shop, but they do not reduce the rent by one penny. I am amazed at charities across this town that are paying full price for the properties they occupy. I always thought that the landlords made people a deal. In fact, what they do is that he or she dodges the 50% empty property rate and then makes sure that charities, which are sometimes maybe not as ruthless in negotiating as some others might be, pay the absolute full rent. For me, that also breaches the spirit of what we are trying to do.

**Mr Attwood:** There are many good things in this statement: the use of pilots; the proposal in respect of energy efficient new homes; the tourism and hospitality interventions; and other things.

Does the Minister not have two concerns? The first is that if a decision is made in the near future that regeneration powers are not to be transferred to councils, then the rug would be pulled from under his feet with regard to his high street interventions, of which there are a number.

Secondly, does he have a concern that the DUP flagged up clearly this morning that when it comes to some, at least, of what he is proposing, he does not have political cover from them?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I am not going to speak for the SDLP. I am certainly not going to speak for the DUP either this morning. I am going to take and bank the positive comments at the start of that statement about the elements of this that you like.

I am with you in terms of regeneration powers for councils. At the same time, and I know you will see this as well, I am buoyed by the attitude of councils, which, as you know,

do feel hamstrung. You heard Gerry Millar, of Belfast City Council, saying in a radio piece last week that additional regeneration powers would help them to do more.

I do not see their hands being completely tied. I see them still trying to do things. I admire the leadership of John Kelpie of Derry City and Strabane District Council, Suzanne Wylie at Belfast City Council and their colleagues in Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council or from other areas who have been in touch with me.

I hope that this will empower them while we wait, as Trevor Lunn said, for Government — while we wait for Godot. At the same time, it will empower the councils to partner us in the time ahead, and it will empower businesses. The Member will know that, despite the challenges, the BIDS went ahead: the Cathedral Quarter voted for a BID, as did Belfast One. As you know, they have much more ambitious plans and hopes for the devolution of power to cities, but they did not sit on their hands. I hope that he will support us in moving positively ahead while we await further improvements.

**Mr Agnew:** As a Member from the other constituency that is greatly affected by the proposal, I unequivocally welcome the removal of the rates cap. I have long argued that it is not fair that my constituents in the Kilcooley Estate subsidise the rates of those who own estates in Cultra. The Minister said that he is confident in going forward with his proposals. Given the position of other parties on this issue in the past, what evidence does he have for his confidence that he will get political support from the DUP for this positive move?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** You are the second person who wants me to join and speak for the DUP. I am very confident that we will get this entire package through, and it is a package; it should not be seen as doing something around low-carbon or zero-carbon homes. That should never have been stopped, Mr Agnew, and we are trying to bring it back. It is not only about the conundrum of empty factories or increased help for hospitality. It is a package, and the cap is part of it. I am confident that all of the measures outlined today will go through and be passed by the Assembly. Will they be tweaked? Will there be, maybe from you, better ideas of how we can do them? I am open to and would welcome that. I am confident that this package of measures will, as a package, be endorsed by the Assembly in the time ahead.

**Mr Allister:** I bring the Minister back to the small business empowerment zones and express my disappointment that his approach to pilots is so Belfast-centric. There is not a single rural town included, and, although the issues may be slightly different, the pilot may be beneficial there, too. I think of a town like Ballymoney, which has been ravaged by dereliction. What does a small business empowerment zone actually mean? There is no substance here about it. Is it rates exemption? Will he clarify that? On rural issues, will he confirm that he is not minded to disturb agricultural rates? Can that be taken as a given?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I will take the third question first. Yes, there will be no change to the agricultural rate reliefs.

Mr Allister, if you would like to bring suggestions about rural areas to Mr Brian McClure at my Department, I would welcome that. Responsibility for rural areas lies with another Minister, with whom I have discussed this. It would be nice to have another pilot for rural areas outside Belfast. We may do so in the time ahead. This was the bite

of the issue that we could take at this time. I mentioned the need to do something for smaller towns and villages, although I was not thinking of places as big as Ballymoney; I was thinking of some of the small coastal villages and towns, for example. If you have any suggestions on that, please bring them forward. You should not think that because we have one pilot, we cannot have another.

I envisage a rates empowerment zone as being somewhere where, for example, the pioneers and champions of the EastSide Partnership, EastSide Arts, will tonight open C S Lewis Square. They could go to a potential investor and say, "We now have special status under the rates system, so, if you have a new business here, you would get 50% rate relief. Instead of paying 100%, you would pay 50%".

This is for at least three years, perhaps five, so there is a bit of certainty and a reason to attract someone to the area. However, it is also for existing businesses: we need them to expand and invest more. We want to transform the area in which they are based. It does not work by passing legislation alone; it does work by having, for example, a full-time worker who, like the chair or chief executive of a BID, goes out and sells the advantages of an area and works out the best strategy to build on this. It is another tool in the toolbox, for example, for the EastSide Partnership, the West Belfast Partnership, Féile an Phobail in west Belfast, EastSide Arts and other groups. I hope that, in that context, we will move swiftly into discussions with some of the other Departments and the council about how they can come in behind this idea.

**12.15 pm**

**Ms Ruane:** Cuirim fáilte roimh an ráiteas. I welcome the statement and, if the Minister is looking for a rural town for the scheme, Warrenpoint will be very open to having it. Will he outline in more detail his interesting proposal to enable companies to access rate relief by accrediting with the Living Wage Foundation? In all this, workers' rights are very important.

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Go raibh maith agat as an cheist. Thug mé cuairt ar Rinn Mhic Giolla Rua ar na mallaibh. Tá súil agam go mbeidh mé ar ais, le dea-scéala más féidir, ach tá súil agam go gcuideoidh seo leis an cheantar. I have been to Warrenpoint at the invitation of the Member, and I believe that, like all the other towns, villages and cities, this would benefit Warrenpoint, especially now that it is trying to focus more on tourism in the time ahead.

I know that I am trying your patience, Mr Speaker, because I have been on my feet too long, but a really major change in the new rate relief proposals is that people have to apply. Previously, under the spray-and-pray approach, we just said that every business under a certain NAV would get relief. We are now saying that it is targeted at small retail and hospitality, but, as well as that, you have to apply. It is a very simple application process, but you have to prove that you have made an investment in your business. If your rate relief is £1,000, you need to show us that you spent £1,000 on new equipment and skills training, and you employed more staff. We want to make it online-only and really simple, but, for the first time, you will have to ask for the rate relief. In my mind, that is a sea change because people will now understand that they are earning something and are entitled to it, but they have to ask for it.

In my view, another way for a business to be entitled to the new business rate relief system is for it to be accredited with the Living Wage Foundation, which accredits businesses. The new living wage is £8.45, but businesses that pay that can have the proud boast that they are Living Wage Foundation companies. If any small business in retail or hospitality can say to us, “I won this accreditation”, that, for me, would be enough to entitle it to ask for and receive rate relief. I hope that that encourages more companies to look seriously at how they can increase the money that they pay their staff. Of course, when you have added investment in staff, you will demand more productivity, but all that moves people up the business and job value chain. My officials will be speaking to the Living Wage Foundation people today, and this relationship can only benefit businesses and employees in the time ahead.

**Mr Bell:** There are a number of very positive things in the statement, and the manufacturing industry will be hugely pleased — rightly so — with the nature of the maintenance of industrial derating. There will be interest in the use of the rates system to encourage regeneration, investment and entrepreneurship. What measures and time frame can we use to check whether this statement matches up to the outcomes? What targets can we use in an outcomes-based approach, and when can we look back to see how well we are doing at using the rates system for regeneration, investment and entrepreneurship?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** That is a fair question. As you know, we really did not do that with the last scheme, but that was in the mouth and the maw of a terrible economic crisis. With this scheme, it maybe needs to be evaluated every two years, but certainly no longer than that. I think that you will agree, as a former Minister for the Economy, that Neil Gibson’s Economic Policy Centre does good work. We are happy with the work that it does. As I said, we are commissioning in other areas, and I would be very happy if it is the body that is commissioned.

We cannot rely on anecdotal evidence and need to assess whether this is working. If it is not working, we need to do something else. I am confident that it will work. As you know, some stakeholders are very supportive and some are not so supportive, but we need to get it right, and, if we do not have the evidence, we will not really know what we are doing. I am happy to work through with the Member how we gather evidence; how we decide whether it is having the desired effect; how we can ensure that it does not have effects that we do not want; and how we can augment and enhance what is working well for us and abandon things that are not working.

**Ms Armstrong:** I thank the Minister for his statement. I take him back to page 4, on halls of residence. There is only one very small hall of residence in my constituency, at Queen’s University marine biology station. What impact will the change have on the hard work being done to attract external students to Belfast? The change may make Belfast a bit more expensive. It will also make it more expensive for rural dwellers who want to send their children to halls of residence or are themselves students. Will it have a negative impact on places like the Holylands?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I thank the Member for her question. No, I do not think that it will have a detrimental effect on the valiant efforts of our universities to attract people from outside this jurisdiction to study here; it will make the system fairer. Other students who live away from home pay

rates in other types of accommodation that are almost like halls of residence — we see those springing up across the city. It is a small change to the system. We consulted on it. I think it is time. I have not yet spoken to my dear friends in the University of Ulster or Queen’s University, but they have strong cases to make on overall funding, and I am listening to that very carefully. I do not think that this will make any difference to their efforts to attract students. All we are doing is making the system more equitable.

**Lord Morrow:** In the early part of his statement, the Minister said:

*“Today, I propose a groundbreaking package of measures aimed at modernising the domestic and commercial elements of the rating system”.*

He then proceeded to outline a list of fairly punitive measures against those who pay their rates: has he anything new to say about those who do not?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Lord Morrow, you have to read past the first few pages. Much of the statement is about people who do not pay their rates, including landlords who pay 50% empty property rates, which will go up to 75% — still way off where Scotland is. That will make a difference. It involves those who do not pay rates on empty factories; we are trying to get that right as well. They will add to the tax base. Through many of the things that we are doing we are trying to bring in more money, not just for Fermanagh and Omagh District Council but for all councils and for government coffers. Of course, we have just spent the best part of 30 minutes discussing the big one: the people who are not paying at the minute are those who enjoy the domestic property cap, and that is going as well. There is no doubt that some people who heretofore did not make as much of a contribution as they should will have to shoulder more of the burden, because we are making the system fairer in the time ahead.

I am always up for listening to other proposals on how to raise more rates. As you know, there was a bit of a love-in when we removed rates entirely from community amateur sports clubs and extended that to pigeon clubs. Everybody is in favour of removing rates, but, if Lord Morrow has other proposals around how we might bring forward other measures to raise rates, I am certainly all ears. Make no mistake: when we finish the exercise, with the support of the House, there will be £16 million recurring each year more in government coffers and £10 million more in council coffers.

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

**Ms Hanna:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it in order for the Minister, when the DUP publicly responds to say that he does not have its support — ironically, when my party was acknowledging its broad sympathy — to deflect his anger by making allegations against other parties and presenting tittle-tattle as fact? If he insists on taking his frustrations with the DUP out on others, would it not be better that, rather than making allegations, he named names and presented evidence?

**Mr Speaker:** I do not think that is a point of order. The Speaker has no role in adjudicating on Members’ —

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** On a point of order, I am happy to name Dr McDonnell and Declan Boyle as going around doors — *[Interruption.]* I can bring the evidence as well.

**Mr Speaker:** Minister, the Speaker has no role in adjudicating on Members' or Ministers' remarks, but the Member has placed her concerns on the record.

## **North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture**

**Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs):** With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 regarding the twenty-sixth North/South Ministerial Council agriculture meeting, which was held in Armagh on Wednesday 26 October 2016. Chris Hazzard MLA, Minister for Infrastructure, and I represented the Northern Ireland Executive at the meeting. The Irish Government were represented by Michael Creed TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and Michael Ring TD, Minister of State, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Minister Creed chaired the meeting. This statement has been agreed with Minister Hazzard, and I make it on behalf of both of us.

Ministers discussed the implications of the result of the recent UK referendum on EU membership. They noted that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) had undertaken an initial scoping exercise to assess the impact of the UK decision.

The Council welcomed the ongoing collaboration between DAERA and DAFM aimed at maximising the drawdown of EU funding under Horizon 2020 for the agriculture, forestry, food and marine sectors and the bioeconomy and the €26 million secured in funding to date by successful applications from both jurisdictions. Ministers noted the progress made in funding projects in both jurisdictions under the DAFM national competitive call and the extension of the United States-Ireland research and development partnership to include agriculture research themes.

The Council noted the ongoing progress made by DAERA and DAFM on the implementation of the common agricultural policy (CAP) reforms agreed in 2013 and the up-to-date situation with regard to the implementation of the rural development programmes. Ministers also noted the potential implications for future CAP funding of the result of the UK's decision to leave the EU and the determination of Departments to implement European Commission proposals for CAP simplification and push for further simplification where appropriate.

The Council noted the current position with regard to the ongoing difficulties being experienced in agricultural markets, the associated measures introduced to address those difficulties and the continuing close contact between officials from DAERA and DAFM on a range of issues, including CAP reform implementation issues and the impact that the UK decision to leave the EU will have on the agri-food and fisheries sectors in both jurisdictions.

The Council welcomed the continuing work on the delivery of the all-island animal health and welfare strategy action plan since the last North/South Ministerial Council agriculture meeting on 20 January 2016 and, in the context of the recent UK referendum, looked forward to the continuation of practical and effective cooperation on animal health and welfare and disease control in both jurisdictions in order that the health and welfare of livestock is maintained at the highest level.

Key points noted included the introduction of a mandatory bovine viral diarrhoea eradication programme by DAERA

on 1 March 2016, similar to that introduced by DAFM in 2013; that, on 29 September 2016, the Executive agreed the recommendation for DAERA to submit an application to the World Organisation for Animal Health for BSE negligible risk status for Northern Ireland — the application has been submitted and the decision will be taken in May 2017; that agreement was reached at a meeting of the North/South disease control and trade working group in March 2016 on ways to enhance trade between the two jurisdictions, in particular agreement on how to streamline the health certification processes for deer and pigs being moved to Northern Ireland for slaughter; that a shared contract for the emergency supply of carbon dioxide for whole-house gassing of poultry has been in place since June 2016 and will be valid for three years; and that a memorandum of understanding for sharing livestock culling teams in the event of an exotic disease outbreak in either jurisdiction was signed by Chief Veterinary Officers in June 2016.

### 12.30 pm

The Council noted the progress made with the review of the all-Ireland Chalara control strategy by officials from DAERA and DAFM in response to ongoing scientific and surveillance evidence; the research being undertaken to develop a population of Irish planting stock tolerant to the Chalara — ash dieback — disease; and the ongoing commitment to continue to work towards the shared objective of achieving and maintaining good plant health status on the island. Ministers welcomed the continued cross-border cooperation in dealing with tree and plant health and the shared approach to regulation, as evidenced through a common approach to Epitrix, which is the potato flea beetle, risk management. Ministers welcomed the joint approach to the continued sharing of science and diagnostic capability and the regulation of the use of pesticides.

The Council welcomed the continuing cooperation between both jurisdictions, the ongoing work to improve farm safety and the agreement between the Health and Safety Authority and the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland on the joint development of farm-safety e-learning packages. Ministers welcomed the success achieved in raising public awareness of the inherent health-and-safety dangers on farms during the international farm safety week 2016 and the forthcoming tripartite meeting of the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, the Health and Safety Authority and the Health and Safety Executive of Great Britain to discuss farm safety that will take place on 1 December 2016.

The Council welcomed the good progress made in both jurisdictions in implementing the LEADER element of the rural development programme. DAERA and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs organised a LEADER cooperation event, held in Newry on 8 and 9 November 2016, to launch cooperation between local action groups from all regions of the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Ministers also welcomed the opening of a new social farming capital grant scheme in Northern Ireland to complement the existing support office in Cookstown. They also noted progress made on the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas funded social farming grant scheme and the Republic of Ireland's new town and village scheme, and they agreed that officials should explore

opportunities to share experience gained from initiatives aimed at sustaining rural settlements.

The Council agreed to hold the next agriculture meeting in the spring of 2017.

**Mr McKee:** I thank the Minister for her statement. Will she provide an update on what she is doing to reverse the recent ruling that has barred boats from Northern Ireland from fishing inside the six-mile limit of the Republic of Ireland? Surprisingly, it was not a topic at the sectoral meeting.

**Miss McIlveen:** I thank the Member for his question. I did not quite catch the last part of it, but the Supreme Court ruling in the Republic in the last few weeks that upheld the appeal came as something of a surprise. I have spoken to the Minister responsible — Michael Creed — on a number of occasions in the last two weeks to determine what will be done to correct that.

The Member will be aware that it is based on the Voisinage Agreement, which dates back to 1964. That was a written agreement between officials with regards to fishermen from the Irish Republic fishing in Northern Ireland waters and Northern Ireland fishermen being able to fish in waters around the Irish Republic to a six-mile limit. It has been in standing for a long time. Obviously, it is recognised in the European Union as a long-standing agreement. It is quite lucrative for our fishermen; not being able to fish in those waters could cost them somewhere in the region of £300,000. It is of concern to me. My understanding is that Minister Creed is currently getting legislation drafted — it needs to be underpinned by legislation in the Oireachtas — and he is hopeful that it will make its way through the various procedures early in the new year. I am keeping in regular contact with him in that regard. Obviously, I hope that that will correct the issue. In addition, I have spoken to George Eustice, the Minister of State in DEFRA, on the further implications that that will have.

**Ms Dillon (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs):** The meeting noted that measures are being introduced to deal with market difficulties. Will the Minister tell us when we will know what is happening with the €4.8 million aid package and whether she is minded to match-fund it, as other regions are doing?

**Miss McIlveen:** I thank the Member for her question. The aid package translates to just over £4 million for Northern Ireland. It is very welcome, as we lobbied to get a greater proportion of the allocation of moneys from the package.

You will be aware from previous comments that I have made that I want to maximise the impact of the money. I want to get it out as quickly as possible to farmers and also get the best value from it, as I want it to make a meaningful difference to the industry. Within the next number of days, I plan to make available the information on the schemes that I am funding. I appreciate that there have been calls for match funding, although not all regions are match-funding it, as the Member will be aware. She will also know that I do not have a surplus in my budget at present to match-fund. It is something on which I will have to have further discussions with the Finance Minister, but, at this stage, I do not have the money. The Member will also know from discussions in farming circles that farmers have not quite been united on how the money should be disseminated.

I plan to let the Member know in the next number of days how I plan to go forward with this.

**Mr Irwin:** I thank the Minister for her statement. The UK referendum result has an implication for farmers in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. Does she agree that, in the event of a hard Brexit, farmers in the Irish Republic could be badly affected?

**Miss McIlveen:** I thank the Member for his question. Indeed, a hard Brexit and a hard border would not help either Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland with trading. The Republic of Ireland exports a considerable amount of goods to Northern Ireland in a year. The figures for 2015 indicate that exports were worth almost £750 million. Likewise, €569 million of goods were exported from Northern Ireland to the Irish Republic.

There are issues for both sides. The Member will be aware that 29% of the raw milk produced in Northern Ireland is processed in the Irish Republic; that 39% of live lambs produced in Northern Ireland are exported to the Irish Republic; and that 31% of all pigs that are slaughtered in Northern Ireland come from the Irish Republic. At the moment, it is an issue that is much greater for the Irish Republic than it is for us. Currency movements are 15% less competitive for the Irish Republic, so it is in its best interests to be able to retain what is a particularly lucrative market within the United Kingdom. Therefore, a hard Brexit will be very difficult for the Irish Republic, as it will be for Northern Ireland.

**Mr McGlone:** To broaden the theme of the previous question, officials have been ensuring that there is close contact on both sides. It is paramount that that continue. Will the Minister provide us with any detail of specific items of work that officials on both sides have been commissioned to start as a result of the NSMC meeting?

**Miss McIlveen:** I thank the Member for his question. He will be aware that I keep in regular contact with the Minister in the Irish Republic. We speak regularly on a number of issues, be they to do with agriculture or fisheries. The specific piece of work that is being carried out is a scoping exercise that will be looking at trade, fisheries, animal health standards, food standards and plant health standards. All those issues are part of the day-to-day work that officials carry out anyway, but there will be particular scoping done to determine the implications that the referendum result will have.

**Mr Ford:** I thank the Minister for her statement. I notice that in three separate paragraphs she refers to the potential implications flowing from the EU referendum in the UK. Given that we are now four months on from that referendum and given the points that she has just made in response to Mr Irwin about an integrated agri-food business across this island, is it not time that we had a bit more detail rather than merely being told that Ministers have discussed the issue? Should the Council not be meeting before next March to deal with these urgent issues on behalf of farmers North and South?

**Miss McIlveen:** I thank the Member for his question. He will be aware that I regularly meet my counterpart in the Irish Republic and that my officials meet regularly to discuss issues of mutual interest, sometimes daily depending on the issue, and that will continue. There will be a Council meeting when we believe that it is necessary,

and if we need to have an additional Council meeting we will do so.

**Mr Anderson:** I thank the Minister for her statement. I will not be asking a question about Brexit. She mentioned animal health and welfare in paragraph 9 of the statement. Will she give us an update on the bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) eradication programme in Northern Ireland?

**Miss McIlveen:** I thank the Member for his question. A mandatory eradication programme was brought in on 1 March 2016 similar to that which was introduced by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in 2013. Its aim is to control, and ultimately eradicate, BVD in Northern Ireland. It is an industry-led scheme operated by Animal Health and Welfare Northern Ireland (AHWNI) in support of the industry's action to eradicate BVD. The Department provided funding of £219,000 to assist with start-up costs, and my officials have worked very closely with AHWNI to facilitate the introduction and implementation of the tag-and-test legislation. We continue to liaise with AHWNI and the industry to bring forward phase 2 of the legislation when the monitoring requirements and necessary IT systems have been developed.

The most up-to-date figures that I have are that somewhere in the region of 335,000 calves had been tagged and tested by the end of September and that there was a positive test rate of 0.73%. AHWNI has surpassed its target for tests being returned within seven days, which has been helpful to the industry. We are looking to the future, and it is likely that phase 2 of the legislation will cover herd monitoring and more rigorous movement and enforcement controls.

BVD eradication programmes are in operation not only in the Republic of Ireland but in Scotland, our two main trading partners. The test is intended to help to increase our competitiveness here and to improve our efficiency at farm level. We are hopeful of positive results.

**Mr McMullan:** I am pleased to see that there was a discussion about farm safety at the meeting. Did Ministers give consideration to making IT packages more available to the farming community? I am looking at the farm business scheme that has just been launched here. It is a matter of deep regret that IT is one of the ineligible items when you consider that anyone who goes online to apply gets 12 extra marks. Will you look at changing that to allow IT packages to become part of the grant scheme?

**Miss McIlveen:** I thank the Member for his question, although I am a little bit confused by it. I know that there is an e-learning package, which is being developed in collaboration with the Republic of Ireland. Farm safety is vital for all of us and is something that I take very much to heart. Any death on a farm is one too many and it is something we really need to focus our minds on.

#### 12.45 pm

I am committed to the safety of our farmers, their families and their employees. We are working very closely with the Farm Safety Partnership to maximise our impact. The Stop and Think SAFE campaign is a really hard-hitting advertisement, which we are investing heavily in.

We are looking at online tools, and you highlighted our Making it Safer tool which is associated with the farm business improvement scheme. While all applicants have

to complete that form, and it is about raising awareness of what they do on their farm, we are encouraging others who are not applying for that scheme to also go through that assessment, and it is to focus their minds on the risks that, perhaps, they are taking on their farm.

You will also know that as part of the rural development programme, through the business development groups and the farm family key skills, this is an integral part of not only the discussion but the training that we are moving forward with. We cannot emphasise enough to farmers the need for them to assess risks and to be aware of the dangers around them.

**Mr Kennedy:** I welcome the statement by the Minister. I ask the Minister whether, at the sectoral meeting, there was any discussion on cross-border rural crime, which is very prevalent in my constituency and with criminal gangs travelling up from the Irish Republic to wreak havoc on rural communities. Will the Minister undertake to have this matter placed on a future agenda and seek input from the respective Justice Ministers to address this important issue?

**Miss McIlveen:** I thank the Member for his question. I do know that it is an issue of concern for the Member. It was not on the agenda for this meeting but I will undertake to do as the Member has suggested for the next meeting.

**Ms Archibald:** With reference to paragraph 14, I welcome the LEADER cooperation event that took place and the opportunities to discuss cross-border projects in the rural development programme. Can the Minister provide an update on the event and outline what steps her Department will be taking to facilitate the process of cross-border applications?

**Miss McIlveen:** I thank the Member for her question. The event was attended by around 120 participants. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend as I was out of the country at that time and sent my apologies. Obviously, it is very much about cooperation and assistance and, where there are issues of mutual benefit, it is important to encourage that.

I will do all I can to work with groups. Obviously, the LEADER element in Northern Ireland has been very successful to date. We have had in the region of 229 applications, which amounts to somewhere in the region of £8 million worth of grant which is being sought, and that work is continuing very positively. We will work to assist where we can to make things easier for applicants.

**Mr Mullan:** Can the Minister give further clarification about the e-learning packages that she has advocated and what form they may take?

**Miss McIlveen:** I thank the Member for his question. At this stage, I do not have any other information. This is being developed by the health and safety executives in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Once I get the information, I will be happy to share it with the Member.

**Dr Farry:** I welcome the Minister's recognition of the very severe consequences of a hard Brexit, both for the Republic of Ireland and also for farmers and agri-food in Northern Ireland. Given the very high levels of integration in the agri-food economy across the island that have developed over the last 40 years, does the Minister believe that whatever outcome emerges from Brexit, that we have to ensure that the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland remain part of the same market system for agri-food,

otherwise we are going to see massive diseconomies of scale, inefficiencies and a loss of prosperity in both parts of the island?

**Miss McIlveen:** I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, he will be aware that we are very cognisant of the unique situation that Northern Ireland has in having a border with a member of the European Union and what that will look like going forward. That has been raised at various levels. It has been recognised in ongoing discussions with those in the Republic of Ireland and Westminster and very much highlighted by the industry itself. My concern is very much around Northern Ireland going forward and making sure that the industry in Northern Ireland is best placed.

**Mr Allister:** At the meeting or elsewhere, did the Minister encounter any recognition by the Republic of Ireland that, if they were to permit the EU to erect a hard border — it will be their choice — by the imposition of average CAP tariffs of up to 18%, the biggest loser would be the Irish Republic because of the loss that would then result to its biggest market — GB — and that there would, in fact, be immense opportunity for the agri-food industry in Northern Ireland to fill that gap? Is there recognition by Dublin that they need to protect themselves by ensuring that those in the EU do not insist on a hard border, given that they seem to be the only people talking about one?

**Miss McIlveen:** I thank the Member for his question. I am aware that they are very concerned about it. They have had meetings with every other member of the EU to put their special case forward so that they are very much on the mind of those members once negotiations take place. The opportunity for Northern Ireland moving forward in all this is immense, given the vacuum that is likely in the GB markets. We saw just last week the interest that there is in British product, when Dunbia (Ballymena) was able to sell its site to a mainland producer. I think that those are positive signs, and there are certainly opportunities for Northern Ireland in all of this.

**Mr Speaker:** That concludes questions to the Minister on her statement. The next item of business in the Order Paper is Question Time. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm.

*The sitting was suspended at 12.52 pm.*

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

2.00 pm

## Oral Answers to Questions

### Education

#### Early Years Education

1. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Education to outline any plans to introduce an expanded or universal provision of early years education. (AQO 715/16-21)

**Mr Weir (The Minister of Education):** I thank the Member for his question. The Department aims to provide a funded preschool place to every child in their immediate preschool year whose parents want it. In each of the last five years, at least — a minimum of — 99.8% of children whose parents stayed with the preschool admissions process to the end received the offer of a funded preschool place. The aim is reflected in the delivery plan for the draft Programme for Government, which is currently out for consultation, and I intend to ensure that children in their immediate preschool year continue to benefit from access to high-quality, universal early years education provision in the future.

I also plan to work with other Ministers and key Departments in the delivery of actions within the draft Programme for Government and beyond that are aimed at improving well-being and tackling disadvantage through high-quality early years education and childcare provision. The Department will be engaging on the delivery plan over the next few weeks to help inform the development of the key interventions in the published delivery plan, including extending responsive, quality provision in early childhood education and care initiatives for families with children aged three to four to up to 38 weeks per year.

I hope to bring forward the full version of the childcare strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months having taken account of the many consultation responses received, the Programme for Government and the new opportunities that now exist to align childcare and early years initiatives. I look forward to engaging with Executive colleagues in more detail on the matter in due course.

I will also indicate that, when we are looking at an expansion of the universal provision of early years education, the definition of it can cover a multitude of subjects. If there are more specific areas the Member wants to raise in addition to whatever response I am able to give to a supplementary question, I would be happy to engage with him if he wants to drill down into some of them.

**Mr Agnew:** I thank the Minister for his answer and, indeed, for the qualification at the end. It concerns me that, whenever we talk about early years, we immediately look at preschool provision and childcare. As the Minister will know, early years is everything from nought-to-six, which is why it is key that he works with his ministerial colleagues, particularly the Minister of Health. To come to my point, Sure Start is, obviously, a targeted provision in Northern Ireland. Are there any proposals to expand that

or to even look at it as a universal service or something similar?

**Mr Weir:** We have to realise that the Department provides £25 million of investment to Sure Start, which, I think, relates to support for around 40,000 children under the age of four and their families. Obviously, the priority is to ensure that all children reach their full potential. At the moment, Sure Start is a targeted service, and there have been some extensions of it. It is a targeted service that has a distinct geographical remit that is defined by ward boundaries, and I know that can be a slightly blunt tool. What it means is that all those within the catchment areas with children under the age of four can access those services. It was initially on the basis of 20% of the most disadvantaged areas. That has now been extended to 25% of the most disadvantaged areas. Findings from an independent review of Sure Start, together with existing research, provide assurances that targeting in areas of highest disadvantage is likely to have the greatest impact.

The Member indicated that it should be a universal service, and, in an ideal world with a limitless amount of money, it would be. If, using a rough rule of thumb, you were talking about something like Sure Start moving from targeting 25% to having a 100% coverage, given the current level of funding, that would probably mean an increase in cost of somewhere in the region of £70 million to £75 million per year. I think that would be very difficult, in many ways, to achieve.

The Member made a valid point about cooperation with Health. There is a large health component, particularly in Sure Start. It is to try to give a better start to those who come from disadvantaged areas in order to close the gap. At one level, if we were to move to a situation in which that was completely universal, it may be advantageous to every pupil in Northern Ireland but would not have a particular impact on closing any gaps, albeit, objectively, it would be regarded as a good thing.

**Mr McElduff:** Further to Mr Agnew's question, I point out that your predecessor, Minister O'Dowd, was able to increase provision in the most socially deprived areas from 20% to 25%. We want universal provision, but, in some wards that are otherwise regarded as affluent, there are big pockets of deprivation, so is there any scope for looking at that?

**Mr Weir:** I understand the point, particularly on the distribution of housing in Northern Ireland. We have an unusual feature — those small pockets of deprivation — which probably differentiates us from other jurisdictions. To some extent, if that were the case, you would have to change the basis on which the scheme is administered. If you simply added those areas, it would be an additional cost, and there would be controversy if you were using those effectively to replace some of the wards that are there.

With Sure Start, projects must have certain economies of scale. You cannot provide Sure Start for three children, for instance. You have to ensure that you have sufficient numbers of under-fours, particularly from disadvantaged areas. If you were to string together some pockets of deprivation, that would create difficulty. I entirely understand where the Member is coming from. I suspect that, from a financial or practical point of view, it may create hurdles and difficulties that would be difficult to overcome.

**Ms Lockhart:** I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. I am sure that he will extend his congratulations to Sure Start on its extension in the Mourneview ward in the Lurgan area.

Why should we focus on early years and its importance in the overall educational offering in Northern Ireland?

**Mr Weir:** I add my congratulations to Mourneview. That shows that all politics is local, even for the under-fours. I am sure that the Member is rightly proud of what is happening in Upper Bann.

A range of research and evidence points in the same direction, which highlights the importance of early years to children's cognitive, emotional, social and physical growth. It is vital that children who are starting school have been and continue to be prepared, supported and encouraged to learn. I get a consistent message, particularly from primary schools — to some extent, arguments at later stages in life are slightly skewed by this — that some children coming through the door of a primary school are already well behind on a range of cognitive issues and social skills and even using a knife and fork. The intervention is vital not only in schools but before children come through the school gates.

It is right that the Executive's draft Programme for Government acknowledges early years intervention and provides that opportunity. That is very much in line with outcome 14, which aims to:

*"give our children and young people the best start in life".*

Similarly, the delivery plan for indicator 15 acknowledges the central role and broad range of agencies and services in taking these interventions forward. That comes back to Mr Agnew's point about the need to try to ensure that we have joined-up services because, particularly in dealing with the very young, you are not simply looking at Education —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I remind the Minister of the two-minute rule.

**Mr Weir:** — but the role of Health. So, yes is the answer. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Thank you is the reply.

**Mrs Overend:** Opportunities for training, continuing professional development and sharing of best practice are underdeveloped in the early years sector. What plans does the Minister have to include those opportunities?

**Mr Weir:** With the childcare strategy and the children and young people's strategy, there is an element of things where we will need to look at where we can provide that training and professional development. The Member makes a valid point, and it goes beyond early years and permeates other areas of education. A lot of good things are happening on the ground, and, at times, to get the best delivery, it is a question of, for example, trying to see how we can best explain and, indeed, promulgate that best practice. I know that that has happened in a number of initiatives. Some of that can be disseminated by getting stakeholders together. For example, I have recently accepted an invitation from a group that has been working on underachievement in north Down. It is hosting a conference in February. The focus of a lot of that will be on best practice, because, I think, everybody realises that there are tough financial circumstances. Part of it will

be disseminating that best practice. I have accepted the invitation to speak at that conference, and I will also have my officials there. There can be that driver. Even taking it at a different level, if there were no financial problems whatever and there was an abundance of money, best practice should still be a key driver. That should be the case no matter what financial position we are in, because I agree with the Member that we should always be ambitious to ensure that we get the best for all our children.

## Entitlement Framework

2. **Mr Lyons** asked the Minister of Education whether he plans to reform the entitlement framework. *(AQO 716/16-21)*

**Mr Weir:** I thank the Member for his question. The entitlement framework (EF) is and will remain a key component of the statutory curriculum, ensuring that all pupils have access to a broad, balanced and economically relevant range of courses. However, as I think I have said previously, I appreciate that there are significant challenges for schools in trying to meet the entitlement framework requirements in full. They are quite ambitious in terms of numbers. In light of that, I am considering the way forward for the entitlement framework policy, including the statutory requirements. However, in doing so, I want to make sure that we retain the benefits accrued to date and try to build on them. I will soon be meeting officials on that. Again, there is probably a two-stage aspect to this. If there is action that needs to be taken in the short term, that will be looked at. As I have indicated, it will be opportune in this Assembly term to take a wider look at how we deliver the curriculum. I think that you cannot simply do that by taking the entitlement framework out on a limb and setting it to the side. It is about trying to get the right balance so that we get retention of the best that is there from the entitlement framework without placing what could sometimes be an undue burden on schools.

**Mr Lyons:** I thank the Minister for his answer so far and for his willingness to review the entitlement framework. He is absolutely right that we want to get the right balance, but will he agree that the entitlement framework puts an extra burden on already tight school budgets and that even a little reform in that area could make things an awful lot easier for schools while delivering a quality education for all of our young people?

**Mr Weir:** I agree with the Member. To give the specifics of this, schools are funded through their core delegated budget to deliver the statutory obligations, including the wider curriculum. Of course, the entitlement framework is obviously a major part of that. It very specifically kicks in at Key Stage 4 and the post-16 situation. EF funding has been provided over the last few years, but we need to ensure that a separate stream is not simply a permanent stream and that, as much as possible, we mainstream what is there. That funding, to date, has provided a contribution to the cost of the expanded curriculum.

Also, importantly, a number of schools are embracing the key issue, which is what can be delivered to the students themselves, so I will also look at the regulations. We need to ensure that credit is given to the schools that now operate with greater levels of partnership and sharing, particularly, in the context of the entitlement framework, on what might be described as minority subjects where

there is less direct demand. It may be less cost-effective for a school to provide that in their individual environment. For instance, in my constituency, good work is going on between Bangor Grammar, Bangor Academy and St Columbanus' in providing a shared solution in, in particular, A-level courses as part of shared education. Area learning communities will be vital as well. In delivering and striking the right balance, we must ensure that we get the best possible delivery for all our pupils. Using more imaginative solutions can be helpful to that as well.

## 2.15 pm

**Mr McGlone:** Many schools struggle to meet the EF requirements, and Mr Lyons referred to some of the pressures on them. Can the Minister advise if there are any resources or support available to those schools to help them in that capacity?

**Mr Weir:** Some additional EF funding has gone to schools. I would indicate that there has been significant achievement in reaching a lot of the targets. The figures for complete compliance show that 40% of schools are completely compliant on every section of this. There are also quite large percentages that are doing the individual aspects of Key Stage 4 or post-16. There are 66 schools that are not meeting them in full. Seven of those are because of the mix of applied and general. However, of the 59 others, 51 are meeting between 20 and 23 courses — the target is 24 courses — so there are schools that are just falling short. Each of the seven schools that are failing to meet the target on the mix is falling short by one general course, so the gap to be bridged is probably not that enormous.

It is also about seeing what we can do from a practical and sensible point of view. Some of that is sharing. Some of that may be that we are asking schools to stretch a bit too much or whatever. There may be issues around the broader level of funding that could be looked at. All of that has to be in the mix. One of the issues that need to be explored — I am mindful that I have 30 seconds, Mr Deputy Speaker — is that we know that a number of schools are falling below it and we probably need to drill down with those schools to find out why they are failing, whether it is purely a question of finance or whether there are any other barriers. We need to have a bit of discussion with schools to see how we can resolve those issues.

**Ms J McCann:** I have listened to the answers that you have given. What steps will you and your Department take to address the issue? As you mentioned, quite a percentage of schools are failing to meet the entitlement framework requirements. What actual steps will your Department take?

**Mr Weir:** Presciently, I am holding discussions with officials at 3.00 pm today to look at the best way forward on the entitlement framework. I am conscious that the entitlement framework has delivered a great benefit to pupils. I am conscious that there may well be a range of reasons why schools fall just short. One of the things that we probably have not done to a sufficient level is explore a bit with those schools why they are falling short. If you are looking for solutions, you need to know the reasons behind things in the first place. Starting that conversation will be critical, and it will be ongoing work. It may mean that, as part of the overall process, we need to find short- to medium-term fixes to rectify situations in

the short term while looking at the longer-term position. It is about retaining and building; it is not about breaking down what is there. I appreciate that there will be particular circumstances in individual schools. Let us see whether there is a pattern and whether it is simply that providing that would require a level of expenditure that is beyond the schools. As I said, there is a strong case for looking at whether we can provide greater help and assistance for a greater level of sharing. The key element of this will always be what offer is in place to the individual student. The key driver should be to provide the maximum opportunity for the student to follow a range of pathways.

**Mrs Barton:** Can the Minister give us an update on any conversations he has had with the Minister for the Economy on a formal 14-to-19 strategy with collaboration between the further education and post-primary sectors to ensure that the curriculum gives adequate attention to skills-based and vocational education?

**Mr Weir:** That is a valid point. This needs to be put into a wider context. When I talk about an overall review of the curriculum, I mean one that will, obviously, go beyond simply the 14-to-19 age range. Issues have been raised with me about the primary school curriculum, issues about languages and the need to have a greater emphasis on STEM. However, the principal focus of curriculum reform will be on the 14-to-19 age range and widening that. I have indicated to a number of people that that discussion needs to take place and needs to be quite detailed. There is a key role not simply for the Department of Education, the schools and the bodies that fall, broadly speaking, within our remit but for the Department for the Economy and the colleges. One of the areas that we need to tackle is area planning. I know that, Mr Deputy Speaker, often in the House it seems that time stands still. At least, from the clock, it seems to have stood still.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** It is very unwise to alert me to that. Go ahead.

**Mr Weir:** Absolutely. I do not know whether that means that I have two minutes from this point.

One of the problems we have is that there are schools where there is a high dropout rate for pupils once they get into lower sixth. Sometimes that is because it is not the appropriate place for those students. Therefore, a range of work has to take place on the curriculum, particularly focusing on vocational pathways, not simply with the Department of Education, its arm's-length bodies and schools but with the Department for the Economy, colleges and particularly with industry and business. I have met the CBI, for instance, which is keen to be involved in that work. It is something that will have to do be taken forward on a cross-departmental basis and will go beyond the initial conversation and into a great deal more depth as we move ahead.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** We move on. Time stands still for no person.

## Educational Programmes: EU Funding

3. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the current position on funding beyond 2017 for educational programmes that are currently funded by the European Union. (AQO 717/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** Some €35.3 million is made available for shared education through Peace IV, covering Northern Ireland and the border region of the Republic of Ireland. That comprises €30 million through the European regional development fund (ERDF) plus €5.3 million from both sides of the border in government matched funding.

Although not yet opened to schools and other educational settings, funding post Brexit for Peace IV is included in the guarantee by Treasury for structural and investment fund programmes signed before the UK leaves the EU. I anticipate that processing applications from programme delivery bodies will be completed by the end of this year, with agreements signed and implementation commencing in 2017. Programme funding will be provided until December 2020 to be spent by 2023.

In relation to the other aspect of European funding that is directly relevant to Northern Ireland — the ERASMUS+ programme — the UK National Agency will continue to manage and deliver the programme across the UK, and all participants and beneficiaries should continue with their ERASMUS+ funded activities and preparations for the published application deadlines in 2017. The UK Minister of State for universities, Jo Johnson MP, has stated that the EU referendum result does not affect students studying in the EU, beneficiaries of ERASMUS+ or those considering application in 2017 and that the UK's future access to the ERASMUS+ programme will be determined as part of the wider discussions that the UK Government will be having with the EU. More broadly, existing UK students studying in the EU and those looking to start in the next academic year will continue to be subject to the current arrangements.

**Mr McAleer:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Has he spoken to the British Treasury or sought any assurances for replacement funding for projects that may lose out as result of the vote on exit from the EU?

**Mr Weir:** Directly speaking, this issue is part of the wider picture that the Executive are raising. We have received a level of assurance on Peace IV funding. Look at ERASMUS+, for example: the vast bulk of ERASMUS+ falls under the Department for the Economy, and the schools element of it is relatively small. It is an issue that was discussed on Friday at the North/South Ministerial Council. I do not want to spoil anybody's appetite for the full briefing on that. There will be a statement on that at a later stage, so I will not go further than that. However, I have spoken directly to my opposite number at the Department of Education and Skills. *[Interruption.]* Maybe that has happened — obviously, the Deputy Speaker is more prescient in these things than I am — but it has also been raised in bilaterals between me and the Education and Skills Minister in the Republic of Ireland. On the education side of things, the direct impact in Northern Ireland will be fairly minimal.

**Mr McGrath:** Will the Minister consider commissioning a report on the benefits of EU funding for young people in Northern Ireland, if only at least to be prepared, should Brexit continue, to bid for any money to replace it?

**Mr Weir:** I tell the honourable Member that that boat is already sailing, because the UK as a whole has voted to leave. There is work for the overall Executive to do. I will not compartmentalise that. I mentioned ERASMUS+: there is around €5 million from that. Off the top of my head,

around €500,000 is going directly to schools. I am also conscious that Ministers should not sail off in their own direction with individual studies, and I am not sure that, if we were to spend a reasonable amount of money doing a study on something that, from an educational point of view, amounts to a relatively small amount of money, it would be good value for money. In the overall picture, we need the Executive to be cognisant of the need to ensure that the difficulties and benefits of Brexit are examined, and we need to harness the maximum potential while trying to protect as much as is possible those who are directly impacted on by it. That is a wider Executive responsibility, however, rather than specifically a Department of Education one.

**Lord Morrow:** Brexit is now blamed for every negative in society, so I suspect that the next thing that it will be blamed for is the weather. What will the impact of Brexit be on education in Northern Ireland?

**Mr Weir:** I travelled through the Member's constituency briefly on Thursday en route to a school in Strabane and when heading back. It was a very wet day. To be fair, nobody at that stage blamed Brexit, but that may yet happen.

The Member asked about the overall impact of Brexit. As I indicated, this is probably where my Department's levels of responsibility compared with other bodies are relevant. The Department of Education covers up to 18 — up to 19 for those with special needs — so more of the direct impact will hit, for good or ill, the Department for the Economy, for instance. There is minimal cost impact. As indicated, provision has been made in Peace IV funding, and the direct impact on schools and on, for example, the ERASMUS+ project that has been put in place is relatively minimal. As I said, the value of programmes was a little over €500,000. There are other things that have been mentioned in the House in which there can be ongoing cooperation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, irrespective of the EU and Brexit, such as the Middletown centre. Those are things that, from the point of view of linkages in the Department of Education, are not dependent on membership of the EU and will be utterly unaffected by Brexit.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I call Mr Edwin Poots for a question. There may not be time for a supplementary question.

## School Readiness

4. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of school readiness of children starting primary school. (AQO 718/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** A range of research and evidence highlights the importance of early years to the cognitive, emotional and physical growth of children. It is vital that children starting school have been and continue to be prepared, supported and encouraged to learn to take full advantage. There is no universal indicator of overall early childhood development. Work on that has been ongoing with the Department of Health through work stream 1 of the early intervention transformation programme, which is a Northern Ireland Executive and Atlantic Philanthropies programme. As part of that work stream, a named health visitor is now aligned with every preschool education setting.

I suspect that the Member may have difficulty getting to ask a supplementary question. There are good initiatives on the ground. The Member was in Lisburn with me on Friday at a launch of an initiative for the Lisburn area on early intervention that looks particularly at communication skills. It is building on Talk Boost. I think that the scheme goes across four areas.

So, good actions are being taken. The importance of early years is critical.

**2.30 pm**

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Unfortunately, the time for listed questions is over, although the Minister's power to predict what the supplementary might have been was remarkable. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Weir:** I will get you the lottery numbers for Saturday, Danny, and then you can retire.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** More septic Meg than Mystic Meg, I think. We move on to topical questions.

## Knowledge Economy

T1. **Mr Aiken** asked the Minister of Education what approach he is taking to improve the educational attainment of our post-primary pupils given that, this morning, a report by the Ulster University on the knowledge economy stated that our GVA, driven by our intellectual capital, has dropped from 10.3% to 9.7%, equivalent to a loss of £400 million to our economy and, more worryingly, indicates that we are on a downward trend. *(AQT 516/16-21)*

**Mr Weir:** Sometimes the Member will see bright skies but be looking for dark clouds on the horizon.

**Mr Aiken:** Brexit must be changing the weather.

**Mr Weir:** If Brexit is to blame, perhaps you can blame some of your colleagues as well. *[Laughter.]* Some of those issues are directly relevant to the economy, but they underline the need to ensure that there is a review of the curriculum. We have considerable success, particularly on IT issues. For instance, when we looked at the scope of exams that were available from exam boards at GCSE level, one of the direct concerns raised by Queen's University was what would be on offer if we excluded the exam boards from outside Northern Ireland. The exam in IT and computer science offered by CCEA was not as skills-based, which is why I took action to ensure that the examinations system was opened up again. That was done to try to ensure that we have the most appropriate choice to build on that skills base.

There is a wider job of work, as indicated, with the curriculum for the Department of Education and the Department for the Economy, working alongside those who have a degree of expertise at post-primary and tertiary levels.

**Mr Aiken:** I thank the Minister for his comments. I would like him to outline what engagement he plans to have with the Minister for the Economy and the Minister of Finance, because there is a significant shortfall in funding in the area, and it is an area that we specifically need to look at.

**Mr Weir:** There are wider Executive discussions on funding. Let us be honest: there is a difficult financial

regime, so we have to ensure that we get the best possible value for our money. There will be serious engagement with the Department for the Economy and with the Minister for the Economy.

A number of steps have been taken, particularly on the skills barometer and the careers advisory side, as part of a good model of joint working between the Department of Education and the Department for the Economy. There is always the accusation that Departments operate in a degree of silo mentality, and the Department for the Economy and the Department of Education, through actions such as that, show that there can be a level of cooperation to tackle those problems.

## Battlefield Project

T2. **Mr K Buchanan** asked the Minister of Education to update Members on the Battlefield project. *(AQT 517/16-21)*

**Mr Weir:** I thank the Member for his question. I have been working alongside the Minister for Communities to bring forward a scheme to allow schoolchildren and teachers from here to visit the World War I battlefields. That has been available to schools in England, but, although a few schools have done it, there has not been the same level of availability in Northern Ireland. I am glad that that will mean that schoolchildren from Northern Ireland will have the same opportunities as those in England and Scotland to visit the World War I battlefields.

The scheme will be open to every post-primary school in Northern Ireland that wishes to avail of it; it is not compulsory, but at least it is being allowed. It will allow for two children and a teacher from each post-primary school to visit the World War I battlefields. This will ensure that the sacrifices of all who served in the war are remembered, and people from across the political spectrum and community were involved in that war. These are also their families, because a poignant visit will often be in order to recall or, perhaps, visit the graveside of, a relative who made the supreme sacrifice. It will enable the sacrifices of those who served in the First World War to continue to be honoured and remembered.

My officials are working with officials in the Department for Communities on the finer details. It is my intention that we will be able to launch the scheme before Christmas.

**Mr K Buchanan:** I thank the Minister for his answer so far. Would he be of a mind to extend that to youth and community groups?

**Mr Weir:** That would be the intention. There are ongoing discussions with the Department for Communities to be able to offer places on the scheme to youth and community groups. That would provide an opportunity for young people in the youth and community sector.

While our focus in education is quite often purely on schools, there is a remit, particularly at the youth level, that goes well beyond that. It is important that young people in youth and community groups can also benefit from the scheme, ensuring that as many of them as possible from here will have the opportunity to visit the World War I battle sites and remember the sacrifice of those who died there — who died, in effect, to ensure that the freedom and democracy was put in place that we are able to observe today.

## East Belfast: Autism Support Services

T3. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Education to outline what autism support services are available for children and families in east Belfast. (AQT 518/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** Direct funding for support services goes from the Department to the Education Authority, and it ensures that there is a range of educational provision to support children with autism, their families and schools in east Belfast.

The Education Authority's autism advisory and intervention service provides support to pupils in schools through training and advice to teachers, and individual interventions with pupils. It also provides support to parents and families.

Specifically in east Belfast, there are parent training and workshops available. They include autism awareness, appropriate and effective home interventions, autism and relationships, social and study skills, transition to post-primary school, sensory processing difficulties, and personal independence skills.

I think that parent training is provided at various times and locations to accommodate, where possible, parental preferences. The training is advertised through the child's school setting, which includes the preschool setting. It is also advertised through email and local health trusts.

School training programmes in east Belfast include autism awareness, appropriate and effective classroom and school interventions and adjustments, inclusion for children and young people with autism, social skills, sensory processing difficulties in the school environment, enhancing communication skills in the school setting, and topical issues such as girls with autism. It is provided in the school setting or at an off-school site.

I think that there is training for other groups in east Belfast that support children with autism, including voluntary organisations, health professionals and youth centres. They also provide consultation and advice and work collaboratively, particularly with the Middletown Centre, which has a level of expertise.

In addition to the autism support that I outlined, there are other provisions and services in the Education Authority, including the early years inclusion team and educational psychology and behavioural support.

**Mr Douglas:** I thank the Minister for his answer thus far. I want to thank him as well for attending the Helping Hands autism resource centre in Ballybeen. Maybe the Minister could look at what help or support could be provided to that organisation, which is a group of families and volunteers.

**Mr Weir:** I very much enjoyed my trip there. There is tremendous potential in addition to what is already happening in Ballybeen. There is potential for the future there, and I know there is ongoing work.

I suppose there are two aspects to this. The direct-funding organisation in each case would be the Education Authority because it would have overall responsibility for special needs. There is specific education funding for special needs through the Education Authority budget. There is also £33 million of resource funding for youth

services because this can also come under youth services.

Under article 37 of the Education and Libraries Order, the Education Authority has direct responsibility for the provision of those services, and, indeed, youth services. It covers a wide range, and can be between the ages of four and 25, which is very much within the remit of Helping Hands.

I understand that Helping Hands is currently registered with the EA's Youth Service and is, therefore, receiving resource funding. Additionally, a call has been made for the voluntary youth capital scheme to fund groups that are registered with the Education Authority, and Helping Hands is eligible to apply for that. There is a direct source in that, but there is no specific open call beyond that. I congratulate Helping Hands on its work so far and wish it every success for the future.

## NASUWT Strike

**Mr Butler:** Like, I am sure, other Members, I have held recent meetings with teachers who are concerned about their pay dispute and conditions.

T4. **Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Education to detail what measures he has in place to mitigate the impact on children in the classroom of the proposed one-day strike by the NASUWT. (AQT 519/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** I am worried that Chris Lyttle might kill me if I answered this in detail, given that he has been given a question for urgent oral answer at 3.30 pm. The date referred to is, I think, 30 November. I will go into greater detail when the question for urgent oral answer is asked, but correspondence has gone out from the Education Authority to all schools in connection with this.

I appeal to the unions to suspend any industrial action and try to have discussions about it. I will not pretend that there is additional money in the budget, but the wider context of where we move to from 2017 onwards needs to be examined. We cannot have industrial disputes almost ad nauseam. The NASUWT, for instance, has been taking constant industrial action for the past five years. Its action on different things has been ongoing since 2011. We need to have a sensible conversation, so I appeal, as the management side of the teacher negotiating committee, to the unions not to implement strike action that would be detrimental to pupils — indeed, in many ways, it would also be detrimental to their members — but to have that wider discussion on how we can take things forward from 2017. Let us try to put the past behind us and look to the future.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Order. Whilst the Minister has answered the question, we should carefully note that provision has been granted for a question for urgent oral answer to the Minister on the issue at approximately 3.30 pm. Will the Member bear that in mind as he asks his supplementary? *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Butler:** I suppose, being new to the House, that I will get away with this only once or twice more. With that in mind, I am more than happy to wait for the question for urgent oral answer and for my supplementary to be answered then.

**Mr Weir:** On the basis of not repeating myself, I refer the Member to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

## Education: Chief Inspector's Annual Report

T5. **Mr Kelly** asked the Minister of Education to outline the key messages in the Chief Inspector's annual report. (AQT 520/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** The Chief Inspector will hold schools to a very high standard of account. A mixed picture emerged from the report, which talked about there being much to celebrate in our system. Primary schools have remained on a steady but fairly high level, and we have seen improvement in post-primary schools. However, the report also challenges us, saying that not everything that we have is fit for purpose. In part, that is because we need to ensure that educational resources are focused very directly on that.

The report highlights the need to ensure that opportunities for early intervention to make wider changes need to be taken. It is a useful document in the way that it drills down into that. While the inspectorate receives its budget directly through the Department of Education, it is an independent organisation. At times, schools will be a little frustrated at the level of its independence. It is important that we acknowledge that schools are delivering against a very tight financial background, and some have been very successful. Some are improving, and some are remaining the same, despite the fact that their budgets are tighter.

**Mr Kelly:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer. I appreciate that he will look at underachievement, but will he be a bit more specific about how the report will focus him and his Department on the issue?

2.45 pm

**Mr Weir:** Obviously, this is a key part of the PFG targets as well. It is important that, if we are looking at what actions are taken on underachievement, they are seen against a baseline of data that shows where some of the problems are. That is where the scoping exercise comes in. The other advantage is that the inspectorate, albeit against toughening conditions from a budget point of view, can give snapshots not simply of where we are today but of where we were in 2014 and 2012 etc. I have to say that, while there are challenges, there are encouraging messages as well. For instance, we have seen a driving-up of standards, particularly with improved exam results amongst those on free school meals. That is to be welcomed. We need to embrace the gains and see where there are further gaps. It gives a statistical basis and, indeed, a professional judgement basis for deciding what actions need to happen next. That is why it is a very important document.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Time is up. We must now move on to questions to the Minister of Finance.

**Ms Bailey:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Sorry?

**Ms Bailey:** Can I make a point of order?

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Not during Question Time.

**Ms Bailey:** For the Minister?

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** No. Points of order are not permitted during Question Time.

**Ms Bailey:** Sorry. Thank you.

## Finance

### EU Updates

1. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Finance whether the funding guarantee from the Chancellor of the Exchequer on structural and investment fund projects signed before the United Kingdom leaves the European Union applies to all such projects. (AQO 730/16-21)

3. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Finance for an update on his engagement with the European Union. (AQO 732/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance):** With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 1 and 3 together.

The guarantee for structural and investment fund projects signed prior to any change of relations with the EU applies to all projects approved under those funds. I have already placed a copy of the correspondence in that regard from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in the Assembly Library. I visited Brussels last week, where I continued to press the importance of EU funding and continued full engagement with the EU. As the Member knows, I have taken and will continue to take all opportunities available to me to vigorously promote the interests of this jurisdiction within the EU.

**Mr Beggs:** It is important that there is clarity, so can the Minister say definitively, once and for all, whether the commitment by the Treasury that it would guarantee funding for structural and investment fund projects signed before the UK leaves the EU, even where projects continue after we have left, applies to the York Street interchange? There has been a lot of discussion about that. Does he accept there is a divergence between what he and the Infrastructure Minister have been saying and what the Treasury has said? Can he explain?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Yes, but the Member has to listen this time, so we will try again. You are right: absolutely, as I said in my answer, any letters of offer signed off before relations with the EU change will be honoured in full. Any letters of offer signed off after that, if such a thing could happen, will not be honoured in full. There are programmes, including infrastructure programmes, that we believe will not even open until 2018, and it is possible that letters of offer will not be signed or issued until after an exit from the EU. I am very clear on that, I think Mr Hammond is very clear on it as well and I think Ministers are.

**Ms Boyle:** I thank the Minister for his answer. What specific measures is he putting in place, as he alluded to, to protect funding streams for the North?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** As the Minister responsible for Peace funding and INTERREG funding in particular — other Ministers have responsibility for other packages and other streams of funding — I have made it my priority, as the House would expect, to try to protect those funding streams. I have tried to expedite the issuing of letters of offer, taking due cognisance of the need to not rush into arrangements that are less than the excellence we expect in our letters of offer and our projects. Last week, as part of this work, I was pleased to be able to report to our colleagues in the

European Union that letters of offer for €120 million had been issued in relation to INTERREG and that the first letters of offer in relation to Peace had been issued.

There is a little way to go. Some programmes have opened just recently.

I am reasonably confident that we will have issued all our letters of offer under INTERREG and Peace by the spring of next year. On anyone's timeline, that is well within the period guaranteed by the Chancellor. I should also say that I had the opportunity in Brussels last week to address the 27 other states at a lunch as part of the general affairs council meeting of the regions. I managed to address the 27 other Ministers for Europe. I thought that we had a sympathetic listen. Sympathy is not really what we want, but I think that actions will follow. There is an awareness that the peace process is the crowning achievement of the European Union, and it will take additional steps to make sure that the peace process is protected and that we get a special deal or special recognition in the time ahead.

**Mr Allister:** Has the Minister now reached the logical position that, when we exit the EU, he cannot — nor can anyone — reasonably expect more from the Treasury than what the Chancellor has said it will do: until we exit the EU, it will underwrite approved schemes but that, after that watershed, no such assurance can be given because there will be nothing to assure?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I disagree with the Member. When we first said to the Chancellor, "Will you guarantee Peace and INTERREG funding?", some people thought that that could not happen, because why would he guarantee funding after September, as it was at that stage. We secured that. We then had a much more important victory when the Chancellor said that he would guarantee all funding as long as it was signed off before an exit or our relations with the EU changed. Our friend Theresa May said yesterday that there could be a transitional parting of the ways. It could be not two years but 15 years, for all anyone knows. Let us put our best foot forward in relation to CAP payments after 2020, ERASMUS and the other wonderful programmes that allow our young people to enjoy the bounty of Europe. Let us make the case for those programmes and for funding for them to continue. I would be surprised if any Member would like the Minister of Finance to say to the British Government, "Don't go any further to guarantee EU revenue streams". I expect that everyone here would be disappointed if I did not go the extra mile to ensure that funding from Europe continues or is replaced in full.

**Mr Humphrey:** I thank the Minister for his answers so far. I will return to the York Street interchange, if I may. I know that the Minister, as a Belfast representative like me, will have an interest in that. Given that the public inquiry has progressed, the proprietary work has started and procurement is well advanced, does he agree that work has essentially begun on what is a crucial infrastructure project for this city and region, connecting airports, ports and the two motorways in Belfast with the west of Northern Ireland?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** As the Member knows, I am not the Minister for Infrastructure, but we find common ground in that we both believe that this is a priority project that could transform the road infrastructure of Belfast. It is my view that we should speak to everyone who has influence over these matters, including the European infrastructure fund,

which will not come on stream until 2018, and the British Government. It remains a priority. I think that the Member and I are agreed on this: we need to and will deliver the York Street interchange.

## **New-build Housing: Environmental Sustainability**

2. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Finance whether there has been an evaluation of the withdrawal in 2012 of the low-carbon homes rate relief scheme to determine the environmental sustainability of new-build housing. (AQO 731/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I thank the Member for his question. As Mr Agnew will be aware, in 2011, the then Finance Minister, Sammy Wilson, made the decision to withdraw the scheme for low-carbon and zero-carbon homes. I see merit, however, in using the rating system to help to increase and incentivise environmental sustainability. Since taking up ministerial office, I have asked my officials to undertake work on the feasibility of a more modern and tailored scheme in this area. That work is ongoing in my Department.

**Mr Agnew:** I thank the Minister for his answer and for looking at the scheme again. He will probably not be surprised to hear that I am not disappointed that Sammy Wilson is no longer the Finance Minister. He suggested in his earlier statement that this may be part of a package of measures. How does he envisage bringing that package forward? Is he proposing primary legislation, or will it be done through regulations?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** First of all, you can be sure of one thing: you and I are going in the same direction on this. I believe that it would be advantageous for us as a society to encourage the development of low-carbon and zero-carbon homes. The measures that I take forward, whether in primary or subordinate legislation — I suspect that it will be primary — will be aimed at trying to encourage homeowners and developers to develop homes which are compliant and eligible for grant aid or rates relief or support in the time ahead. We now need to get into the fine detail. We have done a fair bit of work. The landscape has changed since this was originally introduced, which is why we could not just retrofit and put it back in, but I am pleased with the briefing that I have received so far from my officials. If the Member wishes, I am happy to ask my officials to give him an individual briefing. I know that he will have lots to say about this and lots of input. If he wants to have that input early, I am very happy to oblige.

**Ms Armstrong:** I was going to ask the Minister whether or not he had raised with the Executive the financial savings in the long run from sustainable buildings, whether they be homes, offices or public-sector buildings, but given his announcement today, can the Minister give us a quick update on the research on standards and the value for money that he spoke about and that is already under way?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I will just say one thing about the entire construction industry: one of the best visits that I have had the pleasure to make as Minister was to the South West College in Enniskillen, where they have absolutely focused on this area of work and are skilling up young people to deliver zero-carbon and passive-energy homes. They have forged a path that is unique in Ireland. If we really want to be up in the champions' league of European

homes which are low carbon or zero carbon, we need to partner with business and the construction industry. The value will therefore be not only in energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty, but in gearing us up for a set of skills that will increasingly be in demand in the time ahead as we try to increase our delivery of buildings which are carbon neutral, low carbon or zero carbon.

### US Visit: Update

4. **Mrs Cameron** asked the Minister of Finance for an update on any outcomes resulting from his recent visit to the United States of America. (AQO 733/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I thank the Member for her question. I had a very constructive visit to the US. I met a number of influential public finance and Government representatives, including the New York State Comptroller, Tom DiNapoli; San Francisco Treasurer, José Cisneros; the California State Controller, Betty Yee; and the Chief Deputy Treasurer of California, Collin Wong-Martinusen. I also addressed a meeting of tech leaders in the Airbnb building in San Francisco which was convened by serial entrepreneur Seamus McAteer and, at the request of Invest NI, met a potential investor.

I view all these meetings as ongoing engagements. A number of avenues for continued cooperation and collaboration are being discussed, and I am hopeful of reporting back to the Assembly in the time ahead on plans to deepen this process of engagement to our mutual benefit. During this trip, my officials, working with the assistance of Invest NI and the bureau, also held some very helpful meetings with various finance officials to consider what options might be progressed to enhance external financing for companies and projects here.

**Mrs Cameron:** I thank the Minister for that detail. Given the outcome of the recent election, does he expect Northern Ireland to enjoy the same unique and special relationship, as it has been called, with the USA?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Yes, I do. I think that the Member will find it interesting that the person who gave us a tour of the Airbnb building in San Francisco was a Belfast-born gentleman called Marc McCabe. We have friends right across the US who are determined to ensure that the peace process is transformed into a prosperity process. Not only are they right across every sector of society, whether it be arts, community, third sector or education, but they are in politics. You will find that we have political friends on both sides of the aisle. While there has been traumatic change, some would say, or tumultuous change in US politics, the constant will be that there is continued support for the peace and prosperity process here.

**Mr Chambers:** Can the Minister confirm whether his trip to America at the start of this month included any meetings, even in his own time, to do with his personal interests as a director of Belfast Media Group Limited or with the Sinn Féin party?

### 3.00 pm

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I am here to speak as Minister. In the seven days that I spent in the US, we did enormously beneficial work for the community here. As I travelled from coast to coast, I received a gracious welcome from people who are focused on the work ahead, people who want

to build rather than tear down and people who want to accentuate the positive rather than focus on the negative.

If you ever have the opportunity to travel representing this Government, I think that you will find that it is more arduous than you might believe. While I had free time, I was not able on this occasion to use it to represent Sinn Féin or take on any other responsibilities.

**Mr Lyttle:** Did the Finance Minister gain any impression during his visit to the US of what impact a lack of access to the EU single market might have on US investment in Northern Ireland?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I was on both coasts, and I met different audiences; some were Irish-American audiences and some were solely business audiences, such as the meeting that we had in the Airbnb and those with other businesses. No one put up their hand and said, "We think this is a great idea that you're leaving the EU and the single market". I think that it is fair to say that those who wish to use us as a base for investment see us as being a gateway to the EU. The Member will not be surprised by that; it has been repeated many times by our friends on both coasts, particularly those who have been working closely with us over recent years. Of course, you know some of them.

### Ministerial Car: Cost

5. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of Finance, excluding the cost of the driver, what was the annual cost of his ministerial car over the last three years. (AQO 734/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I thank the Member for his question. During the past three complete financial years, the running costs for the ministerial car were £748 for 2013-14; £1,406 for 2014-15; and £3,687 for 2015-16. Those costs include fuel, maintenance and MOT-related expenses. The figures are subject to yearly variations depending on the Minister in charge and the associated mileage and fuel usage. They are also dependent, of course, on whether the car is under warranty and subject to an agreement for servicing.

**Mr Clarke:** I thank the Minister for the answer. I understand the need for and value of a ministerial car in terms of Ministers doing their duty. However, you have not included in those figures the depreciation costs of the vehicles used. I am trying to draw a parallel, Minister — I raised this question with the Health Minister last week — and I wonder what you can do to encourage your colleague to try to fix the disparity for some nurses who work in a crisis team and are paid a measly 20p per mile for the use of their own private cars.

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I am not responsible for the car fleet or the policy, but, if the Member wants to bring forward any alterations to the policy, I am happy to consider them.

**Mr Kearney:** Aire, an dtiocfadh leat cur síos? Cá mhéad uaireanta a mbíonn do thiománaí aireachta ag obair de ghnáth gach seachtain? How many hours would your ministerial driver typically work each week?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** He claims that he is overworked — that is the first thing. I thank the Member for his question. Mar atá a fhios agat, tá sé de chlú ar mo thiománaí gur oibrí díograiseach é agus go gcuireann sé uaireanta fada isteach. Bhí sin le feiceáil an tseachtain seo chuaigh thart agus inné. My driver has a reputation for hard work, early

starts and long hours. He neither clocks in nor out for me. Last Thursday, we started — this is not untypical — with a breakfast with Chartered Accountants Ireland in the Clayton Hotel in Belfast city centre and ended after meeting the Kilkeel Harbour Works folk at Annalong. It was a 7.30 am start for me and perhaps an 11.00 pm end. The car, of course, has to be parked up and so on, so the driver would start earlier than me. Where I am from, it is basically a 17-hour day. Yesterday was quite similar: we again started early with a coffee at 8.00 am; we were in this place and then had one more meeting; I was home at around 10.00 pm, and he was home later. When I was Lord Mayor of this great city, I had the privilege of having three drivers who worked full out and did a great job. In my view, we have discovered the three-in-one, in that my driver is performing the same job that three people performed.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I thank the Minister for the diary of Máirtín Ó Muilleoir.

**Ms Hanna:** I do not envy anyone who has to drive you around, with the schedule that we know you keep. Does the Minister's driver come from the pool of Civil Service drivers, and if not, why is that policy still in place?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** No, the driver does not come from the pool of Civil Service drivers, but if you can find a superman or superwoman who wants to take on this job from within that pool, no doubt some people would consider that. The present system works very well. It delivers for the Department and for me, and it is a system that has been in place for some time now. There have been efforts to snipe at the driver, who has a huge commitment to this institution, to the Department and to the Minister. He is doing a very good job, and the system is a very good system.

## Citizens' Budget

6. **Mr McGuigan** asked the Minister of Finance what plans his Department has to produce a citizens' budget. (AQO 735/16-21)

**Mr McGuigan:** I thank the Minister for driving forward the economy in the North.

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I thought you were going to congratulate me on driving through these questions. This is the first time that I have managed to get to Question 6.

I thank the Member for his question on the citizens' budget. I am committed to open and transparent government, and I am convinced that the production of a citizens' budget would be a positive development for all of us. I have asked my officials in the open government team to work with the Open Government Network to determine what a citizens' budget might look like and to progress this work at pace to allow its publication to become standard practice over this mandate.

**Mr McGuigan:** I thank the Minister for his answer. What steps is he taking to simplify Budget information?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** The interesting thing about the Open Government Network is that — maybe Members will not be surprised at this — the majority of people who pay rates, or pay tax or are the recipients of our services, generally, do not know where the money comes from or how it is allocated. To encourage not only compliance but engagement with our citizens, it would be helpful if we could publish, after the upcoming Budget, for example, a summary, hopefully on the website but also in other

formats as well, to let people know how the money is divided up. It lets them know the amount that we raise on their behalf but also how the money is allocated between Departments. Sometimes, the confusion around what taxation is paid and how it is delivered back into the communities would be clarified by such a system. However, more than that, we want people to be proud of the services that are delivered and understand how much we appreciate the contribution that their taxes — all types — make to the delivery of those services.

**Mr Smith:** Does the Minister accept that what the Executive have at present, namely, secret monitoring rounds, no longer any public consultation on annual Budgets and absolutely no transparency on how Department's baselines are generated or altered, is exactly the opposite of the thinking around a citizens' budget?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I thank the member for his question. I ask the Member to get on the phone to Mr Hammond, because if it was not for the dog's dinner, the mess and the shambles of the British Government, we would have had our Budget presented to the House long before now. Unfortunately, due to those difficulties and the crisis in London, our ability to bring forward a three-year resource Budget has been hampered. On the other hand, I will speak to the Chief Secretary tonight and we will see the outworkings of the autumn statement tomorrow. We will move expeditiously to bring a Budget in front of the House. I believe that I will recall the House to do that before Christmas. I hope that we will have as long, or longer, than we had to review the Budget last year.

As the British Government settles, Philip, that will enable us to bring forward a Budget system that, in fairness to some of my colleagues in other parties and in particular to Mrs Hanna of the SDLP, lets us simplify the entire process. There is a complicated Budget process. Let us simplify it internally, but also let us make sure that people outside understand what is being delivered and how it is being delivered.

**Mr Stalford:** I welcome what the Minister said about providing citizens with an itemised receipt for their rates and the other taxes that they pay, as I have raised that issue with him. Does he agree that it is important that people know and can see for themselves on a piece of paper precisely how the amount that they are billed in their rates is calculated in order that they get a full understanding of, for example, why in some areas their rates have gone up by significant sums?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I thank the Member for his question. Perhaps that is going to be a little bit more urgent after today, because of the changes that we are making to business and domestic rates. Although we have had a stab at it, when we issue rates bills, we are only starting. People need to have a clearer view of where their money is going.

I found it interesting when a deputation came here from the Basque Country a month or two ago. We met the group in Newry, and one of the points that they made was that they collect all their taxation and duty. They said that people really understand what they are getting for their money. They do not let the Government away with anything but have great engagement with them. Very importantly, compliance — the willingness to pay taxes — has increased.

The Member has brought up the issue before. He will agree that we have made a start, but we are nowhere

near where I would like us to be. I want people to get their rates bill and be able to see what council services they are paying for but also how their rates are making a contribution to the greater government Budget.

## Capital Investment

**7. Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Finance what plans he has to increase the scale and effectiveness of capital investment. (AQO 736/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Aside from the real terms increases in our local capital Budget, I plan to utilise any additional capital funding that may be announced tomorrow as part of the Chancellor's autumn statement to take forward an economic stimulus package with the agreement of my Executive colleagues and the House. That is a good idea, and we will be bringing it forward.

I also plan to ensure that the Executive seek ways in which to introduce capital investment from other sources. That is why I have organised a symposium with Ibec and the CBI on 27 January. It will give the construction and business sectors an opportunity to engage with government on investment opportunities and, of course, on where the funding will come from. In addition, I have recently appointed seven new external members to the procurement board from the private and voluntary and community sectors to determine how we spend our money. That includes Colin Maxwell, who is an artist and architect. I have tasked him with bringing forward proposals to promote architectural excellence and to further the arts in the Executive's infrastructure projects.

**Ms Seeley:** I thank the Minister for his answer. He has touched on my supplementary question, but, given that he has a keen interest in the arts, how does he intend to use capital investment to support the arts further?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** That is commonplace south of the border. Cork city in particular has published an evaluation recently of how it uses Per Cent for Art. It is common in parts of Europe and very common in San Francisco and New York that, when you undertake a capital project, you set aside a percentage for the arts. The consequence of that is that you really change the entire cityscape, or landscape of a city. It is my wish that we reinvestigate how Per Cent for Art, which existed but we have stopped for many years now, might be brought back to the centre of the procurement process and the centre of the building process. When you go to many great cities across Europe and the US and see new investment in capital build, you also see new works of public art. That is a good way to go, and I hope to be able to bring forward more ideas on that to the House.

**Mrs Little Pengelly:** I have been speaking to some people about some very exciting proposals for capital investment. Given that we are anticipating a four-year multi-year Budget tomorrow in the Chancellor's statement, will the Minister outline the time frame for the much-needed investment fund?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** We are doing better than we were when the Member, or one of her colleagues, last brought this up. She knows that we had some disappointing news from the European Investment Bank. We thought that it was not prudent for it to proceed along the lines that we had

originally envisaged with the NI investment fund, which was first put forward by your colleague Minister Hamilton.

## 3.15 pm

We are now making significant progress. I hope that we will get an OK from the Office for National Statistics and that we can move the investment fund off balance sheet, which means that we could deliver it in the middle of next year. As the Chairwoman is very aware, there are a lot of private sector people with energy projects in particular who really hope that we get this investment fund up and running because they will be coming to our door asking to borrow money to make transformative investments in the community.

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

## Councils: Urban Regeneration and Community Development Powers

**Mr Attwood:** I remind the Minister that on 8 November he said:

*"I and my party wish to see a stepping up of the pace of transfer of powers to councils". — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 120, p65, col 1].*

**T1. Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Finance whether he would agree that, if we were to learn in the next short while that urban regeneration and community development powers were not to be transferred to councils, that would be a big blow to those councils, which are seeking those powers and are, to quote the Minister, "as bold as possible in their vision and plans for the future". (AQT 526/16-21)

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I remind the Member that it should be a topical question, not a typical question. [Laughter.]

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Actually, I have met the 11 councils, and I do not see any of them with heads down or not willing to embrace the new opportunities that come from being larger councils. I have been in communication with some of the chief executives, whom the Member also knows, and am in no doubt that, in the time ahead, you will see a stepping-up and a considerable ramping-up of activities by councils as they are masters of their own destiny and will lead the charge for investment in their boroughs and cities.

**Mr Attwood:** Larger councils need larger powers; that is part of the deal for the reorganisation of local government. Will the Minister agree that, if development powers are not transferred, we have the Government pulling in two directions: you trying to help the high street, and another Minister, it might be, trying to impede the development of the high street?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I do not agree with that. I do not reduce councils to just the high street. I heard a senior person on Belfast City Council talking this week about projects that, as he will acknowledge, are as important, pioneering and transformative as any on the island of Ireland.

As I engage with CEOs, I have made it my business to engage with the mayors and the chairs, who come from all parties. I do not know whether the Member has seen this, but he knows that I met his brother who is a councillor

in Belfast at a gathering in Lisburn, and I sense a change of direction and a greater ambition. Yes, absolutely, some councillors are disappointed that they are not getting all the powers that they wanted. However, I do not agree with the Member that that will negate or hold back the ambition and the boldness that I see. In the Budget, I hope to bring forward measures focused on councils as full partners, and as they step up we will step up with them. The Member deals in particular with Belfast City Council, and I understand some disappointment in these matters.

Tonight, I am attending a meeting that involves Belfast City Council about investment in the city centre. Before Christmas, I hope to engage again with Lisburn and Castlereagh about investment. I have been contacted by Mid Ulster District Council. Just last week, I was at a dinner in Derry attended by John Kelpie, the CEO of Derry City and Strabane District Council.

We should take our inspiration and take heart from the attitude of councils. They are not getting everything that they want, or some councils are not getting everything that they want, but in no way is there any lessening of pace, and I intend to match that pace in the time ahead.

### Rates: Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

**Mr Storey:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Returning to his statement on rating policy earlier today, the Minister may be aware that the Northern Ireland centre for economic policy's conclusion in relation to the review of business rates was not supported by the evidence that was gathered from some 500 businesses, and they argued that the scheme should be retained and were against any attempt to restrict it.

T2. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Finance whether, in light of the statement today, he takes into account the concerns of businesses that argued for the retention of the small business rate relief scheme in that survey. (AQT 527/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I do, and I think that we have to move forward on these matters together. The Member knows that not every business organisation or business is supportive of the direction in which I am moving. We cannot ride roughshod over people. I ask him to bear in mind, however, that we need to do something different. We introduced a set of, if you wish, emergency business reliefs for small businesses in 2010 at a time of terrible economic crisis. I am not underestimating the challenges facing businesses today, but I think we have made progress.

I will try to take as many people as possible into account. As the Member will be aware, I do not think for a minute that I have all the answers; the proposals will be tweaked as they come forward. The only thing that I will say to him is this: let us not water down the proposals so that we end up with something that does not make an impact. If he can give me that assurance, I can assure him that I will consult all my colleagues on the best way forward as, of course, I must do.

**Mr Storey:** I thank the Minister for his reply. Will he give an assurance that small businesses, in particular those in the retail sector in my town of Ballymoney and in places like Ballycastle and Ballymena in my North Antrim constituency, that are deemed as retail will not be outside his definition of what retail is so that other sectors may

benefit at their expense, hence their rates might increase? That would obviously be of grave concern.

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I think that I am visiting your constituency either before or after Christmas to meet businesspeople and, no doubt, this will be high on the agenda.

I have not actually stated one definitive definition of retail. There are areas — hairdressers, for example — that seem to me to be services that are very close to retail. For things like payday lending and other matters — I have to apologise to my many friends who are accountants and solicitors — there are a lot of people who occupy offices and bring footfall to town centres. They have enjoyed business rate relief for seven years, but we now need to focus on the hospitality sector and the small retail sector.

I hope that we can do it in a way in which we can join up with councils or business organisations if there is a business improvement district to get extra power behind this push so that we are not standing alone on these matters and on the proposal. None of this will work, if it is seen in isolation. It really needs all those who have goodwill and have the interests of the high streets and town centres at heart to work together. The Member can be assured that I will work closely with those whom he represents. He can also be assured that I am convinced that we have to do things differently and that this will get a bigger bang for our buck.

### Social Investment Fund

T3. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Finance, given his position as guardian of the public purse, to give his assessment of whether there is waste, inefficiency or dead weight in the administration of the social investment fund. (AQT 528/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** It would not be Question Time if, somehow or other, the Alliance Party did not get the social investment fund into every question. I am neither the First Minister nor the deputy First Minister, he will be pleased to note.

I cannot think of a programme or an area of government that could not become more efficient. At the same time, I think that we should all acknowledge that there have been Trojan efforts, in recent times in particular, to deliver services more efficiently and, at the same time, do so in a way that saves money for the public purse. What I will say is that he can take it that I am 100% committed to making sure that every penny of public money that we have is guarded zealously and that, when it is spent, it is spent properly and in a way that is of benefit to the public. Those who pay taxes — we have talked a lot about that today — can be assured that, if their taxes are to be used and turned round, we will do everything to make sure that they get a full return on what is, I suppose, their investment.

**Mr Lunn:** I am quite encouraged by the Minister's answer. On the back of that, does he think that GEMS, which has done a lot of work in his constituency on employability, really needs an organisation like Charter NI to provide management services, given that it has provided much larger contracts without that requirement in the past?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** That would move me too far into another Department. I take the opportunity to commend the work of GEMS. The Member and I know of their work over many years. They are diligent, have an eye to the public purse

and are really concerned to make sure that they make a difference in people's lives. Where they deliver work — I do not know whether they are in your constituency in Lisburn, but they are in mine — they make a real difference. I reiterate my earlier comments — I know that he will agree with them — that we are all guardians of the public purse. I have an additional obligation and will make sure that it is carried out to the full.

### **Business Empowerment Zones: Newtownards Road, Belfast**

**Mr Lyttle:** As part of the rates reform announcement today, the Finance Minister proposed business empowerment zone pilots, one of which will be in my constituency of East Belfast from the Newtownards Road to the Holywood Arches. I declare an interest as a long-term tenant of Holywood Arches.

T4. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Finance whether he recognises the role that the entire Holywood Arches triangle from the Newtownards Road to Grampian Avenue has to play in the key regeneration challenge on the Newtownards Road. (AQT 529/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I welcome the Member's comments. I know that he has had only today to mull over the idea. We will have a greater opportunity to return to it in the time ahead, especially the MLAs for West Belfast and East Belfast. It will be a pilot, and, if it works, it would be great if we could have a rural pilot after that.

As you know, I said this morning that that is where I think the likely boundaries will be. It would be unfair of me to say that it will definitely start here and end there, and that is why I said that it was likely to be there. LPS has done some work in that area and calculated that the investment by the Government in that pilot business empowerment zone would be about £1 million. That will be for boosting businesses that are already there to ensure that they invest more and for attracting new investment. We will, of course, debate and discuss it with the other stakeholders in the area, but, if the Member thinks that it can be tweaked a little to bring in another slice of the Newtownards Road, he should put that forward. I do not think that we should be too definitive, but I also urge caution that we do not end up going down lots of byways and highways.

**Mr Lyttle:** I thank the Minister for his response. Will he undertake to meet businesspeople in the Holywood Arches and me to ensure that they are fully included in the proposal?

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Yes, absolutely. We have consulted stakeholder groups on the proposals and will be talking to people today, but I think that we need a wider meeting in east Belfast. This is an opportunity that needs to be seized. If we implement a business empowerment zone rates support or relief in isolation, it will not work; it will take MLAs, Departments — especially the Department for Communities — business organisations and Belfast City Council to get behind the idea. Of course, as he knows, I have an open-door policy and would be happy to welcome him and his constituents in to see me.

### **Rates: Charity Shops**

T5. **Ms Bradshaw** asked the Minister of Finance whether, when consulting on the potential changes to rates for

charity shops, he will meet the likes of the hospices, which provide beds for children in the last stage of their life and are very reliant on the income from shops and other sponsorship and funding efforts. (AQT 530/16-21)

**Ms Bradshaw:** There is an increasing gap between the amount that charities get from government and the amount that they have to raise. I want to put it on record that I am very concerned about the implications for front-line services of the policy announced today.

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I meet the folk from the Northern Ireland Hospice often. They know of my strong support for their efforts: my personal support and my support as a Minister. They also know my view that it is important that everyone who occupies a high street shop should make some contribution to the rates. If it turns out to be 10% — it is 20% in England, Scotland and Wales — it will be about £15 a week. I do not believe that any charity out there could not ask its landlord — many landlords are making a fortune because they renegotiated with charities that did not have the nous or the cutes to understand what they were signing up for — to take some of the pain. I am not saying that that is the case with the Northern Ireland Hospice, but they could certainly tell their landlord that they should take some of the pain on this.

I do not see it as being a threat to the charities in any way.

Some charities are much larger than others, of course, and some are very well resourced, of course, and, in my discussions with them I said, "Could we not look at ways of ring-fencing this money to work on entrepreneurship in the social sector?" In all the hubs around Belfast, I meet start-ups, small businesses and entrepreneurs who are focused on social enterprises, so there is an opportunity for us to find new, additional ways to raise revenue.

I will say this to the Member: she should not be overly concerned, but if she wants to share those concerns, she should do so in the time ahead. I will certainly maintain the very warm and close contact I have with the NI Hospice in the time ahead.

3.30 pm

## Question for Urgent Oral Answer

### Education

#### Schools: Proposed Industrial Action by the NASUWT

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Mr Chris Lyttle has given notice of a question for urgent oral answer to the Minister of Education. I remind Members that, if they wish to ask a supplementary question, they should rise continually in their places. The Member who tabled the question will be called automatically to ask a supplementary question.

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Education to outline the planning that has been made for schools affected by proposed industrial action by the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT).

**Mr Weir (The Minister of Education):** Industrial action by teachers has been ongoing since 2011. Very specifically, the last ballot by NASUWT was in 2011 voting for industrial action, and it has continued ever since.

The most recent escalation is linked to the recommendation by the management side of the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC) regarding teachers' pay for 2015 and 2016. The total pay deal across those two years is 2.61%. The Teachers' Negotiating Committee is the recognised negotiating machinery for teachers' terms and conditions, represented on the trade union side by the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC), which encompasses the five main teacher unions, and, on management side, by the main managing authorities, particularly the Education Authority and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS).

The management side of the TNC issued a letter to boards of governors and school principals on 17 November 2016 that included guidance for helping schools to manage in the face of escalated industrial action. I understand that today, management side urged the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council to suspend its industrial action and engage with management side in urgent negotiations to resolve the matters that have resulted in industrial action, with a particular focus on 2017 and beyond. I think we need to see not simply settlements of disputes that have been ongoing for a number of years but whether we can reach a realistic position as we move forward from 2017-18 and for the rest of this mandate.

**Mr Lyttle:** I thank the Speaker's Office for taking this question and the Education Minister for his response. I regret that we are only getting this opportunity so close to scheduled industrial strike action next Wednesday. Why has the Minister failed to support a 1% cost of living pay increase for teachers across Northern Ireland in 2015-16? What immediate action is he taking to avert industrial strike action scheduled for next Wednesday, which is likely to impact schools across Belfast and beyond?

**Mr Weir:** I am glad to see the urgency from the Member, given that I do not think he has been in contact with the Department to seek a meeting with me on the subject.

**Mr Lyttle:** You have refused to meet me on other issues, so —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Order.

**Mr Weir:** With respect, you have not. This may be a little bit about grandstanding rather than having real interest in the subject.

On the 1%, let us be clear: across the last two years ongoing negotiations took place, and a realistic approach was not taken. The initial position taken on the trade union pay claim, including the 1.13% increase in increments, was for an annual increase of 8.23%. That was sought by trade unions. There was then an increase, including an increment, of 3%, with no indication of a removal of that increment.

The Member and others refer consistently to the 1%, and, in particular, parity with England, Scotland and Wales has been raised. It should be noticeable that, for example, in Scotland, the pay rates are below those in Northern Ireland, and where annual increments are concerned, every teacher earning below £37,500 will receive a pay rise for 2015-16, but annual automatic increments were abolished in England a number of years ago. So, if we are looking to compare, we have to compare like with like. Even the more modest claim of a while ago of a 3% pay rise in-year would be three times what people get in England. If there has to be parity on the 1%, it has to be across the board.

There is no doubt that all of us would like more pay for a range of public-sector workers, but we are in tight financial circumstances. Let me make it clear: I want negotiations and discussions, particularly on how we deal with the rest of this mandate from 2017 onwards, but no additional money is available in-year. The Executive do not have the money, and, if it were to be injected into the system, given where school budgets are, it would simply lead to additional redundancies. If faced with the choice between additional pay and additional redundancies, I want to keep people in jobs and to put pupils first by ensuring that teachers are kept employed.

**Mrs Overend:** I thank the Minister for his responses. I understand that teachers are taking action over pay, workload and job security. What is the Minister doing to reduce the workload on teachers, including cutting down on paperwork and other non-teaching duties, to enable them to spend more time doing what they do best: teaching? What is he doing to help on job security issues?

**Mr Weir:** We have much greater job security than in England, for example, and that is where a like-with-like comparison is not being made. There is better tenure and job security in Northern Ireland. In that sense, there are better terms and conditions in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the United Kingdom.

The Member makes a valid point about the pressures with paperwork. That is why, as part of the preconsultation exercise that I embarked on a couple of weeks ago, I wrote to every school, asking not simply where there should be greater autonomy but where burdens are being put on schools by the Department, the Education Authority or anybody else that are unnecessary and that duplicate work. I agree with the Member that, if we can reduce unnecessary administrative burdens as much as possible and, indeed, remove them, we should embrace that.

**Mr McElduff:** In light of the fact that there have been increases to teachers' pension contributions and employees' National Insurance contributions as well as, in recent years, changes to income tax thresholds, will teachers be better off or worse off? How does that compare with other public-sector workers?

**Mr Weir:** The Member raises a number of points. There will be a mixed bag as a result of some of the changes. Income tax thresholds, for instance, have moved upwards, which means that a reduced level of tax will be paid on that side of things. With National Insurance contributions, there is additional pressure on the Executive. We always look at the headline figure on where we are with the block grant, but, because of changes made nationally to National Insurance contributions by employers, an extra £22 million burden has been placed directly on schools. Some £40 million has been placed on Education, but that is not unique to Education. I am sure that one of the Members opposite will look at the fact that a massive burden has also been placed on the health service because of those changes. In effect, it is not just a cut to Education but a cut across the board.

Other public-sector workers were mentioned. I indicated that the changes mean that, for 2016-17, everyone will get a direct pay increase and an increment, and everyone earning below £37,500 for 2015-16 will see a pay rise. Mention was made of the rate given to nurses. It should be remembered that automatic progression in teaching to the top point of the upper pay scale takes a teacher up to £37,900. For a nurse in a similar position, the maximum rate is £28,000, which is for longer hours. Indeed, a teacher's hourly rate is about 50% higher than that of a nurse when both are at the highest point of the upper pay scale.

When comparisons are made, they have to be made within the full context. It should also be indicated that the pay rises are not simply to basic pay; there is also 1% for 2016-17 on every teaching allowance, whether it is a management allowance or additional activities that the teacher does for which they are paid. That is also being increased.

**Lord Morrow:** Has the Minister had any feedback from principals and chairs of boards of governors re the impact of the industrial action that has been ongoing since 2011 on children and educational attainment?

**Mr Weir:** There are obviously concerns out there. To be fair, despite any industrial action, children have achieved. We have seen good results in Education and Training Inspectorate inspections and in exams. The aim of this should always be to ensure that we put pupils first. The biggest concern that has been raised with me consistently, time and time again both before I came into office and since I came into office, is the state of school budgets. I have to be very wary that, as been highlighted on a number of occasions, there are schools that will move into greater deficit problems. I have to say that the solution to that, if schools are to live within budget, will be greater levels of redundancy. If we put additional costs into the system — the vast bulk of expenditure in schools is pay, particularly teacher pay — unfortunately we will simply force more people out of the profession. We will increase redundancy levels. That is something that we need to bear in mind as well, and it is why people need to think again and act realistically.

**Mr McGrath:** Does the Minister agree with the teaching unions that the real-terms decrease in teachers' pay from 2010-11 has been 15%? Does he accept that that has a poor impact on teaching morale? Is there anything that can be done to address that?

**Mr Weir:** No, I do not agree. Indications are given about cuts to pay: pay is actually rising. For example, in the last two years, pay has risen by 2.61%. There is no inexhaustible supply of money, and that is the same throughout the public sector, where there are big pressures. The overall education budget is down this year. Given the pressures on the Executive, we are not in a position to give the 15% pay rises that people are talking about. At one stage, one of the unions talked about how they needed 13% to be brought up to parity. Those are just not realistic figures. Quite frankly, all of us have to live in the real world. There have to be discussions about how we can best move forward. However, if fantasy figures are produced for what should happen on pay, there has to be a realisation that that can only be paid for out of the budget for schools, which itself can only be paid out of the budget for education and the block grant. Such pay increases are not realistic. Instead of people grandstanding on issues sometimes, we need to ensure that we deal with things realistically.

**Ms Armstrong:** What action is the Minister taking to rationalise the administration of education in Northern Ireland to ensure that the system allows adequate pay for teachers and adequate resources for our schools?

**Mr Weir:** There has been a wide range of rationalisation in the movement and the Education Authority. In terms of the pressures that are there, the uptake of the voluntary exit scheme has been considerable; indeed, the bid that has been put in for voluntary exit in the Department of Education is greater than that in any other Department. So there has been a reduction of staff in the Department and in the Education Authority, and that is an ongoing issue. However, given where we are with school budgets, that in and of itself will not match all of the gap. That is why we need to be responsible when it comes to levels of pay. I will try to drive out any additional cost that is in the system, but that cannot simply happen overnight. To be fair to my predecessor and to the Executive as a whole, that has been embraced in terms of VES and investing in the teacher workforce, which, as it moves forward, will not only refresh the workforce but lead to a reduction in cost pressures. However, ultimately, there is a limit to what people can be paid. As I said, if automatic increments are simply to be held onto when they are not there in other parts of the United Kingdom, teachers cannot also claim that there should be parity on every issue of pay.

### 3.45 pm

**Mr E McCann:** Would the Minister and Members not agree with me that teachers do not take lightly to industrial action but they recognise the inextricable link between teachers' pay and conditions on the one hand and the provision of first-class education to our children on the other? Is it not the case that they are defending the public service against the job losses etc involved in the Fresh Start Agreement? They are, therefore, giving good example to children and to people generally across society. In light of that, would the Minister and other Members care to join me and my comrade Gerry Carroll on the picket line with the teachers next week — *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Order.

**Mr E McCann:** — and join me in saying that they are giving good example? I say this: let us back the local teachers and defend the future of our children.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** The Member has asked his question, thank you.

**Mr Weir:** I indicated at the start of my comments that there had been an ongoing state of industrial action since 2011. I suspect that, for the Member, there has been ongoing industrial action since about 1971. I will not be joining him.

With respect, the Member seems to propagate the same fantasy politics. At least I have some sympathy for the previous questioner, who asked what we could do to drive out unnecessary administrative costs. Ultimately, we should look to reduce administration, and that means ensuring that voluntary redundancies and the VES are at the maximum. If we put those savings into education funding, that is a sensible way forward. I am sure that the Member wants to see an expansion of the numbers in the public service and greater pay for everyone in it: mathematically, that does not add up. I cannot simply pluck figures out of the air or add money to it. I wait to see the industrial action where the Member and his colleague are not on the picket line; when the Member refuses to join the picket line, that is maybe when I should go onto it.

**Mr Agnew:** There will have been Barnett consequentials to the pay rise that was given to teachers in England. Whilst I appreciate that that would not have been ring-fenced, did the Minister make the case to the Finance Minister that that money should come to him and his Department?

**Mr Weir:** There are not Barnett consequentials to that. We must keep our spending within the block grant. There is a myth that separate money was set aside by Westminster for teacher pay. That was not the case, nor indeed, as some have alleged, was that money going back to Westminster. The money that has not gone into the pay rise has gone directly into school budgets to provide teachers with jobs. That is something that we have to realise: if we inject additional cost into the system, it will lead to redundancies. On the flip side, if we are able to spend that money directly on schools in providing education and not a penny goes elsewhere, we can actually help to protect those jobs. Those are the real choices, as opposed to the choices that some in the House would have us make.

**Mr Logan:** Will the Minister detail for the House the average annual salary of a teacher in Northern Ireland?

**Mr Weir:** Inclusive of employer contributions, the average teacher salary is £48,874 gross. The majority of teachers are above upper pay scale. Upper pay scale, at present, in terms of what they directly receive, is £37,870. As I indicated, increments are included in 2015-16 for anybody below that scale. Therefore, we are not talking about the low-paid. The low-paid in teaching are being protected, because they are receiving increments, which means that everybody below the level of £37,870 will see a pay increase for 2015-16.

**Ms Seeley:** I thank the Minister for his answers so far. I am sure that he will join me in commending the sterling and invaluable work that our teachers do, day and daily, at a time of increased pressure.

What action has the Minister taken, or will he take prior to Wednesday, to do all he can to avert strike action and to bring the ongoing industrial action to an end?

**Mr Weir:** The direct relationship in respect of the pay is between TNC and the unions. I join, though, with the call from the chair of the TNC, today, urging the unions to get back around the table to look at where we can have pay settlements from 2017-18 onwards, to look at the long term and, indeed, to look at any of the issues that people want to be brought to the table. I am not going to pretend to people that there is a pot of money, which I am holding back and could give out if only there was agreement. There is no more money. That is where we are, unfortunately, in the current financial circumstances.

I do not want to mislead people. I urge people from the management side and the trade union side to engage seriously to address these issues and to get round the table and try to discuss those issues. It is a problem that previous Ministers had as well. When we were talking about the 2015-16 settlement, discussions went on for 15 months, without agreement being reached. It stretched over the last two jurisdictions. I think that people have to engage seriously.

**Mr Lunn:** Does the Minister agree that we train too many teachers? One of the criticisms of his two predecessors was that they asked for far too many teachers to be trained without the expectation of a job. Will he undertake to review that situation now that he has control of the numbers?

**Mr Weir:** I am certainly happy to work with the Economy Minister, in particular, because, obviously, there is a split. When we talk about teacher training, there is the issue of the numbers, which, I suppose, directly falls to my Department and the Economy Department, so I am happy to look at those issues. I do not think that the gap between the numbers coming into the profession and numbers being trained is that enormous. We have to look at the correct model. I think that getting the correct model for sustainability in teacher training is a wider piece of work. I am happy to look at those issues, but I do not think they are directly related to the current dispute. However, it is, obviously, an important, separate issue.

**Ms Lockhart:** I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. It is disappointing that, at a time when, I believe, staff morale is low, we have this question before the House in such a manner. I thank the Minister for his efforts in assisting teachers in this role. Will the Minister explain to the House and dispel the myth that teachers on the mainland are better off than those in Northern Ireland?

**Mr Weir:** There is a difference of position. As I said, starting salaries in Scotland are lower than those in Northern Ireland, and that even works up to the maximum level. I do not have the figures in front of me, but I did read earlier, if Members would give me a moment, that, in Scotland, they reach the maximum position of £35,409 at the end of the scale, which is approximately £2,500 less than in Northern Ireland. Yes, the 1% that was put in for England and Wales would leave the maximum of the scale at a higher level. However, the difference is that the Northern Ireland wage settlement for 2015-16 and 2016-17 contains pay progression by way of an automatic increment, because there has not been agreement to remove that. That was abolished in 2013 in England,

which means that there is no automatic pay progression based on time served in England. You are dependent on performance and are at the whim of the board of governors. So, there is a differential on that side of it. On that basis, there is a distinction.

The pay deal across the board in Scotland, for example, was 2.5% over the last two years. It is 2.61% here. So, I think there is a myth being put out. If some of the unions were simply saying, "We will accept a 1% pay deal" or "We will accept a deal on that basis", on the basis of parity, the offers that they made, the initial positions, were, in composite terms, round about 8.3%, which is massively different from what is in the rest of the United Kingdom. Therefore, if people are going to ask for parity, they also have to bear that in mind in their demands.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I call Jennifer McCann.

**Ms J McCann:** My question has been answered.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** OK. That completes questions on the topic. Before we return to ministerial statements, I ask Members to take their ease while we make changes to the top Table.

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

## Ministerial Statements

### Regeneration Bill

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** I have received notice from the Minister for Communities that he wishes to make a statement.

**Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities):** I wish to make a statement on the extension of my Department's urban regeneration and community development powers to local government.

Over the past year, we have seen real change in local government. The 11 new councils have been established, and a range of additional functions and powers has been transferred from central government to them. The aim of the transfer of such key functions as planning, local economic development and local tourism, coupled with the new responsibility for community planning, was to allow councils to take the lead in reshaping and building their communities.

As Members will be aware, it was also the intention of the Executive to extend to councils the Department for Social Development's statutory powers for urban regeneration and community development, but that was unable to progress in the mandate of the previous Assembly. It was also recognised that the new Department for Communities would have responsibility for a much wider range of functions than the Department for Social Development and that it would be better to assimilate the various new functions into the new Department before deciding whether and when some of those responsibilities would be best delivered at a local level.

I have now completed six months as Communities Minister. I have spent a lot of that time on the ground, speaking and listening to the people who use my Department's services and receive its funding, to elected representatives and to community activists. I have seen at first hand the transformative impact that regeneration projects can have on our town and city centres and the contribution that they can make to enhancing the shared space and vibrancy of our communities. I have seen, irrespective of where legislative responsibility lies, that local government plays a huge role in ensuring the successful implementation of our regeneration programmes. Whether it is in Belfast, Londonderry, Lisburn, Armagh or Newry or in our important towns across Northern Ireland, such as Enniskillen, Dungannon, Ballymena and Bangor, a key feature of all that work has been the level of collaborative working that has been achieved between local councils and my Department. That is exactly the type of cross-boundary working that is needed under our new Programme for Government.

The Programme for Government sets out an entirely new context for the delivery of our services, including the way in which we address poverty and disadvantage and the way in which we use our statutory powers to drive economic growth and lever new investment to benefit everybody in this society. The key message from the Executive is that we all, whether we are in central government, local government or outside of government, must ensure that we work in a joined-up way across

departmental, organisational and sectoral boundaries and use all our resources and skills to deliver lasting change.

It is my assessment therefore that the new context calls for a new direction of travel. I want my Department to be at the forefront of that change, using all the powers and resources at its disposal to achieve the outcomes and the ambition that the Executive have for our society, as set out in the Programme for Government.

#### 4.00 pm

This is not the time to tinker with who is responsible for what or to concern ourselves with the splitting up of the regeneration budget. Rather, it is the time for all the stakeholders to work together to maximise our joint effect and achieve positive change in the issues that have bedevilled this society for too long.

Therefore, I am announcing today that I do not intend to bring forward proposals to extend my Department's urban regeneration and community development powers to local government during this mandate. Rather, I want to see central and local government operating within our respective existing legislative, community planning and resource frameworks, working with other stakeholders, whether in the community or private sectors, to maximise the impact that we can make together. This is not simply about improving our public realm and increasing our shared space; it is about creating more vibrant places with more employment opportunities and better housing, addressing poverty, and improving the quality of people's lives.

I also want to explore whether there is a case for extending our regeneration activities to settlements of fewer than 5,000 people. There are many small settlements that serve the same role in the community as larger places, but which, because of our current policy to restrict access to town centre regeneration funding to towns with populations above 5,000, do not directly benefit from investment in the enhancement of public and shared space available to their larger neighbours.

A change to — or, indeed, the removal of — the population threshold could open up opportunities to lever in much greater investment, including from the private sector and local government, into new areas, producing employment opportunities by, for example, exploiting social clauses. This proposal also offers scope for enhanced collaboration and cross-government working with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and with the Department for Infrastructure.

I have, therefore, asked my officials to review the population thresholds and consider options for extending my Department's physical regeneration programme, public-realm schemes, development grants and revitalisation activity to projects that promote the vibrancy and vitality of smaller settlements currently designated rural but which provide retail services and employment opportunities equivalent to more populous ones. That would ensure that citizens living, socialising and availing themselves of services in smaller settlements had access to the same benefits of public-space developments as their counterparts in larger conurbations.

In all of this, I want to emphasise the essential involvement of colleagues in local government. We already have many fine examples of good public-realm improvement resulting from the combined efforts of local government and my

Department. Nothing I have said today will change that. On the contrary, I want to see more such collaborative work, where each sector exploits its strengths and authority to maximise the benefits and reach of our public realm programmes.

Finally, I want to set out my intentions with regard to the neighbourhood renewal programme. Neighbourhood renewal was a 10-year strategy, launched in 2003 to deal with the circumstances at that time, and, since its inception, there has been investment of almost £280 million. The programme has had many successes in helping to nurture community development and in improving the physical fabric, facilities and environment of many of our most deprived areas, and there have been significant improvements across a number of social and economic indicators during the lifetime of the strategy.

The programme has been subject to interim and final evaluations. These studies reported that, whilst there has been some narrowing of the gap between the neighbourhood renewal areas and the rest of Northern Ireland on a range of social and economic outcome indicators, those areas remain some way behind the rest of the country.

Neighbourhood renewal had notable success in community development outcomes. It laid many of the foundations necessary for ensuring that communities can engage in community planning with councils. It instilled a sense of pride amongst residents in their areas and encouraged high levels of community participation in the development of action plans and in the interventions that flowed from them.

The strategy had many demonstrable successes in physical and environmental improvements, with ample evidence of the benefits accrued through neighbourhood renewal capital investment. Examples include sports facilities, childcare facilities, community centres, business units and play parks.

However, we have to recognise that things have moved on; there is a different context now. The Programme for Government places responsibilities on us to focus our efforts on things that make a difference and to challenge ourselves to find better ways of making a positive impact on the outcomes it sets out to achieve. Given where we are, and in the context of the achievements of the programme over the last 13 years, it is my intention to review the current strategies for tackling deprivation with a view to replacing them with a programme that will be more closely aligned to support the delivery of the new Programme for Government outcomes.

It is in all our interests to see whether we can design a programme that will have a greater impact on the intractable social and economic barriers which limit the life chances of so many in our community. In that way we can be better assured about the effectiveness of our interventions to address poverty and deprivation and improve the lives of people facing barriers to participation in the economy and in the cultural and social life of Northern Ireland. It will be important to ensure that any new programme builds on, and does not lose, the real benefits of the existing programme. I will also wish to consult stakeholders on the way forward as proposals are being developed and their impact assessed. The current neighbourhood renewal strategy has provided many good

news stories across all of the areas that have participated in the programme and, in acknowledging these successes, I record my gratitude to all involved.

I conclude by giving an assurance that there will be no sudden change to the delivery of the neighbourhood renewal programme and it will remain in place until the review is complete. This is a process that will take 18 months to two years to complete. The development of proposals will be informed by widespread consultation. I particularly want to ask those who have been involved in the neighbourhood renewal process to bring their experience and knowledge to these discussions with my Department as we take this work forward.

In closing, my statement today brings much-needed clarity to an issue in which there is huge interest across Northern Ireland. It sets out an inclusive way forward, which will allow us to exploit the strengths of central and local government. More than that, it provides an opportunity, through collective effort, to extend the reach of our programmes so that more of our constituents can better benefit from our interventions. The new Programme for Government signals a new way of working, a renewed focus on outcomes that requires us to think differently and challenge the way we do things. This is an important step on that journey and I look forward to the outcome.

**Mr Eastwood (The Chairperson of the Committee for Communities):** I thank the Minister for his statement. There will be much disappointment at the announcement that the regeneration powers will not be transferred to councils. There will also be new uncertainty injected into community groups around the North as a result of the announcement on neighbourhood renewal. Does the Minister accept that with Brexit and all the uncertainty in the funding environment for these groups, this injects a new level of uncertainty? Can he guarantee, going forward after his 18-month review, that money and funding will be given to groups on the basis of objective need and that we are not looking at creating another social investment fund (SIF)?

**Mr Givan:** I reject the assertion that this is going to be met with disappointment: quite the opposite. There may be some with their own interests who may be disappointed, but those who share the common goal of improving our town centres and tackling deprivation and poverty will recognise that I have outlined a real opportunity. It is a way for us to come together, look at the outcomes that we want to achieve and at how best to achieve them.

Let me be clear: the end users of all these services do not differentiate between the ratepayer and the council delivering them or the taxpayer and Stormont delivering them; they want services to be delivered in the most effective and efficient way possible. The process I am going to take forward will be able to deliver those services and those who will benefit will be thankful for having them delivered.

Let me assure the Member and other Members of the House, as I did during the statement, of the huge value that I place on the work that neighbourhood renewal has carried out and of my commitment that, as part of the process, there will be widespread consultation. Neighbourhood renewal will continue until the process concludes. The end goal in all of this is to make sure that we can tackle poverty and deprivation in the communities that need to have it addressed. We will take this forward

in the inclusive manner that I hope everybody will recognise and come to the table and take part in a genuine commitment to address all the issues that we share and reach the end goal that we want to achieve.

**Mr McQuillan:** I thank the Minister for his statement, which I welcome. Given the emphasis, Minister, that you have put on the new Programme for Government, what PFG outcome will the Department align its regeneration activities to?

**Mr Givan:** My statement mentioned the new Programme for Government, within which are indicators that my Department leads on and others that my Department will contribute to. The Department leads on indicator 19, which is about reducing poverty; indicator 32, which is to increase the economic opportunities for our most deprived communities; and indicator 42, which is to increase the quality of life for people with disabilities. Those are good examples.

We are also contributing to other areas. We contribute to indicator 31, for example, which is about increased shared space and is primarily the responsibility of the Executive Office; and to indicator 30, which is to improve our attractiveness as a destination and is primarily for the Department for the Economy. Where I have direct responsibility and where I have responsibility to support other Departments in achieving these indicators, it is vital that we have all the tools at our disposal to do that. That is why we need to take the step that I have taken today of enabling this Department to have those tools available to it to really drive forward in tackling the issues that the Programme for Government highlights.

**Ms Ni Chuilín:** As some will, no doubt, be disappointed that functions will not be transferred to local government, will the Minister confirm something that he said in his statement? I welcome his commitment to neighbourhood renewal and that there will be a continuation for 18 months to two years while the review is going on. However, can he confirm that any review will be done on the basis of tackling poverty and deprivation, that it will look at the role of other bodies and agencies to ensure that they, too, have a part in the delivery of any new neighbourhood renewal programme, and that it will be built on objective need? In my opinion, in the past — not under your watch — reviews were a result of political vetting.

**Mr Givan:** I am happy to give the assurance to the Member that we need to ensure that all the stakeholders feel very much a part of the review and that we collectively recognise the needs that exist and how best we want to meet them. Neighbourhood renewal plays a very significant role in all of that. I had conversations with a number of councillors, and they were keen to have the regeneration powers for public realm work, environmental improvement schemes and revitalisation, but there was certainly a concern from a number of councillors about having the neighbourhood renewal functions transferred to local government. There was no consensus in local government on the issue when I spoke to a number of councillors.

This is an opportunity, Members, for us to tackle these issues and for my Department to take the lead on it. I am a Minister who wants to be held to account, who recognises the challenges and who wants to have the responsibility of leading on all this change on behalf of the Executive

through the Programme for Government. For me to do that, we need to have the tools at our disposal in the Department, and Members will rightly be able to hold me to account for the actions that I take.

**Mr Allen:** I thank the Minister for his statement. Minister, do you not agree that this decision goes against the ethos of the local government reform, given that devolving regeneration powers to councils was a central element of that? Is this an aspect of the Government retaining power for the sake of holding power? Minister, will you advise where this leaves community planning?

**Mr Givan:** As indicated in the statement, the way in which the Executive Departments have been reconfigured means that there is a new context. This Department is the biggest Department in the Executive and has a range of functions now within its responsibility. I considered those responsibilities and the way in which the Programme for Government is changing how it wants to deliver government through the outcomes-based approach, and that set the context in which I had to consider the issue. I do not recognise the narrative that the Member outlined. My Department is involved in the community planning role and in subcommittees within community planning, and it will continue to be very much a part of that.

My statement makes clear that local government has its strengths, and we have partnered with local government on a wide range of areas. We have funded master plans and had councils lead on the contracts for public realm work. That has worked very well, and that will continue to be the case. I know local government will recognise the opportunities that will exist for the Department to tackle a wide range of areas, and I know it will find in me, as Minister, someone who wants to very much partner with it by recognising its skills in addressing these issues.

#### 4.15 pm

**Mrs Long:** One key aspect of the transfer of regeneration powers was the ability to use comprehensive development and land assembly powers, alongside planning and economic development responsibilities, to co-invest in schemes. Developers have said clearly that what they want from councils is a one-stop shop so that they can regenerate major sites. Is this not simply the hallmark of an Executive showing control freakery, whereby distributing power or allowing other people to take a lead on things is sneered at? In fact, is it not the case that local government was the one that lobbied for those powers to be devolved?

**Mr Givan:** No, I do not accept the "control freakery" comment. This Department, when it was previously DSD, was able to use those powers to assemble land for development, not least for some of the major retail centres that now exist in Belfast city centre. There should be no conflict in being able to progress all those matters when assembling land. I will do that where the case has been put forward to do so.

The Member made the point that my Department is holding on to power rather than passing it on to local government. I will point out that it is the two Executive parties that also make up the majority across local government, so it cannot be the case that we are holding power away from it when, in transferring this to local government, it will be the two Executive parties that will control the majority of all its authorities. Members need to move away from

that mentality and recognise that this is about delivering services. Ultimately, as I said in my earlier comments, the public do not differentiate between local and central government. All they want is the service delivered and their area improved, and through this approach we will do that in the most efficient and effective way possible.

**Mr Stalford:** I welcome the Minister's statement, because it provides much-needed clarity. This issue has been running for a long time in local government. The Minister will be aware that different councils were at different levels of preparedness for the planned transfer of powers. Under the announcement that has been made, is there scope for tailored cooperation going forward between different councils that were at different levels of preparedness to deliver, as the Minister said, the services all our people want?

**Mr Givan:** Very much so. That is the approach I have taken in office when local government has come to me to outline what its plans are and ask whether we can partner with it. When that request has come in, local government has always had a very sympathetic hearing. We have then developed those relationships and have been able to partner with local government, not least with Belfast City Council in the area the Member represents. At a strategic level, the Belfast regeneration directorate has formally adopted Belfast City Council's city centre regeneration and investment strategy. Again, throughout the country, the regional regeneration office has worked with councils to produce master plans for our towns and cities. At a project level, the public realm schemes have all been developed in partnership with councils, and often the councils lead on the delivery of those projects.

Through neighbourhood renewal funding, the Department has delivered many projects in partnership with councils. In Londonderry, for example, two play parks were delivered in the past year in the interface areas of Irish Street and Top of the Hill. I was able to visit both of them earlier in the year during the summer. That again demonstrates the benefits of partnership working with councils. I very much want to work with local government, and I know it wants to work with me. When, in a spirit of collaboration, we come together wanting to address the same areas we recognise need to be addressed, we will be able to collectively achieve that desired outcome.

**Ms Gildernew:** I thank the Minister for his statement. I am delighted he is considering lowering — hopefully, he will remove it altogether — the threshold for public realm investment in smaller towns and villages.

It was regrettable that the threshold was introduced by a previous Minister for Social Development. It has really been a disadvantage to many small towns and villages.

The Minister has outlined some of the things that he sees as being part of that: childcare, play facilities etc. He has set down a timescale of 18 months to two years. Is there an opportunity for the Department to engage with smaller towns and villages about what they would see, or do they have to wait to the end of that process for a decision on the threshold?

**Mr Givan:** We have decoupled the two issues of neighbourhood renewal and the threshold with regard to how we use urban regeneration powers around public realm and that type of work. It will not be held back in looking at neighbourhood renewal. Once we have a review and consider how we would do it, I hope to be in a position

to announce, if the threshold is lowered, what it is lowered to or, indeed, whether there should be a threshold at all. I know of the valuable contribution that smaller towns and villages make, and they are very much the hub of rural communities. It is important that they get investment, not just the bigger towns and cities. I hope to be in a position to announce what the threshold will be and whether it is lowered or removed altogether much sooner than the neighbourhood renewal review, which will take around 18 months to two years.

**Ms Lockhart:** I thank the Minister for his statement. The public, I believe, do not mind who does the work as long it gets done. As an MLA for a constituency with many small towns and villages, such as Dollingstown, Waringstown, Seapatrick and Scarva, can I ask the Minister how his Department will determine which small settlements will benefit from public realm schemes?

**Mr Givan:** I think that the Member fitted in all the small settlements in the Upper Bann constituency. She has had me out at a number of them, making the point that investment needs to be carried out in these villages and not solely in larger towns and cities. Currently, the settlement classification for public realm works is determined solely on the basis of population. That means that, to date, settlements with a population of 5,000 and over get the investment and those below that are denied investment from the Department's regeneration programmes. There has been criticism of that approach in some quarters. We want to explore whether a case could be made for smaller settlements based on other criteria that would take in, for example, service provision in those smaller towns and villages.

**Mr Smith:** If the public do not care who does what, it raises this question: why have devolution at all? The Minister will, I hope, be aware of correspondence that I have sent him seeking feedback on my private Member's Bill, which proposes devolving powers to local government, including regeneration powers. As he is, I believe, now responding on behalf of the Executive but has yet to do so, can I assume that his statement indicates his lack of support?

**Mr Givan:** The Member has been very astute in understanding what the ministerial statement has outlined for regeneration powers. That is not to say that there are no other functions that the Executive may wish to consider that could go to local government and may be more appropriate for local government to deal with.

As the Member will know, I chair the regional partnership panel on behalf of the Executive, where I formally meet 11 representatives of the local authorities. We have now extended that to include the chief executives. That allows a direct connection between local government and Stormont where we are able to engage on these issues, and the councils are able to have input. We can update local government. It is a framework that could do more than what it has been able to achieve so far. I indicated at our last regional partnership panel meeting that I very much recognise this as the key connection between local government and the Executive. It will be the vehicle by which we will want to have more detailed engagement with local authorities.

The Member's request has come into my Department, and he will get a formal notification. The statement, however,

is very clear: the Department is best placed to deliver on regeneration powers.

**Mr F McCann:** I thank the Minister for his statement. People have believed for a long time that the concept of neighbourhood renewal is excellent. The delivery by Departments and sometimes statutory bodies fell down, and communities felt it. Can the Minister give an assurance that local government will still have the opportunity to deliver regeneration programmes and projects with the Department, given that those functions will not be transferred to local government?

**Mr Givan:** I give that commitment to the Member. Obviously, local government will have greater powers when it comes to taking forward a range of issues, working with my Department. Where local government wants to make investment around the regeneration of communities in its areas, it will be able to do so. I will certainly be supportive of councils that want to take forward projects. I will happily partner with them as well. Where there are single issue-type areas in which local government wants to take forward regeneration work, it will be able to do that.

**Ms Mallon:** Can the Minister explain the lack of coherence and consistency coming from the Executive? We have a Finance Minister making statements about the need to regenerate our towns, cities, communities and high streets and then a Minister for Communities who today announces that the tools needed to make that happen — the transfer of regeneration and community development powers to councils — will not happen.

**Mr Givan:** I am sure that the Member listened carefully to the Minister of Finance and to my ministerial statement. I do not think that you will see a contradiction in what was said anywhere. I made it clear in my statement how much I valued the work that local government carries out and how much I wanted to work with it in collaboration, which is the way we have been able to work with local government on a range of issues. Local authorities have been with me, outlining programmes that they would like the Department to support. I will very much work with local government to take forward all the programmes that they want within the responsibilities that I have in my Department.

Local government can be reassured today. This provides clarity around the issue. Local authorities have talked about it at length. It is an issue that they have asked me to give clarity on. Often, a decision one way or the other is exactly what they want. They then know the framework that they are operating in, and we can collectively move forward. Local government and the Executive are committed to achieving the same objectives: to regenerate our communities, improve our town and city centres and tackle the poverty and deprivation that Members spoke about at length yesterday during the debate that the two parties brought forward. This is a way in which I have demonstrated my commitment to tackling the issues that Members raised during the debate yesterday.

**Dr Farry:** This really is a kick in the teeth for local government; the hard-working and free-thinking councillors from all political parties; the community planning process, which is a bottom-up process; and the review of public administration itself. Will the Minister comment specifically on the implications that this has for the ongoing development work that councils have been taking forward, which was predicated on the transfer

of regeneration powers? I particularly have in mind the Queen's Parade development in my home town of Bangor, which was very much based on the transfer happening. Other work will now have to be done to accommodate the change of course by the Department.

**Mr Givan:** This is very much a vote of confidence in the ability of local government to partner with the Executive. I know that local government will welcome the fact that I have made it clear that I want to work in collaboration with the 11 councils in Northern Ireland. Together, we will be able to maximise the strengths that each of us has in terms of the Executive and local government, recognising that we have different strengths and abilities to achieve the end objectives that we all want to address. This is very much an opportunity for us now to move on, recognising the framework in which we will operate, and collectively put our shoulder to the wheel to address the issues. Councils will be able to continue with the work that they have been doing in developing their plans and assessing how they want to regenerate towns, cities and villages. My Department will very much play a full role in that process to make sure that those plans become a reality.

#### 4.30 pm

**Mr Attwood:** I want to make it very clear that we, on these Benches, unlike some others nearby, take with a big pinch of salt the DUP's commitment to neighbourhood renewal and the principles that have underpinned that strategy for many a long year; a huge, big pinch of salt. We will be watching you, Minister, very closely. Laugh as you do, but there are a lot of people who will not have smiles on their faces today.

Does the Minister not accept that the very essence of the transfer of powers to local councils was that, if they took planning and development powers, the resources and the ability to do more than just make plans would follow in due course? Minister, do you not accept that what you have done today has run a coach and horses through local government reorganisation and the legislation of the House, as the deal with local councils has been openly and callously breached by you, by your statement to the House today?

**Mr Givan:** I knew that Mr Attwood always had his eye on me. I look forward to having a watchful eye on the activities that I carry out.

In respect of the issues that the Member has raised, I have been in a number of areas where neighbourhood renewal has transformed areas. I was in Ballymena, where I saw at first hand the important work that has been carried out. I have been in areas of east Belfast and north Belfast where neighbourhood renewal has transformed communities. It was a scheme that was created in 2003, and £280 million has been spent on it. Is the Member seriously suggesting that, when you develop a scheme, you do not then look at how it has delivered against the objectives that were set and at where we, as a society, want to look at addressing the needs that exist around tackling poverty and deprivation and making sure that all the government schemes align to addressing that? That would be a foolish approach to take on the way in which government operates. I point out, as I did in the statement, that there were numerous attempts in the last mandate to introduce this and there was not consensus.

Local government authorities and councillors are saying to me that they would like some of the regeneration powers but not to give them neighbourhood renewal because that is a very difficult one to manage. They do not want to have that. So, there has not been consensus in local government as well. In the absence of that consensus and recognising the new way in which the Programme for Government is being delivered and the way in which this Department has brought together a range of its responsibilities — the biggest now in the Executive — I believe that, in that context, the decision that I am taking is the right one to take.

**Mr Lyttle:** Does the Minister not recognise that councils, themselves, believe that it is folly to charge them with local development plans, community plans and setting out a vision of regeneration for their area, only to sweep the powers for master plans and spatial planning from under their feet?

**Mr Givan:** No, I do not, because it has been councils that have led on creating the master plans and the Department has often funded that, or councils have put in a percentage contribution around revitalisation schemes and public realm schemes; it has been a partnership approach. So, in the development of the plans that they are carrying out, the decision by me to retain these powers in my Department in no way will harm the delivery of the plans that councils will be able to come up with. Indeed, I believe, it will actually ensure that they will be delivered because we will maximise my Department's strengths and local government's strengths to achieve the objectives that we want to address.

**Ms Bailey:** It is very disappointing news that we are getting today, not just for local government, which is always best-placed to identify and work on local need, but for those working at ground level in community development and regeneration, who find it much easier to engage with and access their local council than they do Departments and the Assembly. I am slightly heartened to hear that the Minister is keen to keep engaged and ask those who have been involved in the neighbourhood renewal process to bring their experience and knowledge to the discussions and that there will be no sudden change in the delivery of the programme. Will he give his assurance that these organisations and people will not have to prove their need all over again in order to access any continued funding? Will he be happy to keep existing measures and allow them to continue with the great work that they do?

**Mr Givan:** I have met countless community organisations that my Department has supported, whether through financial resources or help in the various offices. I have yet to meet one group that has said that it does not like working with my Department, that does not believe that it helps their community to address issues in the community or that wants councils to deliver that help. However, I was with a group yesterday that Mr Easton, who is not here today, brought to see me. The Ards Development Bureau is an umbrella organisation that works with nine or 11 different community organisations across Northern Ireland. It pleaded with me not to pass responsibility to local authorities. It wanted my Department to continue to do the work and not to transfer it. Those are people who are working at the coalface in our communities and they have an excellent relationship, as they said, with my

Department. They recognise the work that it has been able to carry out, and they were concerned that this responsibility was going to transfer to local authorities. I believe that that organisation was being funded through the community investment fund, which will be staying in this Department. That has provided reassurance, certainly to that organisation, on behalf of those local grass-roots community organisations.

**Mr Allister:** When the Minister says that the £280 million spend on neighbourhood renewal has produced some narrowing of the gap between those areas and the rest of the Province but that they remain some way behind, can one infer that, despite some good schemes, overall there has been disappointment with the outcomes of neighbourhood renewal and that it does need fixed? Will he tell us whether the Department has done a comparative costing in terms of delivery centrally as opposed to delivery locally through the councils?

**Mr Givan:** Certainly, delivering this centrally will allow a consistency of approach across Northern Ireland. It will allow us, in the review, to ensure that when we consider how neighbourhood renewal and that £280 million has rolled out, we look at its effectiveness, what changes could be made to make it more effective and what areas that currently do not benefit from neighbourhood renewal should be benefiting. Having my Department take responsibility for that will allow us to look at that issue rather than breaking those functions up so that there are 11 different approaches to tackling, primarily, poverty, deprivation and regeneration across the different councils. We will be able to do that.

We recognise that there has been some narrowing of the gap, but it is a scheme that started in 2003, and it is timely to carry out a review of that so that, as we seek to address these areas, we can determine whether we are doing it in the most effective way. It is timely now to carry that out.

**Ms Armstrong:** As the Minister has already said, the public want services delivered. However, today is a very sad day because the public who came out to all those community planning meetings, providing their input and their ideas as to how they wanted their towns and villages regenerated, have been stomped over. Does the Minister have the support of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) or of any single council? Has any single council advocated this change, or is he telling local government what to think?

**Mr Givan:** As I indicated, I have met councils and I recognise the excellent work that they have carried out around regeneration. I opened the Portstewart public realm works that were carried out, and I have been in Carrickfergus to see the public realm works that were completed there. In those cases, those local authorities have been the lead. They have appointed the contractors and have managed those projects. My Department has provided, in most cases, the vast majority of that resource, and they have been able to achieve those outcomes.

As I indicated in previous answers, however, there were those in local authorities who did not want to have neighbourhood renewal. There were councillors who did not want to have neighbourhood renewal but wanted to have regeneration functions. Ultimately, these decisions are taken by the Executive, and by me as Minister, in respect of how we seek to address needs in our society.

In my statement, I outlined that the best way to do that is by local government and the Executive collectively working together to drive forward on these issues. I repeat: the public does not differentiate between the two; they just want to have the service delivered. My Department, and I as Minister, have engaged with a whole range of community organisations, and I do not believe that any of them will say that they are not getting the support that they need to be getting from this Executive.

I appreciate that Members in the Opposition and those who are not in the Opposition but are opposing want to use this as an opportunity to make a point against the Executive: that is part and parcel of politics. That is fair enough — I am not going to criticise that — but, if we can lift it above the politics of the Chamber and put ourselves in the communities that we represent, we will see that they want us to deliver the service, not to be involved in bickering about who does what. This is the best way in which to achieve the objectives.

**Mr Bell:** Is it not the case that, for people on the ground, this should be looked on as a win-win situation? The people who need this are not interested in party political point-scoring across the Chamber; they want to see local government and central government working together. You are absolutely right to say that the end users are interested in delivery. They are interested not so much in the route map for how we get there as in real delivery. How can we ensure, despite the nonsense of political point-scoring here today, that we bring the stakeholders along with us and that, at the end of the process, we see a genuine win-win for central and local government?

**Mr Givan:** The Member makes the point very well that this is ultimately about delivering services to our community. I have outlined how that is best achieved, and it is through collaboration. It is not a case of “them and us” when it comes to local government and the Executive but a case of us working together collectively. Councils are well placed through the community planning process to have the statutory framework for engaging with different agencies and the public. My Department has a key role to play in that process, and we will be able to bring all the tools at our disposal to achieve the objectives that local government wants to have addressed.

**Mr Lunn:** I will give the Minister another chance to answer the question that he failed to answer a few moments ago. Does he have NILGA’s support for what he is doing, and can he name a council that supports his position?

**Mr Givan:** I have met NILGA — I declare an interest, as my father is an executive member of NILGA — and the National Association of Councillors Northern Ireland (NAC NI), and I have met them through the partnership panel process. On all those occasions, councillors raised the issue of the transfer of regeneration functions to local government. What they were saying is that they wanted to have a decision. I understand that there are those in local authorities who wanted to have powers transferred, but I have now set out the context on which the decision is based, and I have explained it extensively. I hope Members will now recognise that a decision has been taken and that we should move on collectively so that we can address the needs that exist in our community.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** That concludes questions on the statement.

## British-Irish Council: Environment

**Mr Ross (Junior Minister, The Executive Office):** With your permission, Mr Speaker, in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I will make the following report on the fourteenth British-Irish Council (BIC) meeting held in environment sectoral format in the St Pierre Park Hotel, Guernsey, on Friday 4 November 2016. The Northern Ireland Executive were represented by me, on behalf of Minister Michelle McIlveen, and Megan Fearon, junior Minister in the Executive Office. The report has been endorsed by junior Minister Fearon, and she has agreed that I should make the statement on behalf of both of us.

Members will be aware that the BIC was established in 1999 and is a forum for members to discuss, consult and use best endeavours to reach agreement on cooperation on matters of mutual interest within the competence of its member Administrations. The environment work sector is led by the UK Government. It has proved a constructive forum for facilitating evidence exchange and practical collaboration since the Council was first established.

The meeting in Guernsey focused on addressing the problem of food waste and on improving the quality and quantity of recycling. The meeting was chaired by Dr Thérèse Coffey MP, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment and Rural Life Opportunities. The Irish Government were represented by Seán Kyne TD, the Minister of State for Gaeltacht Affairs and Natural Resources. The Scottish Government were represented by Roseanna Cunningham, Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform. The Welsh Government were represented by Lesley Griffiths, Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs. The Isle of Man Government were represented by Geoffrey Boot, Minister for the Environment, Food and Agriculture. The Jersey Government were represented by Deputy Steve Luce, Minister for the Environment. The Guernsey Government were represented by Barry Brehaut, President of the Committee for the Environment and Infrastructure.

### 4.45 pm

Ministers discussed food waste and responses across their Administrations. Tim Smith, group quality director at Tesco, attended for the first part of the item to set out how Tesco is addressing the global issue of food waste. Tesco is working to meet an ambition of sending no surplus food that can be safely eaten to waste from its UK stores by the end of next year. The approach includes partnering with producers and growers to tackle food waste across the supply chain and helping customers to reduce waste in their home. Ministers endorsed the need to tackle food waste for a variety of financial, environmental and moral reasons and noted that all members of the Council shared the goal of reducing food waste wherever possible. Ministers agreed that all members of the Council will wish to see concrete steps taken towards achieving the UN sustainable development goal target to, by 2030, halve per capita global food waste at retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses. Finally, Ministers committed to working together to develop and share ideas and experiences of policy interventions to support each Administration's ambitions on food waste.

Following the discussion on food waste, Ministers discussed recycling and how to improve both quality and quantity. They noted that the materials that flow through our economy represent a valuable resource and that recycling those materials can create economic opportunities for business and local authorities whilst playing an important role in minimising our call on finite global resources. Ministers noted that the diverse experiences across Administrations presented opportunities for collaboration and learning to enable the citizens of these islands to view everyday materials as a resource and to recycle them effectively. Ministers also agreed that all Administrations should continue to share information and experiences on the challenges, particularly with reference to increasing the quantity and quality of recycling and improving material prices. They agreed that member Administrations should work together to tackle common challenges on recycling, where opportunities arise to do so. They also agreed to identify and share research on recycling in cities.

Following on from the thirteenth BIC environment ministerial meeting, held on the Isle of Man in 2014, Ministers reaffirmed the threats posed to their respective ecosystems from invasive non-native species. They noted that that continued to be a matter of concern across these islands and agreed to continue collaboration and cooperation between all BIC member Administrations, including holding a workshop for those working on the issue.

Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to agreements on natural capital and resources made at the Council's London summit in November 2015. They discussed and noted the progress made on those agreements in the intervening period, including a series of workshops held earlier this year that explored matters relating to pollinators and natural capital accounting. Ministers agreed to continue collaboration and cooperation on natural capital and resources.

Ministers agreed that the fifteenth ministerial meeting would be held in Dublin in 2018. In addition to the commitments outlined, Ministers asked that the work sector collaborate on a programme of work looking at ways to collaborate on the implementation of the UN sustainable development goals, with a particular focus on goal 6, which is to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, and goal 13, which is to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact. The work sector will report on progress to the next meeting of Environment Ministers.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I am grateful to the Minister for the update. I note from his statement that he records that all involved:

*"reaffirmed their commitment to agreements on natural capital and resources made at the Council's London summit in November 2015."*

Of course, the main focus of that was on pollinators. I would be grateful for an update on the Executive's work on pollinators.

**Mr Ross:** That was work that was carried out after the last meeting. I will touch on natural capital first, if I may. It is a concept that we are looking at with some interest because it is one of those areas that can make a huge positive impact across the country in identifying our natural resources. I will write to the Member on the pollinator

process, because, as he will know, I was standing in for the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. I will write to him with all the details, and I am sure that he will be able to absorb them in due course.

**Mr Irwin:** How is the Department working with councils to increase the amount of domestic waste, including food waste, being recycled?

**Mr Ross:** This year, upwards of £2.5 million of financial assistance has been allocated by the Department for councils to invest in and improve recycling infrastructure and services. The Department will also work in partnership with councils on communications, especially on food waste, research — particularly to identify options, costs and timelines for increasing council household waste recycling rates — and to agree action plans to reinforce the strategic approach to dealing with Northern Ireland municipal waste.

It is important that we work in partnership. Across the various councils, there is a mixed bag in the recycling rate and in the way in which they ask their constituents to separate their food and waste in bins. We need to work on that to try to improve it across the Province.

**Ms Archibald:** I thank the Minister for his statement. It would seem that there was quite significant discussion on food waste, which we need to have a bit more of a focus on. There are some very good examples of good practice in other EU states. Will the Minister tell us what measures, relating to how the issue is dealt with in other jurisdictions, he feels could be applied here?

**Mr Ross:** It is a hugely important issue, particularly given the importance of the agrifood sector in Northern Ireland. The inefficiency from food waste arising throughout the supply chain from farmer to householder undermines the economy and wastes natural resources. By addressing food waste, we will help businesses to become more resource-efficient, more competitive and more sustainable.

It is not, of course, just businesses. UK households throw away in the region of 7 million tons of food and drink every year and that costs us in the region of £12.5 billion. By improving the whole structure, the average family could save in the region of £700 a year. That shows how important this is. In Northern Ireland, 56% of food waste is sent to landfill, which accounts for about a third of all household waste that is sent to landfill.

In the discussions that we had across the different jurisdictions, I am not sure that it was so much that we were learning from others; it was important that we shared information about the various things that we were doing and got reassurance that we all face the same challenges in educating people in how to ensure that they are not wasting their food sources and how to separate food waste, which is a particular challenge with the older generation. There is also a significant difference between urban and rural areas, which all jurisdictions will have to address.

It was encouraging that particular note was given to some of the things that we are doing in Northern Ireland. A number of initiatives were mentioned that other places have also done. The Love Food Hate Waste campaign was very successful. The Waste and Resources Action Programme was noted, as were the hospitality and food services sector responsibility agreement and the Rethink Waste capital and revenue funds. Most significantly, other

jurisdictions are learning from us through the Food Waste Regulations that were introduced in January 2015 and that place a number of responsibilities on businesses in reducing food waste. We should be proud of that and of the fact that other countries have taken an interest in those regulations.

**Mr McPhillips:** I thank the Minister for his statement, which mentions the importance of tackling non-native invasive species across these islands. The Minister will be aware that invasive species are causing environmental concern across the North, particularly in Fermanagh, on the land and even in Lough Erne. Will the Minister outline what steps he has taken to tackle the like of Japanese knotweed that is a huge concern, not alone in Fermanagh and South Tyrone but across the North?

**Mr Ross:** I am not sure that I have taken any particular steps, but I know that the Minister has worked on that issue. There was a debate on 20 September, and I know that Members from constituencies across Northern Ireland raised particular issues. At constituency level, many of us have been approached by people who are getting increasingly frustrated that action cannot be taken to deal with this. I know that the Minister has asked officials to examine the policy options available to her Department and the consequential financial and resource implications that those would have. She has a mind to report back on that in due course.

**Mr Ford:** I thank the Minister for his stand-in role, at the meeting and today. I must say that I was slightly disappointed to see so much of a focus on recycling given that I thought that we had got slightly higher up the waste pyramid and were looking more at reduce and reuse. In relation to the Minister's reference to UN sustainable development goal 13 on climate change, is there any chance of us hearing that the Executive will introduce a climate change Bill by next week, which is the first anniversary of the Assembly calling for it?

**Mr Ross:** I sincerely doubt it.

**Mr Anderson:** I thank the junior Minister for his statement. How do recycling rates in Northern Ireland compare with those of other BIC members?

**Mr Ross:** We sit somewhere in the middle. The European average is 40.45%, and Northern Ireland has a household recycling rate of 42%. You have to take these figures with a pinch of salt because different countries use different definitions for recycling. That is a broad indicator rather than the definitive figures. The exemplar region appears to be Wales, with a rate of about 53%, but it uses a slightly different definition from the one used here, in England or in Scotland. At 32%, Jersey has the lowest rate because it relies quite heavily on incineration. We are sitting at 42%, which is around the average of all the countries in the BIC.

**Mr McMullan:** I thank the junior Minister for his answers so far. I draw his attention to paragraph 11 on the threats to ecosystems from invasive non-native species. I will bring the question of Lough Foyle into this and the unregulated fishing practices of fishermen bringing in seed mussels. Some might be non-invasive species that could wipe out the natural mussel or oyster in that area. Will the work sector look at how we can move this on so that agreement can be made between the British and Irish Governments on regulations for Lough Foyle before its ecosystem is wiped out?

**Mr Ross:** That was not discussed at the BIC meeting in Guernsey, but I am happy to pass that on to the Minister, and I am sure that she will respond directly to the Member.

**Mr M Bradley:** I thank the junior Minister for his answers so far. He referred to the problem of food waste here in Northern Ireland. What specifically is being done by the industry to tackle the issue?

**Mr Ross:** That is an interesting point. We had an opportunity to talk to Tim Smith from Tesco at the BIC meeting. It is important that supermarkets play their role in reducing waste, and there are a number of things that they are trying to do. The first is making sure that packaging is appropriate and that customers recognise that grouping a number of food items leads to a lot of wastage and people throwing food away. Increasingly, they are looking at the packaging of individual portions of food.

The other issue raised was food labelling and the difference between use-by dates and best-before dates, particularly for the younger generation, who tend to look at the best-before date and throw away food when it has gone past it, even though it could be perfectly safe and healthy to eat. They are looking at labelling in order to encourage people not to throw food away when it reaches its best-before date and look at the use-by date instead.

They are also looking at ensuring that their canteens use up foodstuff that would otherwise be left on the shelves. They are collaborating with local charities to make sure that that food is available to people who need it. They are also looking at giving away fruit. Tesco, in particular, gives away fruit to children while their parents are shopping.

I noted that, in the last number of weeks, Members received a package from Sainsbury's on what it is doing to reduce waste. The supermarkets are taking it seriously, and it is important that we continue to monitor what they are doing. In Northern Ireland, there is legislation in place under the food waste regulations to make sure that supermarkets in Northern Ireland are doing all that they can to reduce waste.

**Mr Kennedy:** I am grateful to the Minister for his statement and answers. I refer him to paragraph 9, which states:

*"Ministers noted that the diverse experiences across administrations presented opportunities for collaboration and learning to enable the citizens of these islands to view everyday materials as a resource and to recycle them effectively."*

Will the Minister give examples of that?

Paragraph 13 states that the next meeting is scheduled for Dublin in 2018. Given the importance of these matters, why are meetings only biyearly?

#### 5.00 pm

**Mr Ross:** Where some of the learning is concerned, the concept of the circular economy and putting an economic value on wastage was something there was a great deal of discussion about. Sometimes we see waste as having no value, but it has an economic value. I think it is important we recognise that recycling and reusing are good for the economy and for the environment. There is learning in that and in how we get to a higher level for that circular economy and keep using resources as long as possible until there is no value left in them.

As a former Minister, the Member will know that the BIC and the North/South bodies do not meet that quickly between meetings, but, of course, meetings between Ministers go on in the interim period anyhow. When I was over in Guernsey, the Welsh Minister said she met our Minister in three or four weeks out of the previous eight or nine at different events. Conversations continue to go on between Ministers, and I think relationships are good between different jurisdictions, in that officials will continue to work together. The official meetings of the BIC tend to be where there is reporting back on previous agreements. Of course, if something extraordinary happened, I suspect different jurisdictions would want to get together before that.

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Minister for his statement and answers thus far. I think these types of fora are a very useful opportunity to look at and learn from practice in other jurisdictions as we all move towards our ultimate goal of a circular economy. In that vein, I am aware that the Scottish Executive were proceeding with a deposit return scheme. Did they elaborate on that? Was any information given to the meeting on it? Do the Minister and, indeed, the Executive concur that such a scheme would be useful here in the North?

**Mr Ross:** There was a brief mention of it, and they certainly thought it had been proven to be relatively successful. I know our Minister is looking at that issue along with a number of others that other jurisdictions are doing. In particular, the Welsh Government have set themselves quite difficult targets for their initiatives, so the Minister is keeping under consideration a range of different initiatives taking place in other member states.

**Mr Robinson:** Can the junior Minister expand on what is meant by "natural capital"? Is the concept something the Department is embracing?

**Mr Ross:** The definition of natural capital is the elements of nature that produce value, directly or indirectly, to people, such as the stocks of forests, rivers, soils, minerals and oceans. It is, I think, fair to say it is a relatively new concept to the Department here in Northern Ireland, but it has monitored progress in the rest of the United Kingdom and in the Irish Republic to learn about the approach and the processes that have taken place. The Department here appears to have developed the concept further than others perhaps have, and it has asked the Office for National Statistics to incorporate natural capital into its budget decision-making process by 2020.

It is an incredibly complex issue. Placing value on forests, natural resources and peatlands is quite a difficult thing to do, and it obviously leads to discussion, debate and some level of disagreement. For example, with a forest, some people may put a higher value on the timber because of the uses it has for producing paper, whilst others will look at the forest's impact on and value for tourism and recreation. Where other jurisdictions have tried to put a value on some of their natural resources, it has led to widespread disagreement. I think that is indicative of the complexity in this. I know the Minister here in Northern Ireland is open to and intrigued by the concept and wants to make sure that officials carry out further work on it to see whether it is something we want to take forward here in the Province.

## Executive Committee Business

### Savings (Government Contributions) Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** We will pause while we retrieve the Minister for this bit. He cannot be too far away.

**Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities):** Mr Deputy Speaker, I apologise to you and the House for the delay. Therein lies the problem when your diary runs out, and you end up trying to put meetings in. I was meeting representatives from the deaf community, but the door was knocked and I was told to come down here. That is my apology; hopefully, Members will accept it in the spirit in which it is offered.

I beg to move

*That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the Savings (Government Contributions) Bill as introduced in the House of Commons on 6 September 2016, including the provision in clause 5(2) making bonuses under the Bill an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the provision in paragraph 16(8) of schedule 2 dealing with information sharing.*

The Savings (Government Contributions) Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 6 September. The Bill comprises two policies: the lifetime ISA and help to save. These schemes will support more people as they save for the future and provide them with new options to do so. From April 2017, adults under the age of 40 will be able to open a lifetime ISA and pay in up to £4,000 each tax year. They will be able to continue making contributions up to the age of 50. The Government will add a 25% bonus to those contributions. That means that individuals who save the maximum will receive a £1,000 bonus from the Government each year.

Tax-free funds, including the Government bonus, can be used to help to buy a first home worth up to £450,000 at any time from 12 months after first saving into the account. The funds, including the Government bonus, can be withdrawn from the lifetime ISA from age 60 for any purpose. Lifetime ISA holders can also access their savings if they become terminally ill. Savers will also be able to make withdrawals at any time for other purposes, but with a 25% Government charge applied to the amount of withdrawal. This returns the Government bonus element of the fund, including any interest or growth on that bonus, to the Government, with an additional charge of 5% applied.

The lifetime ISA is not part of the pension system or about replacing a pension. It is an additional flexible savings product. It is about giving people a complementary product to help them to save for later in life, while keeping open the option of building up money to put towards a house. It is not an either/or choice. Factual sources of information on the lifetime ISA will be available on the official Government site prior to its launch. The lifetime ISA will not be marketed as an alternative to a workplace pension such as auto-enrolment, as it is a complementary product. That should reduce the risk of people choosing a lifetime ISA rather than a workplace pension.

The Government are fully committed to auto-enrolment and want to have a robust, functioning pension system. They do not expect that people will opt out of their workplace pension to pay into a lifetime ISA instead. The launch of the help-to-buy ISA in December last year did not lead to a surge in the opt-out rate for auto-enrolment. People, particularly young people, are sticking with auto-enrolment and not opting out at the rate that some thought they might. As with other ISAs, the Financial Conduct Authority will regulate the product. It published a consultation last week that will inform the regulatory framework for the lifetime ISA.

The help-to-save scheme is intended to help working families on low incomes to build up their savings. The scheme will be open to adults in receipt of universal credit with minimum weekly household earnings equivalent to 16 hours at the national living wage, or those in receipt of working tax credit. It will provide a 50% Government bonus on up to £50 of monthly savings into a help-to-save account. The bonus will be paid after two years, with an option to save for a further two years, meaning that people can save up to £2,400 and benefit from Government bonuses worth up to £1,200. Limiting the scheme to in-work universal credit claimants and those in receipt of working tax credits will ensure that it targets those on the lowest incomes effectively. It is not meant to be an additional subsidy to out-of-work households. The focus is on working households.

Under the help-to-save scheme, people will be able to save as little as £1. It will be up to individuals to choose how much they want to save each month. A higher limit not only allows individuals to build up a bigger savings buffer against unforeseen costs; it makes the scheme more flexible, as savers can choose to put aside more money when they can afford to.

Help-to-save will be available no later than April 2018. At the outset, there will be a single provider — National Savings and Investments — which is an executive agency of HM Treasury. However, there is provision in the Bill to allow more people to provide the product in future. It was decided that National Savings and Investments would be the single provider at the outset in order to guarantee national coverage of the scheme.

There is currently provision for information on universal credit to be shared between the Department for Communities, the Department for Work and Pensions and HM Revenue and Customs. That current provision is limited and prevents HM Revenue and Customs from using the information for the purposes of the help-to-save scheme.

The Executive Committee considered the matter and gave their approval on 27 October; the Communities Committee gave its approval on 10 November. Now the Assembly is asked to consider the principle of the extension of the provisions in the Savings (Government Contributions) Bill, including the provision to make bonuses under the Bill an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the provision dealing with information sharing. I hope that Members will agree that the lifetime ISA and the help-to-save scheme are worthwhile and will support the motion.

**Mr Eastwood (The Chairperson of the Committee for Communities):** I thank the Minister for his contribution and welcome him to the House. The Bill, which extends to Northern Ireland, makes provision for two of the London

Government's measures to encourage saving. The Committee has considered the purpose of the Bill and the appropriateness of the measures being provided for by way of a legislative consent motion rather than bringing an Assembly Bill.

The Committee noted that the government bonuses under the lifetime ISA and help-to-save scheme will be a benefit not unlike welfare, which is devolved to Northern Ireland and therefore requires the consent of the Assembly. Members of the Committee noted that the provision making bonuses payable under the Bill an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 was to reflect the fact that they will be administered and funded by the London Government and agreed that it would be more efficient and less complex to deal with the provisions in a Westminster Bill, rather than promoting a specific Assembly Bill.

The Committee agreed that the provisions of the Bill are a positive measure to support and incentivise those who are in a position to save to do. The Committee, however, recommends that the London Government should highlight the difference between a lifetime ISA and automatic enrolment and, as recommended by the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee:

*"make it clear that the LISA is not a pension and that, for employees who have been automatically enrolled, any decision to opt-out is likely to result in a worse outcome for their retirement."*

I ask the Minister to relay that recommendation to Westminster on the Committee's behalf.

The Minister seeks the Assembly's support for the LCM today so that people in Northern Ireland can take full advantage of the new lifetime ISA and help-to-save scheme. The Committee calls on the Minister to acknowledge that, while these are positive measures, many low-income families simply do not have the disposable income that would allow them to access those schemes.

Nevertheless, the Committee for Communities recommends that the Assembly endorse the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the Savings (Government Contributions) Bill as introduced in the House of Commons on 6 September 2016, including the provision in clause 5(2) that makes bonuses under the Bill an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the provision in paragraph 16(8) of schedule 2 dealing with information sharing.

**Ms Mallon:** This is certainly a positive measure. Anything that encourages people to save is a positive measure, but it is important that we put on record the reality faced by many homes in the North. It is a fact that people struggle to pay essential bills. While this is a positive measure, it is important to realise that many families in Northern Ireland do not have the disposable income to access or benefit from this saving scheme. We do not mean to be negative at all, and we support the motion, but we just want to add that caveat about the reality that is faced by many individuals and households across Northern Ireland.

#### 5.15 pm

**Ms Gildernew:** I concur with much of what the Chair of the Communities Committee and my colleague on that Committee Nichola Mallon have said. I am sorry that I was not able to stay for last night's debate, but I too want to

point out that, while this is a welcome development, there are people in my constituency, Minister, who are stretching a jar of milk to pay day. These are people who are working and are not on benefits; they are working families who really struggle to make ends meet. We need to recognise that there is real poverty out there. Over 20% of children and around the same number of older people live in poverty. People do not have the disposable income to put into a savings scheme. We welcome it, but there will be people who will not be able to access it.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** That concludes comments. We return to the Minister to respond.

**Mr Givan:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I thank Members for their contribution. Let me take up the request from the Committee Chairman to raise the concerns that people may see this as a way in which they could opt out of the automatic enrolment pensions. I will happily relay the concerns that have been outlined to the Minister at Westminster.

I share the comments that Members have highlighted: some people will not be able to save. I have highlighted that people on low incomes can save £1 a month, but some may not be able to do that. Others may be able to do that, and the Government are able to provide moneys into that scheme to incentivise people to think about saving, where they are able to do so, so that they can prepare themselves better for some of the future needs that may arise. I fully acknowledge that this is not a scheme that will be attractive for some people, but, for others, it may be, and it will provide them with an opportunity to save.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the Savings (Government Contributions) Bill as introduced in the House of Commons on 6 September 2016, including the provision in clause 5(2) making bonuses under the Bill an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the provision in paragraph 16(8) of schedule 2 dealing with information sharing.*

## Private Members' Business

### Energy Affordability and Security

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** 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 in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

**Mr Aiken:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly notes with concern that electricity prices for non-domestic large energy users are almost 60% higher than the EU15 median; further notes the policy vacuum that exists in the Department for the Economy regarding renewable energy following the closure of the Northern Ireland renewables obligation and the collapse of the renewable heat incentive; calls on the Minister for the Economy to clarify the position on future subsidy arrangements for all forms of energy generation in the context of decarbonisation and mitigating the effects of rising costs; and further calls for long-term energy security and affordability to be given a much higher priority in the emerging Programme for Government 2016-2021.*

I rise to move the motion on one of the most important issues affecting all of us in Northern Ireland — our energy affordability and security. I welcome the Minister for the Economy's commitment yesterday to having an open discussion. Throughout the debate, I hope that we will be able to find a consensus view on the urgent need for a coherent energy policy that will set the agenda for the next decade and beyond.

Be in no doubt of this: there is no point in pretending that all is well with our energy situation. The report published by the Executive's ministerial energy and manufacturing advisory group, chaired by Dr David Dobbin, in March 2016, states that:

*"local energy costs faced by our manufacturing sector are some of the highest in Europe. This is most acute for large energy users (LEUs) who face electricity prices almost 60% higher than the EU-15 median, while for medium and small/medium users, the price differential is over 40%."*

In the report's 24 recommendations, there is, in the carefully worded prose, an underlying and clear message that there are issues around cost, security of supply, the avoidance of excessive policy bill being attached to renewable targets and obligations, the need to build the North/South interconnector, the need for a plan to support the grid and future grid requirements, and uncertainty over the delivery of a secure and sustainable electricity system.

I am sure we all agree that, with their recommendation, the Executive should provide long-term policy certainty by developing a clear, consistent, long-term energy and decarbonisation strategy for Northern Ireland by 2030. Although the absence of any actions being taken by the Department and of a stand-alone outcome in the Programme for Government raises obvious concerns.

Before we get into the detail, let us say up front that we need from the Executive an energy policy that delivers three practical things: the integrated single electricity

market (I-SEM), the North/South interconnector and an effective delivery mechanism with no more renewable heat scandals.

It is also worth pointing out, for the record, some of the challenges. First, the Minister must acknowledge that his Department has failed spectacularly for every taxpayer in Northern Ireland. We have been witness to the renewable heat incentive scheme debacle, which will cost us £30 million a year and potentially over £1 billion in total. No Minister or civil servant is seemingly responsible for that. We may be about to repeat that debacle. We have a significant energy-from-waste scheme being proposed, the economics of which are, at best, uncertain. It should be a matter of concern that, despite the lessons from the renewable heat incentive scandal, we have the Agriculture Minister offering to recommend the provision of financial support to help offset additional costs potentially over the next quarter-century lifespan of the project. I am sure that we would all be interested in hearing the Minister for the Economy and the Minister of Finance's views on that.

In addition, we have a grid that is at capacity for renewable energy, which stands at 24%, or 846MW, of our energy mix. We are busily installing another 17.8%, 720MW, by the end of March next year, and we are looking to install another 500MW by 2020. That is all very laudable, but, bearing in mind that our total requirement is a maximum of 1,800MW and that our grid can only manage, with very judicious balancing, 55% capacity, many are perplexed by the rush towards wind energy installation and by how we can afford a system of generation that can only deliver just over half of its capacity. How, in view of that, can we help sustain our local renewable industry?

I was heartened to hear the Minister state in the Assembly that all of the renewable capacity that is due to be installed will be connected to the grid and that all its generation would be usable, although he was careful not to imply that it would be connected by 31 March or any other time. As I am sure the Minister is aware, wind energy is not free, and the costs of distribution and capacity baseload matching are significant and are often in considerable excess of the costs of conventional generation. The last thing we want, in addition to the DUP's annual £300 million lack-of-oversight own goal, is our consumers picking up renewable costs for the 45% of the energy that we cannot use. However, without a route to export in order to achieve any form of system balancing across Ireland, that is precisely what our Government will be doing.

That is why we need the 420kV North/South interconnector and the I-SEM to make it effective. That is critical. Indeed, any delays to the North/South interconnector will put at risk our energy supply unless we make an expensive agreement with our conventional coal and gas generators. We have the majority of our conventional generating capacity being decommissioned by 2021, yet there is no urgency to make sure that we do not enter our second century in Northern Ireland with the real possibility that we will be suffering from brownouts or even worse. That is not the message any of us wish to send about Northern Ireland plc, especially to eventual investors, but it is more than an unfortunate or inconvenient truth.

What should be done? No more studies; it is time for action. Given the amount of reports, papers from Committee meetings and Hansard transcripts we have, we could use them as an alternative fuel for all our biomass

boilers, incidentally saving us several millions. We know what needs to be done. The Executive must affirm their commitment to the I-SEM and ensure that, post-Brexit, its provisions are maintained and that the model itself is instituted in 2017, as planned.

Secondly, in view of the importance of the I-SEM, and the critical importance of the interconnector, the lack of a clear and unambiguous message from the Minister, and the Minister for Infrastructure, on why the interconnector must be built, and on time, is a major worry — to energy suppliers and distributors as well as our economy. We would welcome from the Executive an early statement committing them to the commissioning of the interconnector by 2020. To echo the view of the Utility Regulator last week, there is no plan B.

Thirdly, the Executive must clearly signal to the regulator that we must drive our energy costs down — down towards the average level of that for all consumers in GB and the Republic of Ireland — and indicate clearly to our generators and renewal providers that we need to drive the cost of subsidy down and then, if possible, out. We need a Northern Ireland energy business that is not dependent on costly subsidy or Horizon 2020 grants or that is being forced to maintain a decarbonisation strategy out of step with the rest of the United Kingdom.

We as an Opposition are for renewables, especially those provided by our excellent local companies, but as part of an energy mix that supports energy efficiency, maintains security and delivers energy at a cost that sustains our economic growth rather than penalises energy users.

Finally, Minister, I do not envy you your task ahead. Above all else, for the future of Northern Ireland, you have to grasp hold of a Department that has proven to be unfit for purpose. You have to persuade your Sinn Féin colleagues that burying the North/South interconnector will kill the project stone dead and, in effect, make the I-SEM unworkable. You need to prevent your colleague the Minister of Agriculture supporting unrealistic economics. You need to avoid carrying the can for blue skies — should I say salty brine? — storage projects. You need to ensure that there are no more examples of colossal renewables negligence. Above all, you need to maintain the security of supply, keep the cost down and provide export routes for our energy providers.

There is no doubt that, from whatever quarter, and from the Minister himself, there is a strong acknowledgement that our energy system is struggling. There is no clear direction, and it is beset by challenges — challenges that we as an Opposition understand that you are seeking to address, despite a lack of Executive unanimity of purpose.

We therefore call on the Assembly to support the motion and encourage the Minister to implement rapidly an energy policy that delivers for Northern Ireland, now and for the next 30 years.

**Mr Storey:** We will not be accepting the motion, and I will quickly set out a reason. In fact, the Member confirmed for us why we should not. In his opening remarks, he was heading in the right direction when he talked about having an opportunity to ensure that we debate and discuss the issues. He welcomed the comments from the Minister yesterday, and it took him all of two minutes to get to the point at which he then said, “However”. It was downhill from thereon. It was a blame game. It was a case of, “Our

hands are clean. We’ve never done anything like that. We are completely faultless when it comes to these things. It is all the fault of the Minister and the Executive”. Given the negativity of the motion, there is no way that we can come to the House and be able to support what is being said, and that is disappointing.

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

However, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate for a couple of reasons. The first is the importance of the issue. Let none of us have any doubt that we are talking about an issue that impinges on all our constituents and all our homes. Secondly, since coming on to the Economy Committee, I have found it to be a steep learning curve. I am trying to understand what some try to present as the complexities of the energy market but what others tell you are easily understood. Maybe the complexity is there because it suits some who believe that they can confound us with all the information. It has been a learning curve for me, and I want to understand for my constituents how we ensure that we deliver for them. That is vital.

### 5.30 pm

Before I comment on the lack of detail in the motion, I would appreciate it if the Minister could give the House an update. In moving the motion, the Member made reference to the electricity and manufacturing advisory group report and how its recommendations were being progressed. I have no doubt that the Minister will take the opportunity to update the House and give us his opinion on electricity prices for large energy users, the integrated single electricity market, and security of supply.

I also notice that the motion makes reference to the Programme for Government and it is important that the Member set that out to the House. Before I leave this point, let me quote from one of the companies that the Member referred to as one of the excellent companies that we have in Northern Ireland that provide some of our energy for us. They said that they are:

*“confident that the Executive will create a policy environment that supports renewable energy projects in the years ahead, whether this means the review or complete overhaul of the strategic energy framework, we know that policy makers appreciate the role of local renewable energy in supporting business, attracting foreign direct investment and meeting consumer needs. Cost and supply are among the most important issues affecting energy users in Northern Ireland and through the creation of a dedicated indicator for energy in the Programme for Government, the Executive has demonstrated its commitment to addressing local energy challenges during the current Assembly mandate.”*

**Mr Nesbitt:** I appreciate the Member giving way. Does he dispute the fact that the Programme for Government graphically states that Northern Ireland goes into energy deficit in 2020? If he agrees with that graphic illustration, how does he spin it as a positive?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Storey:** As leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, the Member is the expert in spinning negatives into positives, so I will leave him to be the person who does that rather

than him, yet again, trying to undermine what is being said and done.

Let us go to the consumer, because it is vital that we remind ourselves that what we do here is not about building empires — although some tried to do that and failed — it is about delivering for our constituents and consumers. Let us remind ourselves of electricity prices for domestic customers. They are estimated to be 13% lower than in the Republic of Ireland, and Northern Ireland is on course to meet its renewable target of 40% by 2020. We should also welcome the fact that over 900MW of potential renewable electricity generation has now been connected to the grid. Moreover, between 2015-16, almost 26% of our electricity consumption was from renewable sources. I think that that recognises the investment in the interconnection between these islands —

**Mr Speaker:** Will the Member conclude his remarks?

**Mr Storey:** — the great infrastructure and the integrated single electricity market. It is disappointing that we do not have more time, because, no doubt, we will hear in the debate today the weasel words of those who claim —

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

**Mr Storey:** — to help, whereas what they do is only cheap political point-scoring —

**Mr Speaker:** I call Mr Conor Murphy.

**Mr Storey:** — That is why they were rejected by the electorate and that is why they are in opposition.

**Some Members:** *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member —

**Some Members:** *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Murphy:** I hope to take a bit of heat out of this electricity debate as I go along. I came to the motion earlier with an open mind, and I feel the same. However, the presentation from the Deputy Chair of the Economy Committee has probably ruled out any chance that anybody in these Benches could support the motion, even though it is important that we begin to debate these issues. I want to hear from the Minister about renewables, because it is key that we have a policy on renewables and on bringing down the wholesale cost.

The issues that we hear about time and again in the Committee are cost and security. Security of supply and sustainability are the two big issues. I am keen to hear from the Minister in that regard. Certainly, the evidence that we have received to date in the Committee is clearly that renewables do provide the opportunity to bring down the wholesale costs in the single energy market. I know that the motion mentions large-scale consumers but, in an area with such high levels of fuel poverty, it quite clearly could have done with also mentioning ordinary consumers who struggle through that. I have no difficulty with hearing from the Minister about that.

As I said during a debate last week, I would rather that we learn lessons from these things and get these issues right than say, "The time for action is now". That sounds good in terms of grabbing a headline but I would like to see a proper, thought-out renewable energy policy as part of a broader energy policy that gives us a cheap,

affordable, secure and sustainable electricity supply here. It is important that these things are got right, and there are clearly lessons to be learnt from the previous experience of what the British Government did with the NIRO and the renewable heat initiative. We said at the time, and continue to say, that the renewable heat initiative has placed an unacceptable burden on the Executive and we want to see that issue being dealt with by the Executive.

The motion also complains that:

*"energy security and affordability to be given a much higher priority in the emerging Programme for Government".*

The indicator on energy is the first indicator in the Programme for Government. I know that it is not ranked in priority and is not meant to be ranked in that way, but I am not sure where else you can put it ahead of that to give it a higher priority. It is mentioned there. In the first chapter of the Programme for Government, there is a clear reference to security of supply and affordability in relation to all of that.

I am not quite sure what the motion intends to achieve. I very much welcome the fact that we are having a debate on these issues, but I think that it could have been phrased in such a way that we could all have got on board with the motion, because we do want to see the sort of things that Mr Aiken outlined.

We have debated this, and the Committee will undertake a significant piece of work on this in the new year. It is about the "trilemma" of cost, security of supply and sustainability. That is what we are clearly looking at. We have heard from many stakeholders at the Committee and individually as MLAs, and having sat around that table since June and dealt with this almost on a weekly basis, I have to say that no one around that table is an expert in all these matters. I do not profess to be an expert and none of the people whom we have heard from can have expertise across all the broad range of complex issues that are involved in the energy market. That argues for the fact that, collectively as a Committee and as an Assembly, we need to work with the Department and the Executive to ensure that we have the best energy policy that suits the people on this island and one that is very firmly part of the single energy market.

I expect to hear soon from the Department about the energy delivery plans. There is an argument — I have heard it from many people in the field — that, rather than simply renewing the strategic energy framework, we have an opportunity to go with something bigger and bolder and something that will take us forward for the next 20 to 30 years. That should not be rushed into. It is not an excuse for undue delay, but these things have to be got right. The PAC is dealing with the renewable heat initiative scheme and that is the where it is being analysed at the moment; but we want to hear how that unsustainable burden will be dealt with by the Executive.

I feel somewhat disappointed that I do not feel that I can support the motion. If it were presented better and were not simply about trying to attack the record of the current Executive and previous Executive, of which your party was a member, and instead tried to bring together some solutions, we probably would be in a much better debate in the House and would have had something that produces

more value rather than simply leads to slinging insults across the Chamber.

**Ms S Bradley:** As SDLP spokesperson on the economy, I support the motion and thank those who brought it forward for debate. The motion begins by raising concern that electricity prices for non-domestic large energy users are almost 60% higher than the EU-15 median. Along with the proposers of the motion, I would argue that we should all share that concern. Whilst we endeavour to understand the reasoning behind it, we must also look at and aim to fully address it in a realistic fashion. This is an economic burden that we can ill afford to carry at this time of such volatility across Northern Ireland businesses.

It is widely acknowledged that the wholesale fraction of most energy bills is, at roughly 60%, proportionately the most expensive. It is also known that the most significant factor in determining the price of wholesale electricity is the price of fossil fuel used by the conventional fossil fuel generators. Costs are forecast to rise significantly, which is a point that we need to rethink.

In 'Northern Ireland Electricity Price Transparency: Follow-up Paper', the Utility Regulator rightly highlighted that there were no straightforward answers to lower electricity prices for Northern Ireland customers, as energy use can be complex and interwoven. It is important to be clear about the key drivers of price and the levers that can be used to impact on prices in the short and longer term. The paper also highlighted the tensions between the energy policy goals of sustainability, security of supply and keeping cost as low as possible. That is what is known as the "trilemma".

Of course, we need a long-term strategy that details the efficient, sustainable generation of power, identifies an agreed and considered transmission process and delivers a fit-for-purpose and, equally, a reliable distribution network while ensuring a fair and open competitive retail market. We must not lose sight of the renewable targets, which were put in place for very good reasons, such as the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, while broadening our vision of emerging technologies, such as battery storage, as they come closer to market.

The motion rightly refers to the policy vacuum in the Department following the closure of the Northern Ireland renewables obligation and the dramatic failing of the renewable heat incentive. The cost attributed to the renewable heat incentive — this is without fear of exaggeration — is staggering. The estimated £1 billion bill is a major mistake that the Executive cannot brush aside and dismiss. Budgets for many years to come will carry —

**Mr Agnew:** I thank the Member for giving way. Given that the renewable heat incentive was, effectively, set up by the UK Government and all we had to do was administer it, does she agree that the blame for this shambolic situation can be put only on those who were in charge — effectively, the First Minister in her previous role?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Ms S Bradley:** Thank you. I thank the Member for his intervention. There is no place for anybody to hide, and that will become a matter of public record, given that it is with PAC at the moment.

The estimated £1 billion bill is a major mistake that the Executive cannot pretend did not happen. For many years, budgets will carry the scar of RHI, which has been

described outside the House as "grossly negligent". Funds to support strategies such as the one we speak of today will inevitably be disadvantaged as RHI claimants are paid off.

I urge the Minister to ensure that a good dose of realism is injected into any scheme that aims to forward the integrated single electricity market. He must consider population growth, the hope of economic growth and the overall rise in demand. As the Minister is no doubt fully aware, serious and legitimate concerns have been raised by residents in close proximity to the proposed North/South interconnector. In that context, in 2001 the Moyle interconnector went into service, an undersea cable between Islandmagee and Ayrshire connecting the Northern Ireland energy market to GB at 500 megawatts. Fifteen years later, we are told that technologies have developed significantly. In that context, does the Minister appreciate the legitimate questions raised by residents about the proposal to build the infrastructure for the North/South interconnector at 600 megawatts?

**Mr Frew:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms S Bradley:** Yes, I will.

**Mr Frew:** I understand what the Member says about the North/South interconnector and the Moyle interconnector, but she is talking about two different things. Does the Member realise how many problems we have had with the Moyle interconnector? When there is a fault, it takes years to fix. It has been running at 50% capacity.

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

**5.45 pm**

**Ms S Bradley:** I accept that intervention, but I also ask the Minister to consider the time period and the developments in technologies that have happened since the original infrastructure was put in place.

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

**Mr Lunn:** I support the motion. I hope I do not say the wrong thing and cause Mr Storey to light up again. *[Laughter.]* I am not a member of the Committee, but I must say at the outset that it is not clear to me why electricity prices for non-domestic large users are as much as 60% above the European median, because other users' prices are falling. That is for a more expert person than me to figure out. I can see that the pure cost of energy in the UK is amongst the highest in Europe, given our peripheral position and the fact that the UK is a net importer of energy. Our dependence on imported energy is, I believe, now back at levels last seen in the 1970s, although, in fairness, all EU countries are now energy importers. The dependence the UK now has on imported energy from unstable areas of the world — the Middle East and Russia — really is very worrying. There are wars in the Middle East, and our gas and oil pipelines that come from northern Russia somewhere actually run through the Ukraine and Georgia — all these happily contented countries where nothing ever happens that could cause destabilisation.

The ability of our generation system to meet peak demand is still worrying, and I think others referred to that. The consequence of sterling's decline against the dollar following the referendum — it is almost 20% now since 23 June — is worrying. It may be good for retailers along the border, but it is not much good in the long term that sterling

is weak. Eventually, if energy is expensive, prices rise, trade becomes more difficult and international investors will look elsewhere.

At that point, I will just say something about the North/South interconnector. It really is the elephant in the room: do we need the North/South interconnector or not? Of course we do. It is the only thing that can give us any long-term stability of supply. It has now been in planning, I believe, since 2009. It has the ability to consolidate the all-Ireland energy market. Most of continental Europe is already interconnected. Somebody mentioned the Moyle interconnector: how many years out of those 15 has the Moyle interconnector worked at full capacity? I think the figure is none. It has been out of commission for some of those years. Even now, it is still not working at its full capacity. We are in trouble here with the electricity supply if we do not do something about it. I look forward to listening to the Minister's comments about the North/South interconnector.

The motion refers to:

*"the closure of the ... renewables obligation and the collapse of the renewable heat incentive".*

It also refers to the "policy vacuum" that caused. I completely agree with Ms Bradley. We do not disagree with the ending of the renewables obligation, but the discussion about the RHI will soon take place in the House and, frankly, the sooner the better. For the record, it should be said that whoever sanctioned the RHI scheme — there were various stages in the process — which was an arrangement designed in such a way as to ensure profit for overheating commercial premises and effectively legalise fraud, should hang their head in shame and not deny liability by protesting that they could not be concerned with every jot and tittle of major departmental policy. That jot and tittle will cost upwards of £600 million. It may well go to £1 billion. It is an absolute disgrace.

**Mr Agnew:** I thank the Member for giving way. Is he aware that, whilst this was a UK-wide scheme, the rest of the UK made a decision to effectively reduce the subsidy as demand increased to make it sustainable? It continues to exist in the rest of the UK. Only in Northern Ireland did we manage to muck it up.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Lunn:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. That is, in a way, the tragedy of the RHI. The rest of the UK was a year and a half ahead of us and had a perfectly good scheme that is still running satisfactorily, and we did not take the best and most prudent aspects of that scheme and run with them, such as the ability to tier payments and degression. I really do not want to spend my time on that, because it is for another day. There will be another day for that in the House, and some sections of the House will have a field day on it. It is a disgrace.

The call for long-term energy security and affordability in the motion is well made. It should be given a high priority in the emerging Programme for Government. I look forward to hearing from the Minister about that and all the other aspects that Members raised. The two Government parties should not, as usual, just dismiss a valid motion that has a lot of merit. It is an important issue. No offence to Mr Storey, but we should not talk it down in the way in which it has been. It is valid. It needs to be discussed. The

lights could go out. We could have a brownout: I had never heard that word before; I thought that we had blackouts. Whatever kind of outage it is, it is coming down the track. This place will be in an energy deficit by 2020 or 2021 if we do not do something about it.

I look forward to hearing from the Minister, even though he is not particularly listening to me at the moment.

*[Laughter.]*

**Mr T Buchanan:** I think that the entire House is agreed on one issue: long-term sustainable renewable energy is vital for the continued growth of Northern Ireland's business sector. As that sector has a high dependency on electricity, it stands to face a number of challenges in the next few years. Opportunities for economic growth will be very much dependent on providing an electricity system that provides affordable, secure and sustainable energy for our businesses and consumers right across Northern Ireland.

My constituency is renowned for manufacturing. When it comes to competitiveness, it is dependent on not only energy costs but the totality of costs and overheads faced by businesses. While there is clear evidence to show that Northern Ireland is competitive when it comes to labour costs, property costs and other costs associated with the manufacturing industry, more work needs to be done on the reduction of energy costs. Each one of us around the Chamber tonight will say that more work needs to be done on that, and we need to work together. If some parties continue to point the finger, it will not do much to move the matter forward. The security of our electricity supply is of extreme importance. Perhaps the Minister will give an indication this evening as to the ongoing work between his Department, the Utility Regulator and the System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) on how current and future electricity demand will be met.

It is fair to say that, looking back over the past 10 years, the energy market in Northern Ireland is almost unrecognisable due to the increase in renewable energy. Changes in the way in which electricity is generated are clearly evident when travelling throughout Northern Ireland. In west Tyrone, there is a proliferation of wind farms and single wind turbines throughout the countryside. With the increase in wind generation comes the difficult issue in some areas of accessing connection to the grid. There is no doubt that the grid is a scarce and valuable resource. Every effort should be made to ensure that all connections to it maximise the efficient use of the network to the customer's interest. Of course, that is a two-way process; while those seeking grid connections have every right to expect the application and connection process to be transparent, efficient, timely and flexible, landowners' interests must be respected throughout the process.

Little respect has been shown in an ongoing scheme in west Tyrone to a few landowners who have genuine concerns about the direction of the overhead network. Although they have offered alternatives on their land with the support of neighbours in the surrounding area, they have practically been treated with contempt. The issue must be approached with sensitivity and due respect as renewable energy is taken forward. I have heard much about the North/South interconnector this evening. Of course, a lot of landowners are involved across that whole section of ground. It is important that lessons are learned and that people are treated with respect so that pitfalls that

cause animosity, bad feeling and delay in schemes going forward are avoided in future.

In conclusion, I will mention the gas network. The Gas to the West project is expected to add some 40,000 to 50,000 additional customers by the end of 2018 when works are completed. This provides a welcome alternative for many businesses feeling the financial pressure of high costs. A number of businesses in west Tyrone are awaiting the arrival. However, with the increase in demand from both domestic and businesses over the next few years, no doubt this will add extra pressure to the gas supply. Again, perhaps the Minister could give the House some indication of the security of the gas network as we move forward to the future.

**Ms Archibald:** I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on this important issue. I believe that we all share the concern around energy costs. Energy affordability and security of supply are clearly very important aspects of our economic development, both for indigenous companies and also to attract FDI. Indeed, at last week's Economy Committee meeting we heard the Utility Regulator outline the potential for investment in the energy market itself. We need a very serious look at our energy policy. As my party colleague and the Chair of the Economy Committee, Conor, has already highlighted, it is a key issue for the Economy Committee, and we are carrying out an inquiry into energy in the new year.

The closure of the NIRO and the renewable heat incentive (RHI) leaves us with currently no renewable schemes, but the Utility Regulator highlighted last week the fact that these were very successful in incentivising the uptake of, particularly, onshore wind. When I questioned her about the future direction of renewables policy, she indicated that there needs to be a focus on a mix of new technologies around generation and storage. Renewables will obviously have a part to play in that. The regulator indicated that, in her opinion, onshore wind has been maximised in the North, and there needs to be a better use of the renewables that we have to maximise their use on the grid. She stated that, due to the unpredictable nature of wind, there should be a mix which includes both renewable and thermal generation, and that, in her opinion, there is potential for offshore generation of energy and that further scoping of marine sources such as wave or tidal energy is necessary.

Here in the North, we are committed to various targets on greenhouse gas emissions and renewable energy generation, and that requires a policy direction. Under the EU renewable energy directive, there are legally binding targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 through renewable energy generation. The overall target is 16% energy from renewable sources, with a 40% target for electricity. According to various stakeholders, we are on course to meet this target. However, we also have further challenging targets in terms of the 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emission by 2050 and, under the 2015 Paris agreement, to reduce EU greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030. Those will require commitments to a much-lower-carbon economy, and therefore we need to look at how this can be achieved and ensure that the policy and practical basis for this are in place.

In terms of what the motion is calling for, as has already been outlined, the Committee has a focus on the development of energy policy, and I am sure that will inform the Department's future energy policy direction.

Specifically with regard to the Programme for Government, it is my understanding that the PFG is based on outcomes and indicators rather than priorities. The PFG process has been a consultative one, and that is a good path to take to ensure that what we are trying to achieve as a Government is relevant to the needs and priorities of those that we legislate for.

The current draft out for consultation has acknowledged responses to the first consultation which called for more inclusion of energy. It specifically states that other respondents call for a strengthening of position in relation to housing, the environment, water and energy. We have taken on board those views in this latest version of the programme. In this draft, there are particular mentions of the importance of secure, sustainable and cost-efficient energy within outcome 1, which is to promote a strong, prosperous and regionally balanced economy. It mentions the opportunities that it provides in employment, innovation, knowledge and skills and the wider economy.

There is also an acknowledgement of the cross-cutting nature of energy through to other outcomes, in particular outcome 2, which is to live and work sustainably, protecting the environment. We have already talked about the various targets that we are committed to meeting. There is also a specific mention of the role of energy in a circular economy model and the need to address energy generation from waste.

In my opinion, the PFG process has been responsive, and there is clearly a focus on energy security and supply, and also on looking at alternative forms of energy generation.

**Mr Aiken:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms Archibald:** Go ahead.

**Mr Aiken:** I thank the Member for her comments. One of the concerns that we have is that you have mentioned a lot of things about EU directives and directives to look at energy requirements and the rest of it, but your other party in Government is not committed to any of these EU directives going forward.

What is your view, therefore, about being able to keep the necessary requirements to have green energy at the required levels, bearing in mind the potential of Brexit?

**6.00 pm**

**Mr Speaker:** Interventions should be short and focused. The Member has an extra minute.

**Ms Archibald:** There is an awful lot of work to be done on the policy directions going forward and the entire outworkings of the process of exiting the EU, however that may transpire.

I am encouraged that the new draft of the Programme for Government has taken on board the findings of the initial consultation. I envisage that further responses to the consultation will be reflected in the final version.

**Mr Dunne:** I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak on this important issue in the House today, as a member of the Economy Committee. There is no doubt that energy affordability and security of supply are important issues, and we must ensure that they are kept high on the agenda. The cost of electricity to consumers continues to be a real

challenge for domestic and non-domestic large energy users in our economy.

We must ensure competitive conditions to retain existing businesses and to attract new foreign direct investment into Northern Ireland. Energy costs continue to be one of the major overheads for any business here, particularly our large manufacturing companies, some of which are proposing to go off the grid to generate their own energy. Companies such as Bombardier have gone down that route or are proposing to do so, as they plan to remain competitive in the aircraft industry.

I welcome the fact that Northern Ireland is on course to meet its renewables target of 40% by 2020 and that over 900 megawatts of potential renewable electricity generation has now been connected to the grid. Between April 2015 and March 2016, 25.4% of our electricity consumption was from renewable sources. There has been considerable investment in renewable energy locally over the past decade. I know that many businesses and domestic users now rely on renewable energy as their main energy source.

The renewable heat incentive scheme, which has already been mentioned, was established to encourage the renewable generation of heat by giving support payments to eligible generators. There were clear risks from the start, with two bodies involved: DETI was responsible for the policy framework, and the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) managed the applications and installations, including compliance, but did not have any representatives based in Northern Ireland. Lessons must be learned from the scheme and corrective actions put in place to stop the recurrence of such system failures in future.

There is a clear need for the North/South interconnector to be established between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, allowing interconnection between GB and the Republic of Ireland. I welcome confirmation that the Planning Appeals Commission is to resume its consideration of the North/South interconnector in the next few months — in fact, in February 2017. The ongoing delay costs consumers here around £7 million every year, and progress on the project is vital for future energy provision. The establishment of a community fund by SONI and the other providers is critical in ensuring long-term support for the communities directly affected by the proposed installation.

There is clear evidence that our electricity network needs to be upgraded. It was largely constructed in the 1950s and 1960s and is in need of considerable investment to improve consumer protection. During periods of extreme winter weather, we have seen that there can be particular pressures on our existing network. Investment in our grid and further work to develop the single electricity market are crucial in making our energy sector more competitive and, ultimately, reducing the cost to users.

I trust that the Minister will bring forward a new energy strategy that will address the needs of domestic and business consumers and that work will continue with the Utility Regulator and all other energy stakeholders to ensure that we have sustainable, secure and affordable energy in future.

**Mr Smith:** The motion rightly highlights two critical issues, each of which has the potential to derail Northern Ireland's economic policy — namely, energy affordability and

security. I want to address the most important issue, which is energy security.

It is rare to get a consensus on any issue, but the potential for the lights to go out in Northern Ireland if we do not secure our supply and develop an energy strategy comes close. The CBI stated in 'Success through Smart Choices' that, even if the second North/South Interconnector was in place before 2021, the Executive would still face potential security of supply and system stability challenges.

Last month in 'The Irish News' Jamie Delargy said:

*"There's one clear message coming through about the North South Interconnector. If the power link isn't built, the lights may very well go out."*

SONI general manager, Robin McCormick, in this month's 'agendaNil', stated that Northern Ireland is facing an energy supply crisis, as old, conventional fossil-fuel generators retire. He goes on to say that, over the next five years, we will be at a point where we are in energy deficit and states:

*"As the system operator I can't stand up and speak confidently about keeping the lights on".*

I can quote many others, like the economist John Simpson or the NI Utility Regulator, Jenny Pyper, saying similar things, but time is against me.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Smith:** Yes.

**Mr Nesbitt:** At the risk of setting off the Member for Naples, Mr Vesuvius, to my left, I know the Member has seen the graphic in the Programme for Government consultation that says we go into deficit in 2020. Is the Member surprised that in the following pages, under the headline, "What will we do?", there is no mention of fixing the problem?

**Mr Storey:** Is that the Ulster Unionist manifesto?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Nesbitt:** No, it is your Programme for Government.

**Mr Smith:** I thank the Member for his point. The reality, as he points out, is that we are going from generating a 600 MW surplus last year to a 200 MW surplus this year, and from 2021, as the Member rightly points out, our generating capacity will be in deficit.

While we currently are secure in our electricity supply, a prolonged outage of a large generation plant or of the Moyle interconnector would force us into deficit at any time. All that was recognised in DETI's 2010 strategic energy framework —

**Mr Frew:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Smith:** I have already given way, so I want to make progress.

Hence its endorsement of a second North/South interconnector, which was then forecast to be operational in 2013-14. Here we are in late 2016, no further on and keeping our fingers crossed that we have enough capacity to deliver our energy requirements. That may be one of the less newsworthy failures of the Executive but is, possibly, the one with the biggest impact. It is ironic and cold

comfort that our low growth and energy demand due to flatlining economic growth may be our saviour.

What are our options? The return, as we have talked about, of the Moyle interconnector to full capacity will be helpful, but its record of faults does not instil great confidence. SONI proposes greatly increasing wind capacity to deliver the double benefit of building local capacity along with meeting our 40% renewables target by 2020. Whatever your views are on doubling or more the number of wind turbines in Northern Ireland, the reality is that wind generation is intermittent and still requires backup capacity. Furthermore, integrating additional large amounts of renewables onto the grid will require significant investment in the transmission and distribution network. While both of those developments will help build capacity, the key action is the building of the second North/South interconnector to secure an integrated single energy market, but, for it to be in place on time, work must get under way now.

I acknowledge that there are concerns about the use of overground rather than underground cabling and the resulting impact on public health as well as the local landscape, and those objections may well hold up progress. The issue of interconnection is closely related to the issue of renewables policy. Where will all the consented renewables go if the interconnector is further delayed? Where is the grid capacity? With the sudden closure of the NIRO and the RHI does the Executive have a policy or a plan for renewable energy? Leaving to one side for a moment the unfolding scandal of RHI currently being investigated by the Public Accounts Committee, the fact is that there is nothing to replace what has gone before. All that remains is a policy vacuum and a massive bill that, as the Audit Office identified, could and should have been avoided.

I hope the Minister can, in his response, provide reassurance that the lights will not go off in Northern Ireland any time soon and that he can detail his plans for securing the additional generating capacity needed to avoid that. If we do not take action now, electricity outages could become a reality by 2021, if not before.

**Mr Lyons:** I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate. I commend the mover of the motion for giving us the opportunity to talk about what is a very important issue, although I do not agree with the tone of the motion or the way in which he proposed it. This is an important debate. We need to have energy affordability and security of supply. If we do not have them, we are going to be in difficulties in the future. Although I do not want to get involved in the doomsday scenarios that some are predicting, it is important that we have energy that is affordable and that it has the security that is necessary for our economy to grow and prosper. I therefore welcome the fact that we can have a debate on what is a complex issue. I think that it was Conor Murphy who said earlier that no one on the Committee pretends to be an expert. Well, perhaps the Deputy Chair does sometimes, but I think that we can all learn more about the issue.

Take first the issue of affordability. There is no doubt that there are challenges out there, especially for our large energy users, but it is wrong of us to send out the message that Northern Ireland is an extremely uncompetitive place in which to do business. We need to be very careful about doing that, because we can move into that territory very

easily. Of course we want to see more affordable energy and our large energy users being able to compete with other parts of the European Union, but domestic costs here in Northern Ireland are much lower than those for our neighbours, and our non-domestic energy prices are smaller than those for our neighbour the Republic of Ireland. Even though our large energy users have higher costs when compared with the EU-15 median, as Mr Aiken pointed out in his motion, it is important to note that they are below the UK average.

I take issue with what Mr Lunn said. He said that there has been no difference in energy prices for large users over the past number of years. That is not true at all. In fact, if we look at the figures in front of us, provided by the Utility Regulator and the Assembly Research and Information Service, we can see how, in the past two years in particular, there has been a decrease in the cost. I am not saying that that makes everything rosy in the garden, but at least let us be factual here and say that there has been a decrease in the past number of years and that that should be welcomed. That may be cold comfort to those who are trying to compete with elsewhere in the EU. It is important to note, however, that, for competitiveness, our labour costs, transport costs and property costs — other indicators of competitiveness for the sector — are lower.

**Mr Aiken:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Lyons:** If he is very brief.

**Mr Aiken:** I will be very brief. I ask the Member to reflect on the fact that some of our major energy users, including Michelin, cited high energy costs as one of the reasons for not being in Northern Ireland and on the fact that we now have major concerns about large energy users going off-grid.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Lyons:** I do not dispute that that could have been a factor that contributed to it, and that is why we need to look at the issue and why it needs to be addressed.

**Mr Storey:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Lyons:** Yes. He had better be brief.

**Mr Storey:** Following on from that point, it also needs to be remembered that the wholesale price is 70% of the bill. There are issues that we cannot always control, because electricity is a tradable commodity. That fact has to be placed on the record, given that some people would like to make mischief with the issue.

**Mr Lyons:** The Member is absolutely correct, and I thank him for that intervention.

I wanted to make a few comments about the North/South interconnector, but I think that the reason that it is so important and why we need to have it in order to secure our energy supply has been well placed on the record by other Members. It is also good for investment and job creation and ensures that we have a more competitive economy.

The Programme for Government is very clear. It states that we want a:

*“Secure, sustainable and cost-efficient energy supply”.*

That is the headline outcome in the Programme for Government. It is up to the Minister to deliver that, and I

know that he will do that through the new energy strategy as well.

In the time that I have left, I want to address the issue of the renewable heat incentive scheme. We know the problems and can see the failures that have taken place. It is obvious that there were officials in the Department who did not bring it to the attention of those higher up or to the Minister. It is worth placing on record that as soon as it was brought to the attention of the then Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister, Arlene Foster, she took appropriate action, and the investigation of the matter began.

I want to point out one thing. Members are saying that it was the Minister's job to be involved in the scheme and to scrutinise it. What about the members of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee? What about Members from other parties who sat round the Executive table and never made a peep about any of it? In their scrutiny, did they have any problem with it at all? No. What are they doing now? They come here and say, "Not my circus, not my monkeys". That is what they are saying, and that is an abdication —

**6.15 pm**

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

**Mr Lyons:** — of responsibility. *[Interruption.]* I will not support the motion; I will oppose it. *[Interruption.]* I urge the Minister to do all that he needs to do to —

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

**Mr Lyons:** — secure it. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Mullan:** I thank the House for the crescendo, the very warm introduction, and the accessories. *[Laughter.]* As a Member for East Derry, I too welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate about the future of our energy supply, especially in the renewables sector. It is clear that there is broad consensus that a transformation is needed in our energy system if our society is to meet the challenges of environmental sustainability, security of supply, infrastructural renewal and, as has been reflected this evening, economic sustainability and affordability.

It is concerning, as highlighted in the motion, that energy costs for SMEs in Northern Ireland are among the highest in the European Union, with only Italy being more expensive. Energy prices for large and very large businesses are the third highest in the EU, which led the chief executive of Manufacturing NI, Stephen Kelly, to state that the high rates are:

*"damaging economic recovery, impacting on investment and job retention and creation."*

We have also seen significant job losses in the manufacturing sector, which is of great concern. Like many others, I do not believe that the Executive have done enough to drive down prices.

There is also great concern that non-domestic customers in the North are paying up to 20% more than those in the South and 10% more than those in GB. That puts us at a competitive disadvantage, especially in relation to attracting foreign direct investment.

In an attempt to drive down prices, we have seen moves to incentivise renewable energy along with moves to have a fully integrated all-Ireland network. However, with the

end of many subsidies and Brexit hanging over us, there is great uncertainty over the future of the energy market in Northern Ireland. Energy supply and generation is now in uncharted waters: the financial supports for many renewable projects of the past have been withdrawn and little has been done to replace them. Subsidies for all new wind generation under the Northern Ireland renewables obligation (NIRO) have ended and current beneficiaries will cease to receive subsidies from 31 March 2017.

As the motion highlights, we have also witnessed what has been described — my colleague referred to it extensively — as the biggest scandal since devolution: the renewable heat incentive. Successive Ministers and the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) have been asleep at the wheel, and that has resulted in a £500 million black hole in the block grant. That is money that could have gone to our health service or been used for educational services or social housing. Instead, it is literally being burned to heat empty sheds. The scheme is a disgrace, and it is also a disgrace that the First Minister failed to ensure that the necessary safeguards were in place to avoid exploitation. Although that has been denied by some Members, nevertheless the facts remain.

**Mr Agnew:** I thank the Member for giving way. A couple of people have drawn Ofgem into it when discussing responsibility. Given that Ofgem administered the scheme UK-wide and that it was only in Northern Ireland that the scheme went awry, does he not agree that responsibility is firmly with the former Minister, Arlene Foster, who implemented the scheme?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Mullan:** I cannot agree more. We now face a very uncertain future for renewables and I welcome the Minister's comments on how he intends to plug that financial gap without hampering future renewables investment. In addition, there is uncertainty over how EU directives will work, as they require cross-border connectivity, but these directives, like many EU initiatives, face an uncertain future as little to nothing has been done to prepare for Brexit.

An all-island integrated single energy market, which is heavily reliant on EU cross-border funding, should have been up and running this year while we have also consistently witnessed stalling after stalling on the North/South interconnector. We have spoken enough about that this evening.

I welcome the Minister's commitment to the interconnector and I am sure he will agree that the project must be pursued as a matter of urgency in considering the very real risk to the long-term supply of electricity across the North. All these developments are hugely concerning, and the Minister and the Executive have not done enough to militate against growing fears and unrest in the sector as evidenced by stakeholders such as Manufacturing NI, the FSB and others. Of particular concern is the fact that the Executive have done little to secure alternative schemes around renewable energy, which has not only impacted on renewable targets but has caused a spate of job losses across the North. The SDLP supports the motion.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Mr Paul Frew. The Member has three minutes.

**Mr Frew:** Oh dear. I am aggrieved that I have only three minutes. *[Interruption.]* I commend the Members for bringing this debate. The House will know how passionate I am when it comes to energy and everything around it. I believe that it is one of the most fundamental issues that a Government can tackle or grapple with. So, I was annoyed and disappointed at the wording of the motion, but I will give credit where credit is due. The content of the contributions was very factual. It was very good, but it was all doom and gloom.

Whilst it is very important that we get energy right, it is about the energy mix. It seems that the Ulster Unionist Party has a real worry, nervousness and panic around sustainability. Have lessons not be learnt that when decisions are taken in panic, it costs. That is the most important thing that we should take away from this today. It is the cost of energy to our people and our businesses that is the massive issue.

They talked about the grid, the step change and going into deficit. That is the grid if nothing happens. That is what happens if nothing happens. I take exception to the words "policy vacuum". There is no policy vacuum. Just because we do not have subsidies for renewable energy does not mean that there is a policy vacuum. Interconnection is there. Interconnection needs to happen in the most affordable way and at the most affordable price: that is overground. It has to happen because it will reduce constraint charges on our people — some £30 million in a pot that has £152 million of constraint. That is the prize for interconnection, but it is not the only prize. We should be interconnecting everywhere. We should be connecting with GB more, and we should be connecting with France. Even Iceland is being talked about. That is where the future is with regard to interconnection.

I have very little time, Mr Speaker, but I ask the Minister to look at RP5 and at the fact that NIE was given £459 million in this price control, and it has not spent that money quickly. If it does not spend it, it gets to keep 50% of it because of the price control determination. I ask the Minister to investigate that and see where we are with regard to that spend in RP5. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy):** Mr Frew followed that old lesson of leaving them wanting more.

Shortly after taking up post as Minister for the Economy in May, I was introduced to a new phrase, "the energy trilemma". The World Energy Council's definition of energy sustainability is based on three core dimensions: energy security; energy equity, in other words accessibility and affordability; and environmental sustainability. The motion, whilst not using the awful phrase "energy trilemma" does, perhaps unwittingly, touch on each of the issues of affordability, security and sustainability, and it is on each of these three important elements of energy policy that I want to focus my remarks this evening.

The motion notes the high cost of electricity for large business users, and I agree that a perception certainly exists that electricity prices in Northern Ireland across the board are high. That, of course, is not the case for everyone. Earlier this month, the Utility Regulator published a report titled 'Electricity Prices in NI: A Factual Analysis'. The regulator found that Northern Ireland's approximately 800,000 domestic customers pay just below the EU average for electricity and considerably less than

their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland, Germany and Denmark. The price paid by our smallest industrial and commercial customers, who account for around two thirds of all the roughly 80,000 business customers, is slightly higher than the EU average.

The issue, as the motion acknowledges, is for large and very large electricity users. The amount that the remaining approximately 34% of all business customers pay for electricity is amongst the highest in the European Union. I am not arguing that that is not an issue, but is worth noting that the prices remain lower than the UK average, lower than places such as Italy and comparable with the Republic of Ireland and Germany. Furthermore, for July to December last year, unit prices on a per kilowatt hour basis were 7.9p in Northern Ireland compared with an EU average of 5.4p, a difference closer to 30% than the 60% more referenced in the motion. It is also worth remembering that the average annual domestic bill in 2016 is approximately £475 compared with nearly £700 in 2008. This represents a 32% decrease and is the lowest in 10 years.

Even for large and very large industrial and commercial customers, electricity prices have dropped considerably in recent years. I am not for a second trying to take away from the genuine concerns that exist, especially amongst some of our biggest energy-consuming businesses. Whilst competitiveness is affected by a range of costs, including property and wages, I accept that, for some of our key companies, electricity costs affect their competitiveness.

Members will recall that the Electricity and Manufacturing Advisory Group was established by my predecessor specifically to review the effect of energy costs on the competitiveness of the manufacturing industry in Northern Ireland. The group was also tasked with offering advice and recommendations on energy cost reduction measures, and I am looking very closely at those recommendations; indeed, I am using them to inform my thinking.

I am committed to doing all that I can. Some Members have acknowledged the limited capacity of any Minister to affect many aspects of electricity prices. Even though the tools at my disposal are limited, I want to ensure that the House is aware of my commitment to keep a downward pressure on electricity prices for business customers. I have been giving careful consideration to any and all options that are presented to me to remove cost from business customers' bills, and I look forward to the support of Members in doing so.

The motion talks about an absence of a renewables policy. Perhaps it will be useful to recap the impact that the Executive's policy of generating electricity from renewable sources has had. The motion points out that the Northern Ireland renewables obligation is now closed to new onshore wind projects and will close to all other technologies on 31 March next year. It is important to note, however, that projects accredited to the NIRO will continue to be supported by Northern Ireland electricity consumers until 2037. When the NIRO was introduced in 2005, electricity consumption from renewable sources stood at just 3%. Since then, over 900 MW of potential renewable electricity generation has been connected. The latest official figures published by NISRA show that, during the 12-month period between April 2015 and March 2016, 25.4% of our electricity consumption was from renewable sources such as wind, solar photovoltaic, combined heat and power, and hydro.

With a further 700 MW of committed projects with accepted grid connection offers, plus around 200 MW of offers still to be made, I am confident that the Executive's 2020 target of 40% can be achieved over the next few years. Furthermore —

### 6.30 pm

**Mr Agnew:** I appreciate the Minister giving way. I appreciate the positive impact the NIRO has had to date, but what options is he considering going forward, for example, through CFD or even negotiating Northern Ireland's inclusion in the refit?

**Mr Hamilton:** I will come to that later. I thank the Member for his acknowledgement of the success so far, which is highlighted by that jump from 3% to over 25% in a very short period. I am also confident that, when all the renewable projects with offers for connection or those that will receive offers are eventually connected, Northern Ireland will have the capacity to meet 100% of peak electricity demand of around 1,800 MW from renewable sources. In short —

**Mr Aiken:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Hamilton:** Yes, I will.

**Mr Aiken:** I thank the Minister for his comments, but, of course, one of the big issues we have is that the grid at the moment can manage only 55% of synchronous electricity. Going forward, we would need to boost that to somewhere close to 75%, and there is no technology globally anywhere that can do that. Could the Minister comment on that?

**Mr Hamilton:** I will come to that in a moment. What I was going to say was that, in short, the NIRO has successfully helped Northern Ireland to make huge strides forward in generating increasing amounts of electricity from renewables. As I consider the future of renewables policy, I have to contemplate a range of factors. They include the potential of the scarce and precious resource that is the grid — that is how we should view the grid; it is a scarce and precious resource — and its capacity to accommodate more renewables, the absence of significant storage options and the cost of a new support scheme. The motion implicitly, I think, calls for new subsidy arrangements. I am sure that, when penning the motion, the proposers were aware of the impact that a new scheme like the NIRO would have on the large non-domestic electricity customers that the motion also wants me to help reduce prices for.

As regards the renewable heat incentive, which was raised by several Members, I am acutely aware of the enormity of that issue. Members will appreciate not just that the matter is under investigation by the PAC but that, very soon after taking up post, I commenced an independent investigation of the allegations of fraud and abuse of the scheme. I neither want to cut across the PAC's important work nor go into detail about the independent investigation, which is ongoing. What I want to make clear is that I am giving the issue my fullest attention. Lessons are being learnt, and I am carefully considering how we can address the cost that the scheme has for the public purse. The RHI suffered from systemic failures on the part of officials. The important thing now is that decisive action has been taken and a long-term plan is being developed to deal with the problem.

Finally, I turn to the third element of the energy trilemma: security of supply. As I said at Question Time yesterday, with the existing generation capacity at our three conventional power stations at Ballylumford, Kilroot and Coolkeeragh, as well as existing interconnection, including the Moyle interconnector being restored to 450 MW transfer capacity, and the additional 250 MW capacity provided by the SONI AES reserve services contract from January, there are no concerns about meeting our electricity demand to 2020. I acknowledge that emissions legislation could further impact on the Kilroot coal-fired plant in particular from 2020.

A key element of securing future electricity supply and creating a more efficient market via the integrated single electricity market will be the second North/South interconnector, which was much mentioned in the debate. Clearly, the interconnector must proceed through the planning process, but I once again wish to put on record my view that it is a critical piece of energy infrastructure for our energy future. As Mr Frew emphasised in his short but important contribution that, coupled with other plans, such as the proposals by Evermore Energy for a new gas-fired power station in Belfast, battery storage by AES, small-scale wind storage options, the Gaelectric compressed air energy storage project, which is a project of common interest status and has the potential to attract huge investment, and the Islandmagee gas storage project, there is a range of ways in which our security of supply could be enhanced in the years ahead. I assure the Assembly that I am working closely with the Utility Regulator and SONI, the system operator, to consider how best to ensure our security of supply after 2020. If it is considered necessary, I will agree further actions to safeguard our electricity supply.

The motion calls for energy security to be given greater priority in the new Programme for Government. I wish to point out to Members — some Members have already done so — that the draft Programme for Government includes an indicator on a secure, sustainable and cost-efficient energy supply, with the measure being a percentage change in the security of energy supply margin. I believe that that emphasises the importance that the Executive attach to the security of our energy supply.

The World Energy Council states that addressing the three goals of the energy trilemma entail:

*“complex interwoven links between public and private actors, governments and regulators, economic and social factors, national resources, environmental concerns, and individual behaviours.”*

I am increasingly aware that not only is energy policy a complex and often technical area but it is massively interlinked. As I consider the issues raised in the motion, I am mindful that movement on one will in all likelihood impact on another. It is for that reason that I intend to address all the issues relating to affordability, sustainability and security of supply in a comprehensive and long-sighted new energy strategy for Northern Ireland that I intend to move forward on in the near future.

Energy policy must take account of the range of complex issues that have been highlighted today: energy costs, the grid, the link between energy infrastructure and the economy, electricity generation and security of supply, and the decarbonisation of the energy sector. That is what

I intend to deal with in a new energy strategy, and I look forward to the support of the whole House as we grapple with these considerable challenges, which are of such importance to our economy and to our wider society.

**Mr Speaker:** Members, the Question is that the motion — Sorry, my apologies. I call Mr Alan Chambers. My apologies, Mr Chambers.

**Mr Chambers:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Reports on energy and electricity are not in short supply. We have reports, inquiries and investigations. The ETI Committee had three volumes in its inquiry in the last mandate. Currently, the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee at Westminster is holding an inquiry, and it recently held hearings in Northern Ireland. Despite all the reports and inquiries, it is not at all clear to me what the policy of the Department or the Executive is on generation, security of supply, price control and renewables.

There were recommendations in the ETI Committee reports in November 2013 and February 2014 on the security of supply and electricity prices. More recently, there were 24 recommendations in the Energy and Manufacturing Advisory Group (EMAG) report. I remind Members that that was a report that the former Minister, Mr Bell, commissioned after major job losses last year and in the light of complaints about lack of action to tackle the high energy prices faced by our large industrial users.

How did the Executive respond to an expert report that they had commissioned in such a hurry? Interestingly, the chair of EMAG, Mr David Dobbin of Dale Farm, is reported in the November edition of 'agendaNi' as saying:

*"The timing of the report was unfortunate as Purdah had started and the previous minister couldn't comment on it. We then had the election and then the appointment of a new minister and that was followed by the changes to the departments. I have had some behind the scenes talks with the Department for the Economy but so far their approach hasn't been announced."*

The EMAG report was received by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on 5 April 2016 — almost eight months ago. In May, my colleague Robbie Butler asked the new Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the recommendations of the Energy and Manufacturing Advisory Group. The answer he received, three months later, on 22 August from the Minister was:

*"I am currently considering the recommendations of the Energy And Manufacturing Advisory Group."*

My colleague Steve Aiken submitted a question for written answer on 10 October:

*"To ask the Minister for the Economy when his Department will respond to the recommendations contained in the Energy and Manufacturing Advisory Group Report."*

It remains unanswered.

It is time that the Assembly said that we need and demand answers. We need to know what policy direction the Minister and the Executive want to take us on with renewables and the decarbonisation agenda. We need to know what action the Executive intend to take to tackle the

crippling energy costs that our major industrial users have been complaining about for years.

We also need to hear some sort of response to the reports that the previous Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee compiled, and a response from the Department and Minister for the Economy to the EMAG report, which his predecessor commissioned to try to cover his embarrassment at the major industrial job losses announced last autumn, where the cost of energy was cited as a contributory factor, especially in the case of Michelin.

I turn now to a few of the contributions. My colleague Steve Aiken highlighted the fact that our industrialists have some of the highest prices of electricity supply in Europe. He talked about the North/South interconnector and how important that is. He said that there is no plan B. That is not his rhetoric; those were the words of the Utility Regulator, last Wednesday, to the Economy Committee. There is no plan B.

Mervyn Storey demonstrated that he is a bit touchy about criticism. He acknowledged the seriousness of the situation, but he was unable — or maybe unwilling — to answer the question from my colleague Mr Nesbitt about energy deficit, because it was contained in an Executive —

**Mr Speaker:** Mr Chambers, may I ask you to miss the mic with your papers?

**Mr Chambers:** OK, sorry.

The energy deficit claim was contained in an Executive publication. Mr Storey reminded me that the best form of defence is attack, but bluster fools no one.

Mr Murphy put his cards on the table and told us immediately that he was opposed to the motion. He talked about policies that needed to be thought out, and he said that they had got to be got right. That is code for more reports and more prevarication. How much time does he need?

Mr Agnew made a significant intervention in Ms Bradley's contribution, as he did a couple of times during the debate. He added further fuel when he attributed the blame for the developing renewable heat incentive scandal on where the blame lies.

Mr Dunne supported the concerns on electricity prices for our manufacturing industry. I welcome his support for the interconnector.

My colleague Mr Smith highlighted security of supply, which is absolutely important.

Mr Lyons talked about the interconnector being important. It is not enough to acknowledge that we need it; we have to acknowledge that we cannot afford any delay. He demonstrated the concept of spreading the blame. He pointed the finger at the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee. I do not know; his attempt to spread the blame would not even fool a monkey, Mr Speaker.

Mr Frew talked about the Ulster Unionist Party showing a characteristic of real panic. I do not accept that assertion, but the actions of this Executive would cause you to have a bit of panic at times.

**Mr Storey:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Chambers:** No, I will not be giving way. I think I have heard enough bluster from you today. *[Laughter.]* I was delighted to hear the Minister. He has talked about what he

is going to deliver. In actual fact, he is going to deliver an awful lot of what is in our motion, but his colleagues do not seem to accept that. It concerns me when I hear Members deride and decry concerns about security of supply. It displays a blasé and complacent attitude which is all too commonplace in the ranks of the Sinn Féin/DUP coalition. I remind them that it is not just members of the official Opposition who have raised concerns. We have heard quotes today from SONI, the Utility Regulator, the CBI and respected commentators like John Simpson and Jamie Delargy. If Members on the Executive Benches do not believe the experts, I refer them to the graph on page 25 of their own draft Programme for Government consultation document. The electricity supply margin is 400MW and currently meets security standards. In terms of generation adequacy, the level is sufficient in Northern Ireland in the medium term. An accompanying graph shows Northern Ireland going into a generation deficit by 2020.

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

Our motion has deliberately called upon the Executive to clarify their position on future subsidy arrangements for all forms of energy generation. That is because it has not, as some have alleged, been just the renewable sector that has been the recipient of government subsidy. Generation based on fossil fuels has been a heavy beneficiary over the years.

#### 6.45 pm

From engaging with the sector, it is clear to the Ulster Unionist Party that the renewables industry is not asking to be subsidised in perpetuity, but it needs a route to market. There is a crucial need for a mechanism that subsidises the wholesale price to enable investors to invest. At the moment, on wholesale prices alone, no one is willing to invest in any form of new generation. It is in everyone's interests to structure a route to market that is competitive and technology neutral. That way, the market brings forward the least cost generation technologies.

Above all, the Assembly and the general public need reassurance that the Executive have a long-term plan to keep the lights on. I look at what has been going on over the last few years, with the fiasco around the renewable heat incentive scandal. That is a glaring example of a good concept being undermined by maladministration and a lack of ministerial scrutiny, and it leaves me with little confidence that those in charge know what they are doing.

Six months into the new mandate, is it too much to ask the Minister and Executive to give us an indication of what they plan to do on renewable policy? Is the 40% target still achievable? Is the NIRO going to be replaced? Are we looking at the contracts for difference model? How are we going to pay for the renewable heat incentive fiasco, and is anyone going to accept responsibility for it? We have brought this motion to the Assembly in the hope that we will start to get some answers to the questions that we have raised. I commend the motion.

*Question put.*

*The Assembly divided:*

*Ayes 35; Noes 53.*

#### AYES

*Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Hanna, Mr Kennedy, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr E McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Aiken and Mr Chambers.*

#### NOES

*Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr Robinson.*

*Question accordingly negatived.*

7.00 pm

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I will allow time for Members to leave the Chamber so that we can have a good debate.

## Assembly Business

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Order. I inform Members that the Speaker will rule — order — on the point of order raised by Jim Allister at the start of this morning's session at the end of the next item of business and before the Adjournment debate.

## Private Members' Business

### Arm's-length Bodies

**Madam 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.

**Mr Logan:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly notes the reduction in the number of government Departments and the associated efficiencies; and calls on the Executive to review the number and function of their arm's-length bodies with a view to reducing their number, where possible, and maximising the available revenue.*

I move the motion in my name and that of my party colleagues. First, I wish to state that arm's-length bodies (ALBs) are necessary for the proper functioning of government; they perform an important role in helping Departments to fulfil their obligations. The review is not intended to eradicate all arm's-length bodies but aims to improve the public's, and even the Assembly's, understanding of arm's-length bodies. The review is intended to produce better scrutiny and stronger accountability and to ensure that arm's-length bodies are carrying out their functions as intended, meeting their aims, and achieving value for money.

In 2010, the Assembly debated a motion that called on the Executive to review the roles and functions of quangos and arm's-length bodies to ensure that there was accountability and value for money. The Democratic Unionist Party has tried to make streamlining government and its associated arm's-length bodies a key ambition. In the previous mandate, the Executive made huge strides in streamlining Departments and their arm's-length bodies and made provision to reduce the number of MLAs from the year 2021. In the 2011 mandate, the Executive delivered a reduction in the number of Departments from 12 to nine; a reduction in the number of special advisers; a reduction in the number of MLAs per constituency by one from 2021; and a reduction in the number of councils from 26 to 11. As of 31 March 2015, the number of public bodies stood at 103. Even then, that figure was collated after the creation of the Education Authority in place of the five separate education and library boards.

Progress is being made, but this party believes that a fundamental review is required of future delivery of the work carried out by arm's-length bodies. The Department for Communities alone has 21 ALBs — excluding the Northern Ireland Housing Executive — which collectively have a combined budget of £78 million. The main drivers included in the review should be as follows: reducing budgets; sharing services and accommodation; more collaboration; different accountability and governance models; and reducing the number of ALBs. On Wednesday past, I asked staff from the Equality Commission, in Committee, what England and Wales lose by having a combined Equality and Human Rights Commission. They did not know. I asked them how they justified not only

separate buildings and support staff but the split thinking that comes along with them.

**Mr Lyons:** I thank the Member for giving way. The Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission are one body in England. Over the last five years, its budget was around £100 million. The two organisations in Northern Ireland have a total budget of about £30 million. That works out at £17 per person in Northern Ireland and only £2 in England. Surely this needs to be addressed. There is no reason for that type of spend on such organisations.

**Mr Logan:** The Member makes a great point and backs up the reason for having the debate today.

There should not be a reduction in the number of arm's-length bodies just to save money at the expense of sacrificing useful services. Good government requires that the public bodies supporting it are efficient and effective. This is not a case of overhauling the most expensive arm's-length bodies but of looking at each organisation's functions, including at why those need to be done by an arm's-length body as opposed to in-house and at how efficiently they are done by any other organisation and how much they contribute to society.

This is not a straightforward process — at times it will be difficult to compare organisations — but we have seen instances where even sharing services has made a significant difference. The use of shared services has delivered significant savings across government. For example, IT Assist has reduced the cost of IT provision per user by more than 30% over three years and saved over £29 million. Utilisation of existing government shared services such as IT Assist, Account NI and HR Connect must be considered as opposed to each arm's-length body delivering its own IT and HR services internally.

This is a challenging discussion. We talk about reviewing arm's-length bodies abstractly and in general terms. It all sounds simple, but no doubt each stakeholder involved in the organisations is passionate about what they do and what they contribute. If an arm's-length body delivers, we need to recognise that and give praise.

Sometimes we get caught up in framing all arm's-length bodies as a waste of money or as unnecessary extras but some of them do fantastic work and contribute well to Northern Ireland. For example, on Friday I met with a business in my constituency of North Antrim. It ships pharmaceutical products all over the world and made clear that it was delighted with the support it gets from Invest NI.

Invest NI, for example, is an organisation that exceeds targets to help the Northern Ireland economy. In 2015-16, the agency once again exceeded its targets, promoting over 5,500 jobs across Northern Ireland against a target of 4,000. There is an organisation that is delivering.

I recently spoke in the Chamber about the Middletown Centre for Autism and the fantastic service it provides. The glowing reports from its most recent inspection highlight its effective service.

When individuals in my constituency contact me about work-related issues, the Labour Relations Agency is exemplary in the support, information and advice it provides to my team and to the individuals concerned. So, praise where praise is due.

However, there is room for a review of arm's-length bodies to see where there are inefficiencies. As the motion indicates, where the number of arm's-length bodies can be reduced, that is the most preferable option; but the review should be allowed to examine all options to maximise service delivery and reduce administration overheads.

In conclusion, the Executive are committed to delivery. We want the very best for the people of Northern Ireland and ALBs help us to achieve that through their various functions. What the motion is asking for today is simply a review. If a reduction in cost, administration, bureaucracy or duplication can be achieved, that would be beneficial for everyone. I commend the motion to the House.

**Mr Attwood:** I beg to move the following amendment:

*Leave out all after "departments" and insert*

*"and acknowledges the important contribution of current and past arm's-length bodies across a range of social, cultural, environmental, economic, legal, rights and equality issues; recognises that arm's-length bodies have independence which avoids decisions and funding being politicised, produces best policy outcomes and has access to technical and specialist capacity; and calls for a review of the financing of arm's-length bodies to establish proper resourcing with an objective and sustainable funding process through which arm's-length bodies can deliver effectively their work."*

I will make one preliminary comment on the speech that we have just heard. On reading the motion, it is quite clear what the DUP was at: taking a battering ram to arm's-length bodies in Northern Ireland. What we heard from the proposer of the motion, Mr Logan, who was very measured and moderate in his tone, was him trying to reconfigure the motion to disguise its real intentions. Let us remember, as we go through the debate, that whatever is said by the DUP in proposing the motion —

**Mr Logan:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Attwood:** — the intent of the motion is to do undue damage to ALBs. I will give way in a second. ALBs need review, but the motion would do them undue damage.

The proof of that is that there was only one intervention during Mr Logan's speech. What was the intervention? It was to reply to comments being made by Mr Logan. Why was the intervention made by Mr Lyons, other than to launch an assault upon the Equality Commission? In that moment and in that space, did the DUP not reveal the true intention behind its motion, despite the worthy efforts of Mr Logan to disguise it? For Mr Logan then to accept the scripted point from his colleague, without trying in any shape or form to recognise the different environment, culture and history in Northern Ireland when it comes to equality issues, and to subscribe casually, in that shallow way, to the analysis put forward by Mr Lyons of merging the Equality Commission and Human Rights Commission, as happened in England — something that many people rejected and the consequence of which is that many people feel that both the equality and human rights functions of that new body have been degraded — really did reveal much of the true thinking behind the DUP motion.

The SDLP supports reform. There are too many places in Northern Ireland society where people still cling to the past and the old ways of doing things. We agree that

there should be a review of arm's-length bodies, but, in conducting that review, let us look more laterally rather than looking in the one-dimensional way of the DUP. I will come back to that in respect of the content of the motion. Let us bring into the heart of government the specialists in outside agencies who know best about how to mainstream into the life of government and the life of the North proposals and requirements in respect of equality, human rights, childcare, anti-poverty and older people. If you bring the people who have those specialisms into the life of government, government might live up to the ambition and needs of society. Let us do that.

When we are dealing with the issue of arm's-length bodies, what will we do about the gender imbalance in those bodies? At the moment, the number of men is twice the number of women, and the number of men who are chairs of arm's-length bodies is four times higher than the number of women. If we are going to do a review, let us deal with the gender imbalance across arm's-length bodies, especially at senior positions.

If we are going to review, let us be radical about it. When I was Minister, rather than conducting a light-touch review of the Housing Executive, I initiated a fundamental review in order to protect the legacy of its great achievements over the last 40 and more years —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Sorry, may I just inform you that your microphone has switched the wrong way and is not picking up?

**Mr Attwood:** All right. That might be a relief to some people, but obviously not to the Principal Deputy Speaker, who is very anxious to hear all my words. I welcome that.

Let us conduct a fundamental review, as we did in the Housing Executive, when, in an effort to ensure that it was fit for purpose for the next 40 years, we protected its legacy against those who wanted to degrade it.

What is revealing in the motion —

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that the review is not necessarily tantamount to reduction? It is about how we do things more effectively, and it might lead to the creation of a new arm's-length body — an independent environmental protection agency, for example?

**7.15 pm**

**Mr Attwood:** Yes. I see that the Programme for Government is silent on that, despite the urgings of the SDLP in our very substantial Programme for Government submission, which we will publish in the near future. It will provide a very useful checklist against the inadequacies of the Programme for Government produced by the DUP and Sinn Féin.

What does the motion from the DUP say? Is says we are going:

*“to review the number and function”,*

and cost. That is it. Number, function and cost. Do not rely upon the British Government — I barely rely on them on this — but even they publish guidelines on reviews of arm's-length bodies. They talk about it a lot more than even the DUP talks about it, because the British Government talk about whether the bodies are still

needed, still deliver, carry out their activities effectively and contribute to policy development. I go a lot further than the British Government, but it is revealing that the DUP does not go even as far as the Cabinet Office advice from the British Government; the DUP concentrates just on numbers, money and function.

I will say this to Sinn Féin, because I presume it may or may not be inclined to support the DUP motion —

**Mr McGuigan:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Attwood:** It should be vigilant and warned about those who use soft words tonight about an arm's-length review when we know that part of its intention is to damage fundamental values and architecture in Northern Ireland. I will give way.

**Mr McGuigan:** I am a wee bit confused about Mr Attwood's contribution on the amendment. He seems to be talking at odds about the amendment, which is calling for only a review of the finances of arm's-length bodies; it does not call for a review of arm's-length bodies.

**Mr Attwood:** I will deal with my amendment in my closing remarks. I want to deal first, though, with what should be off limits in the DUP intentions to prey on fundamental requirements of our society. There is a wide range of arm's-length bodies that, in the view of the SDLP, should be off limits in any fundamental revision of their function or future. Somebody once wrote that, once national conflicts are fully evolved, they revolve around issues of law, order and justice. Our society demonstrates that, when our national conflict entered its most recent phase — I reject the use of violence to bring about a resolution to that national conflict — it revolved around issues of law, order and justice. Consequently, through the Good Friday Agreement and other interventions, we created an architecture to ensure that issues of law, order and justice did not again become the engine for conflict in our society. When we come to the Equality Commission, the Human Rights Commission, our policing arrangements, our criminal justice arrangements and our oversight arrangements —

**Mr Stalford:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Attwood:** I will give way in a second.

— through all the criminal justice and other agencies in the North, let us be jealous in guarding them. They are fundamental features of the new order of politics, uncertain and turbulent though it may be, in Northern Ireland. I will give way.

**Mr Stalford:** Thank you. If law, order and justice are fundamental to what caused the conflict in Northern Ireland and should be off limits, why did the SDLP support the devolution of those powers to the Assembly?

**Mr Attwood:** Because we are better than a British Government at shaping the destiny of this part of Ireland and the needs of our people. Are you now saying to Sinn Féin that you did not want the devolution of justice and policing? I remember that, in 2007 and 2010 —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I ask Members to make —

**Mr Attwood:** — you spent a lot of time going down that particular road —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I ask —

**Mr Attwood:** — and rightly so. I will come back to —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will you please take your seat? I ask Members to make their comments through the Chair. Thank you.

**Mr Attwood:** I will conclude, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker, and go back to the issues. I judge from the intervention that Sinn Féin is not inclined to support an amendment that is more rounded, grounds a review in fundamental values and requirements, talks about the need for independence in decision-making on certain matters, tries to protect the areas that need the most protection, looks to the strengths of arm's-length bodies rather than their deficits and talks about:

*“a review of the financing of arm's-length bodies to establish proper resourcing with an objective and sustainable funding process”.*

That is where we should concentrate our efforts.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member please bring his comments to a close?

**Mr Attwood:** We should not go down the road the DUP is encouraging Sinn Féin to go down, as it would see a degradation of fundamental issues in Northern Ireland society.

**Mr Lynch:** Ba mhaith liom labhairt i bhfabhar an ruín agus in éadan an leasaithe. I support the motion and oppose the amendment. My party colleague will speak on the amendment later.

The motion is short and concise, and it calls on the Executive to review the number of functions of their arm's-length bodies, which few would disagree with. I agree with Mr Attwood that there are fundamentals, and we need to look at things laterally and protect human rights and equality. We all know and understand that it is a time of Tory cuts to the block grant and of great financial difficulties for this Administration. There is a greater need and a responsibility on us to look at what more can be done to ensure the proper scrutiny and accountability of already reduced resources. Indeed, arm's-length bodies should be reviewed regardless of the state of the finances. There is also a responsibility on us to review public bodies to ensure that they remain fit for purpose, well governed and accountable for what they do. Good governance requires public bodies to be efficient, effective and accountable. We also have a responsibility to ensure that we get the service that we deserve and require for the people whom we represent at the lowest cost.

I was a member of the previous Justice Committee, and a number of arm's-length bodies came under the Assembly and Committee that previously had not been. They came to the Committee regularly to brief us and to be questioned — for example, the Criminal Justice Inspection, the Probation Board and the Police Ombudsman. Those organisations play an important and useful role in delivering services, and many in the public recognise that. As Mr Attwood said, those are key parts of the architecture of the new dispensation.

Since a similar debate took place in 2010, some progress has been made. The streamlining of five education boards into a single Education Authority, which was established last year, could save millions of pounds each

year. Any review should consider issues of efficiency, including the potential for savings, and examine whether the public body could provide better value for money. It should also consider the performance of the body and the extent to which it meets its objectives, and whether it should be streamlined, as with the education boards. Could overlapping public bodies be amalgamated to avoid duplication? That could establish whether individual bodies should be abolished, absorbed into their parent Department or merged with another body, resulting in efficiencies and savings.

If the Assembly and Executive were seen to address the issues of public bodies through a review, they would inject greater public confidence. The matter needs to be addressed not as a cost-cutting exercise but as something that could have the beneficial impact of saving money. It would demonstrate that we are serious about tackling inefficiency and delivering value for money. There is an opportunity now, with these institutions bedding down and as we move further and further away from the days of direct rule, to bring about positive change with arm's-length bodies.

Mr Attwood mentioned a whole plethora of issues — for example, how members are appointed to public bodies, representation of minorities and gender balance. I read the research pack, and it was noticeable that women were under-represented, particularly in terms of remuneration.

**Mr Stalford:** I am grateful to the Member for giving way. He will be aware that, in the Executive Office Committee, I have consistently raised the issue of the class background of people who are appointed to public bodies because there is a tendency for a small self-perpetuating group of people to occupy quango-land.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute. Tá nóiméad breise ag an Chomhalta.

**Mr Lynch:** I agree with the Member. Young people were also under-represented, and all those issues need to be addressed in any review. Over the years, I have heard people complaining about duplication of the work of two bodies in the House. This motion affords us that opportunity.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I am not sure whether it is an obligation on me, but I will nevertheless declare an interest, having been a commissioner in the Commission for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland, an arm's-length body of the former Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and now, of course, the Executive Office.

It was an interesting experience that gave me some insight into the relationship between an ALB and the Executive Office in Northern Ireland.

Principal Deputy Speaker — do you see how I hold an audience? — what about the clock?

I have some direct experience of the relationship between an ALB and a Department in Northern Ireland. I was hoping that the debate might focus on why we have ALBs. I know that Mr Logan touched on it, but we have to drill down a bit and say that surely the function of an ALB is to do something that government cannot easily do or to do something that government can do but do it more effectively or more efficiently. The latter can be quite challenging, because there is a strong umbilical cord between the ALB and the mother ship. It seems to me

that the Executive like to keep their control. I remember that, for example, there were 36 policies that we had to adopt with regard to sole working, alcohol and drug abuse, expenses and so on. With a lot of them you can see the need for a consistent approach across ALBs, particularly when you have seconded civil servants working on your staff. However, it makes things very tight, and, when you try to use initiative, it can be difficult.

I will give you one little example. When the commission was established, we were in temporary government accommodation in the centre of Belfast with two seconded civil servants who were spending 10 hours a day photocopying. They had to photocopy every policy document three times because, suddenly, they had been presented with four commissioners rather than the one they had been expecting. The point was made to us that the photocopier was about to break down. Using my initiative and a bit of entrepreneurship, I thought, I contacted a man in the business community who rented photocopiers to the government, including one to the then First Minister in his home, I believe. Anyway, he lent us a photocopier without charge for six months, but, when it arrived, the civil servants said they would not touch it because we had not tendered it. They expected a tender for those who were prepared to give a machine for free. In the real world, I do not believe that that happens.

We talk about the independence of arm's-length bodies, but they are only independent in one sense. That was put to me by a civil servant who, I believe, was not perhaps the greatest fan of the Victims' Commission. He said to us one day that we had to realise that we were only independent in terms of the advice that we offered Ministers. With a little more relish than perhaps might have been deemed professional, he went to say that, while the Ministers were obliged to listen, they were not obliged to take our advice. If we are going to have a review, let it be a comprehensive review — an audit that includes looking at the unnecessary shackles that we place on arm's-length bodies.

I see that junior Minister Ross is here to respond to the debate. Earlier, perhaps unkindly, I referred to an archived document to do with the environmental British-Irish Council meeting that he had been at; I am afraid that I will do the same thing to him this evening. This document is a Budget review group report from September 2010 on a review of arm's-length bodies that was discussed as part of the Stormont House negotiations. At September 2012, it appears that there had been an agreement to

*“abolish, integrate or merge 62 ALBs”*

while 40 others “should remain unchanged”. We have tried to do our own little forensic trail this week to see whether the 62 were indeed abolished, integrated or merged, and it is difficult to get to the bottom of it. I do not know whether the Minister has the information to enlighten us. Several of them are still around, including the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and the Livestock and Meat Commission. The Armagh Observatory and the Armagh Planetarium were to go, and the Arts Council and the Sports Council were to merge. NI Screen takes me back to my first point: with a global player like NI Screen, you cannot have set rules such as you have only £4.99 per head for lunch, not when you are going to Cannes, Hollywood or the Oscars to try to attract business.

The SDLP amendment says that we want to review the financing only —

**7.30 pm**

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

**Mr Nesbitt:** It does not allow for a change in the numbers, so reluctantly, on that basis, we cannot accept the amendment. We will accept the motion.

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

**Ms Armstrong:** I find myself in an unusual situation where I can accept absolutely the amendment and the motion. Reading the detail of both, if only they were together, we would have something structured that we could take forward.

There needs to be a review of the performance, range and number of arm's-length bodies. If that review identifies duplication of service, of course, there should be positive action to ensure efficiencies. As the amendment identifies, we have a range of arm's-length bodies that have and continue to deliver effective outcomes for this government and, importantly, for our citizens. Those bodies are as relevant now as they were in 2010 when the subject was last debated. We should give credit where credit is due and ensure that sustainable funding is provided to allow them to go forward, but, where there is a failure of service delivery, we need to take proactive action to reduce and remove any unnecessary expenditure.

In 2010, my colleague Stephen Farry confirmed that there absolutely was a role for arm's-length bodies between Departments and the community. Many arm's-length bodies deliver services and functions that are best served outside government, and that was recognised in 2012 by the former First Minister Peter Robinson. If a review finds that arm's-length bodies are no longer needed, the rationale for reaching that decision must be based on factual evidence that the service is no longer required and not just on saving money — I was glad to hear Mr Logan say that the intention of the motion was not just to save money — or bringing services back inside core Departments.

If rationalisation occurs, there may not be the savings that the original motion envisaged. Rationalisation should be considered only if services are no longer necessary or are being duplicated. Rationalisation can create the benefit of better service delivery and could enable effective mergers and improve the general process of good financial management. We have heard that for many years in the community and voluntary sector, have we not?

Having reviewed the guidance on reviews of public bodies provided by the Cabinet Office, as was mentioned by Mr Attwood, we should follow the first principles approach to whether each function is needed, is still being delivered, is carried out effectively by the organisation and contributes to the core business of the organisation, the sponsor Department and the government as a whole. It must have respect to devolved arrangements, and we must, of course, consider if the function is provided in order to meet reserved matters. As noted in that report, we must also consider the extent to which the public body's functions are delivered in an environment currently directly affected

by EU regulations or processes, and how the body will deal with the impact of Brexit has to be part of the review.

What we could do here is take the best of the reform programme utilised by our colleagues in Westminster, where the reform effectively reduced the number of bodies and enabled mergers where duplication and overlap occurred. Some were asked to improve functions in order to meet challenging and changing needs, and others were simply retained. The Public Bodies Act 2011 ensured that a framework was enshrined, ensuring that a fair and transparent process was followed. That is key here. We need that consistent approach. We may need to streamline the number of arm's-length bodies, as long as it is a positive and proactive change, but that can only happen if there is a clear, open, consistent and impartial process.

**Mr Irwin:** This is a timely motion, given that we are well into the first year of the new Assembly term. Already, the restructured Departments appear to be responding well to the mergers that took place. Having been the Chairperson of the ARD Committee and having worked through the merger of the Environment and ARD Departments, I know that there was a clear argument for the combination of those Departments, given the many cross-cutting functions of each division of government. I recall that, in earlier discussions on the issue, the DUP was out in front in actively calling for and subsequently working towards a reduction in Departments. For much of that time, our party was a lone voice in pursuing this important matter.

The public rightly stated that Northern Ireland, for its size and population, was over-governed compared with other parts of the UK. We in the DUP listened intently to those concerns and took action. We have already overseen the reduction in Departments from 12 to nine and a reduction in local councils from 26 to 11. There are further targets to hit, namely a reduction in the number of MLAs by one in each constituency by 2021. That was all in a bid to rationalise our Government to better reflect our population size. It is therefore only right that we take that a stage further and look at the many arm's-length bodies that exist across our remaining departmental remits and seek, where possible, to reduce the number of such bodies.

There are, of course, arm's-length bodies that play a very important role, and no one is saying that every single body should be done away with. However, it is the right time to start looking at the role and functions of all arm's-length bodies to see where and how efficiencies can be made. In areas where the duplication of remits and services takes place, steps can surely be taken to ensure that that is not the case, and if that means that a particular body is no longer needed or can be subsumed into another existing body with no loss of service, surely a realistic assessment must be made of its future.

There are innumerable arm's-length bodies. I am aware that the Communities Department, for example, has 21, not including the Housing Executive, and that is only one Department.

**Mr Humphrey:** I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I want to make the House aware of a visit that I made last year to Cairn Lodge Amateur Boxing Club in my constituency, to which public servants from the Sport NI organisation had committed to give funding. Two weeks later, they withdrew that funding simply because of an affiliation issue of boxing in Northern Ireland. That sort

of arbitrary behaviour by public servants is simply not acceptable. Does the Member agree?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Irwin:** I thank the Member for his intervention, and he certainly makes a valid point.

Clearly, a review is the most appropriate method of determining the number, function, benefit and, crucially, the cost of operating each body. It is only through a review of all arm's-length bodies that we can be fully informed and then actively work towards making efficiencies. In an era of efficiencies and prudent expenditure, it is incumbent on the Assembly to initiate the process with arm's-length bodies. I certainly encourage Members to support the motion in order that the Executive can work towards the commencement of a review process. I support the motion.

**Mr McGuigan:** Like my party colleague, I support the motion. I see what it suggests as the sensible thing to do to ensure efficiency, public accountability, good governance and, hopefully, value for money when it comes to arm's-length bodies. It was a Sinn Féin manifesto commitment to have a review of arm's-length bodies, and it is one that I wholeheartedly agree with. This subject, as has already been pointed out, and as is clear from the briefing pack, has been debated before in the Assembly Chamber, and there have been questions on it many times. The majority of the arguments that we have heard so far today and will continue to hear are similar to the arguments that were debated in the last debate, in 2010.

From my point of view, there was a time when it could have been argued that we needed the number of arm's-length bodies that have accumulated here in the North. That time was when there was no functioning Assembly, but direct rule has long gone, thankfully, and will not be coming back. The work of these institutions and the changes to local government have brought about enhanced democratic accountability, and, as a result, that surely means that we will need to reduce, reconfigure and adapt some of our arm's-length bodies. We need to bring about even more democratic accountability to those charged with decision-making, ie elected politicians. The motion quite rightly points out the recent reduction in Departments, so I think that this is a timely opportunity to look at and review arm's-length bodies again. I will not argue with the reality that we need arm's-length bodies to provide support to government. I certainly do not envisage a situation in which we do not have any groups or bodies that assist that work in certain circumstances.

As the amendment states, there will be instances when "technical and specialist capacity" outside of government is required. Let those instances be determined by a review that is based on our current and future circumstances, not on our past structures and needs. I have to say that the sentiment of the amendment baffled me, and I was even more baffled by the contribution of —

**Mr Stalford:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McGuigan:** Go ahead.

**Mr Stalford:** Does the Member think that it is bizarre to find a party with the word "democratic" in its name advocating rule by experts and technocrats, rather than rule by the elected representatives of the people?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Tá nóiméad breise ag an Chomhalta. The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr McGuigan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I would not suppose to answer questions from other political parties.

As I was saying, I was baffled by the contribution of Mr Attwood. He said that arm's-length bodies need to be reviewed, yet there is no indication in the amendment that they need to be reviewed, and the only things that the amendment suggests need to be reviewed are finances and resources.

I certainly acknowledge the:

*"contribution of current and past arm's-length bodies"*

— that is contained in the amendment — and the honest work of individuals who sit on them. I do, though, have to question the rationale of calling for:

*"a review of the financing of arm's-length bodies to establish proper resourcing",*

as is stated in the amendment, without any call for a review of the number, make-up and functions of those bodies in the first instance. Surely that is putting the cart before the horse. In all honesty, it is probably allowing two horses to pull the cart when only one is required. As Kellie Armstrong pointed out, if the amendment about resources had been added to the motion in the aftermath of a review instead of completely ignoring the need for review, it would have made more sense.

I am not sure that I can completely agree either with the sentiments in the amendment that the make-up of arm's-length bodies in all cases allows decision-making to be totally independent and:

*"avoids decisions and funding being politicised".*

As has been pointed out, given the nature of appointments and the number of current, silent or ex-political party members appointed to some public bodies, I doubt whether the public would agree with that assertion either. My colleague coming after me will touch more on the detail of that, as well as on other important questions of how the make-up of some of the bodies is reflective of society.

I want to address another point regarding Sinn Féin's position on defending equality and human rights. Our position on both issues is quite clear. Regardless of the position of other political parties in the Chamber, we can state that we will be standing four-square behind equality and human rights in any review process.

In conclusion, and without predicting the outcome of any review process of arm's-length bodies, I am mindful of the need to ensure accountability and for the public to get the best value. Thus, where savings can reasonably be made while still providing the best outcomes, that is something that we need to do.

**Mr Stalford:** I am determined to entice Eamonn McCann into the voting booth with me at least once, so I will start with a quotation from Tony Benn. He said that the questions that all powerful people should be asked are:

*"what power do you have; where did you get it; in whose interests do you exercise it; to whom are you accountable; and, how can we get rid of you?"*

We are dealing with a new reality in Northern Ireland. Over the past year and a half or so, the number of Departments has been reduced, and the number of Assembly Members will be reduced at the end of this Assembly term. The institutions that were established in 1998 have undergone radical change. We now have an Opposition. Nowhere should be immune from change and reform in public life and the public sphere in Northern Ireland.

It is sad to hear Mr Attwood become the conservative defender of the establishment in his contribution. The fact of the matter is that the motion calls for a fundamental review to ensure the best delivery for the people whom we are sent here to represent.

We know what created the situation of why there is so much power in the hands of quangos and arm's-length bodies. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, local government was accused of not being fit to be trusted with power, so that power was moved from local government into the hands of quangos.

Effectively, and in real terms, Northern Ireland was governed as a sort of colony where a Secretary of State acted like a proconsul, appointing people to arm's-length bodies that —

7.45 pm

**Mr Humphrey:** I am grateful to the Member for giving way. The Member will remember that, in July of last year — I served as a member of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure at the time — nine resignations took place from the Sport NI board for reasons that we still do not know. Those nine people, who had been selected from a pool of people skilled in the wide sporting field, were replaced by public and civil servants. Does the Member agree with me that we must never again allow a situation where a Minister can appoint nine public or civil servants to replace people who had the skills to bring to the table?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Stalford:** I absolutely agree. This is one of the issues that I have raised consistently in the Committee for the Executive Office. Arm's-length bodies and quangocracy or quangoland are not reflective of society in all sorts of ways. Mr Attwood raised the issue of gender, and I acknowledge that that is the case, but there are all sorts of other ways in which they are not reflective. They are not reflective of age, and they are certainly not reflective of class. In fact, I will go so far as to say that my constituency is probably the most over-represented constituency in terms of the population of quangoland of all the constituencies, with the possible exception of North Down. That is not right. If arm's-length bodies are charged with delivering services to the people of Northern Ireland, they should look like the society that they are supposed to serve.

**Mr Allister:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Stalford:** I will give way to Mr Allister in one second, and then I will give way to Mr Attwood. Arm's-length bodies exercise enormous power, and it is right that we should review how they function and whether or not some of them are still fit for purpose.

**Mr Allister:** Indeed, it is not right, but it has not been right for a very long time. What expectation is there that this promise to deal with the situation will be any more

successful than the DUP's last promise to deal with it? Seven and a half years ago, in May 2009, Mr Robinson had a headline, "Robinson vows to axe 'quango waste'". He talked about a bonfire of quangos, and it came to nothing because they turned into a vehicle for patronage.

**Mr Stalford:** Well, I am here now. *[Laughter.]* I will give way to Mr Attwood.

**Mr Attwood:** I think that you have just been taken off Peter Robinson's Christmas list.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I do not think that he was on it.

**Mr Attwood:** That is probably a good question.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I ask Members to make all their comments through the Chair.

**Mr Attwood:** Can I just probe the Member a bit further? If he thinks that there should be a review, does he believe that the architecture in respect of criminal justice oversight, equality rights, and policing are areas where we need to tread with the utmost caution, or does he think that they are up for grabs as well?

**Mr Stalford:** I do not think that anywhere should be off limits, and I make no apology for saying that. We have seen, in some areas, arm's-length bodies, which are supposed to exist as a function of delivery of priorities, take upon themselves an entirely different character from that which they were established for. For example, we arrived at a situation some time ago where a significant proportion of the Arts Council's advertising budget, which was supposed to be used for advertising the events that it runs, was instead used to attack its sponsor Department because of budget cuts. That is not the correct and proper use of taxpayers' money by an arm's-length body. It cannot be right that money that comes from a sponsor Department should be deployed in that way. That is why I think —

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

**Mr Stalford:** — in the context of the reform of the institutions that has taken place here, it is timely and right that we should look at this now.

**Mr Boylan:** Ba mhaith liom labhairt i bhfabhar an rúin agus in éadan an leasaithe. I rise to speak in favour of the motion and against the amendment. On the way in, I asked Mr Attwood whether he was moving the motion, and he said that he was moving the amendment. I was looking forward to his contribution because I wanted it clearly defined. It must be his great ingenuity. It is not for me to question the Speaker, but this is a good one as to how this got past the Business Committee. Members have been saying that they may support the amendment and that they may support the motion, but, if you read the motion and the amendment, you will see that it does not fit that way. If you read the first line of the motion and then the amendment, you will see that one completely overrides the other. I think that there was the opportunity in the motion to bring something forward. Fair play to him for his ingenuity.

My colleague Philip McGuigan asked the question. The amendment clearly calls for a review of the financing of arm's-length bodies, and there has been no objection to that whatsoever. Everybody would support a review. That is what I have been hearing from the Floor of the House.

We will hold Mr Stalford to what he said in response to Mr Allister. He said that he was here now. I thank the research team for the documentation. To be fair to Mr Allister, he has teased out some of the information on quangos right up to 31 March 2015. It is about the terms of reference of the review and how we go about it. I think that there is a good opportunity here.

We have to recognise good work. Some of my colleagues have already mentioned the groups that have been in to some of the Committees and the work that they do. We recognise the good work and the specialist knowledge that they have and everything else. Nobody is questioning that at this time. That is the point that we are all making here, and that is why I support the motion and that view.

I want to pick up a very good point that Mr Attwood, to be fair, brought up on the gender issue. The stats show that there is not enough female representation. I want to quote something for the record. I will read this out to the House because we want to get this right. If we are serious about reviews, I want to put this on record. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act places public authorities under a duty to:

*"have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity—*

*(a) between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;*

*(b) between men and women generally;*

*(c) between persons with a disability and persons without;*

*and*

*(d) between persons with dependants and persons without."*

The amendment mentions that arm's-length bodies produce best policy outcomes. It should be about producing those outcomes through section 75, and that is why I wanted to read that in.

Another point is on the public appointments process. A report on diversity published by the Commissioner for Public Appointments in 2014 acknowledged that initiatives to date had had little impact on increasing diversity. The report contains a range of recommendations to government to improve diversity on public boards. I support that, and I support the gender issue. I support those minor groups —

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Member for giving way. Given that Mr Stalford said explicitly on the record in Hansard that nothing was off limits in the review and that that, for him, included human rights, equality, policing and criminal justice oversight organisations, are you not concerned that, behind the motion and behind the words, there is a wolf in sheep's clothing in that they have ambitions that maybe you should be very concerned about?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Tá nóiméad breise ag an Chomhalta. The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Boylan:** I accept the Member's intervention. I will state this clearly on behalf of our party, Sinn Féin. We will look at the terms of reference, and we will look at what is going to be reviewed. I take it on board, and it is clearly noted. Your note is clearly noted in Hansard as well, Mr Attwood. I think that we have a good opportunity now. We made

commitments to the review of public administration, which reduced the number of councils. We have now reduced the number of Departments. Surely, it is time now for us to take another look at these bodies, and let us see whether we can get it right. It is not about finances; it is about efficiencies and doing things right, and I think that there is an opportunity to do that.

In conclusion, I support the motion and agree that we must assess, evaluate and review the number and functions of arm's-length bodies. I look forward to the terms of reference of that review.

**Mr Poots:** It has been an interesting debate thus far. I noted that Mr Atwood, when moving his amendment, did not speak to that amendment; he just criticised the motion. Maybe I will spend some time speaking to Mr Attwood's amendment in the absence of him attempting to do it. Mr Attwood's amendment is keen to recognise that the skills to make decisions lie with quangos as opposed to political bodies. As Mr Stalford pointed out, quangos came about largely as a result of direct rule. Those bodies were answerable to direct rule Ministers, but, in essence, they were able to do largely what they liked because the direct rule Ministers did not pay that much attention. Now that we have the Assembly, a bolstered local government system and an Executive, those are the people who should make the decisions on behalf of the people. If the people do not like the decisions, the people can change the individuals who make them. We need to be very clear that quangos are not fit for purpose in a modern, democratic society. Quangos should be very limited and very technical, and particular skill bases can be applied to them. In the era that we live in, we do not need 100 quangos for a population of 1.8 million. I am fascinated by the SDLP wanting to defend them.

According to the SDLP, quangos have "technical and specialist capacity". I am not sure how the SDLP arrives at that conclusion. I looked at many of the applications from individuals to join quangos. It seemed that a huge surplus of people who have just retired from the Civil Service apply for quangos, and they seem to get through with far greater regularity than people who had far greater skills. The retired civil servant seemed to get recommendations, whereas the people more skilled to carry out the job had fewer recommendations. Many of us believe that, in quangoland, there is a fair degree of "jobs for the boys". Of course, certain parties were associated with that, and that may have led to Mr Attwood's stout defence of quangoland. Historically, the SDLP has not done badly out of quangos. The SDLP would be better withdrawing its amendment and supporting the motion. Mr Attwood's amendment goes on to say that we need to put more resources into quangos.

**Mr McGrath:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Poots:** Yes, I will give way to you.

**Mr McGrath:** Thank you. You mentioned that it is all about jobs for the boys, but is it not your party and Sinn Féin who have been making the appointments for the last 10 years?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Poots:** Thank you for giving me the extra minute. I pointed out that, very often, people who are very well qualified to sit on quangos do not get through the process and retired civil servants do. That is where the jobs for the

boys comes from. Ministers do not get an option to pick individuals who are extremely well qualified because they have already been screened out.

**Mr Stalford:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Poots:** Yes.

**Mr Stalford:** Does the Member agree that, if Ministers had such power, the Opposition would be the first to decry it?

**Mr Poots:** Yes, absolutely. On Mr Attwood's —

**Mr Nesbitt:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Poots:** Yes.

**Mr Nesbitt:** On a point of factual accuracy, in some appointment processes, Ministers are given lists of those deemed appointable, and they make the final choice.

**Mr Poots:** That is correct, but, very often, there are people who should have been deemed appointable but do not get through the system. If you know all the buzzwords and get a bit of help writing up your application, it is much easier to get through. I am not convinced that the skills and abilities that lie with quangos do not also lie elsewhere. I just do not think that that stacks up.

Mr Attwood and his team go on to say that we need to put more finance into arm's-length bodies to establish "proper resourcing". What exactly does that mean? It means that we take money from somewhere else in government and give it to the quangos. He had 10 minutes to speak on this, and I never heard him say once where he was going to take that money from. Where does the money exist? Where does the resource exist that you will feed to the quangolands and the people who are unaccountable and unelected? It is very interesting that that is a point Mr Attwood and his colleagues made.

8.00 pm

**Mr Attwood:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Poots:** If you are going to tell me where that money will come from, I would be happy to.

**Mr Attwood:** The point is that, if you do not fund the arm's-length bodies to do their job properly in crucial areas of public policy like equality, rights, policing and the oversight of criminal justice, we know from our history and experience that that will not be a healthy situation.

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

**Mr Poots:** We are saying that £30 million seems excessive for equality and human rights.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Before I call Richie McPhillips, let me say that he has three minutes because of the time constraints on the debate.

**Mr McPhillips:** I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate concerning the call for a review of each Department's arm's-length bodies with a view to reducing their number and maximising available revenue.

Arm's-length bodies are supposed to operate independently of politics, and that needs to be respected as we consider the potential for a review. It is ironic that the DUP has brought the motion to the Chamber, considering what can only be described as the fiasco in its dealings

with the social investment fund that has been played out in the media in recent weeks. The lack of accountability, due diligence and transparency with the SIF is a cause for great concern, and I have worries that other bodies, set up as similar pet projects, are in similar positions due to political interference.

The proposal put forward in the motion is wholly unreasonable. At a time when public finances are stretched, it is important that this institution takes all reasonable steps to ensure that services are streamlined and there is no double-jobbing, if you like, where public bodies provide the same service. In those instances, we need to forensically examine arm's-length bodies and their roles following the reduction in the number of Departments. In saying that, I have great concern that, in going down the route of rationalisation, there may be a tendency to slash and burn to save costs. A review cannot simply be a cost-cutting exercise to tackle wastage in the system without giving proper consideration to the role arm's-length bodies play in Northern Ireland. We must also remember that, over recent years, many arm's-length bodies, such as the Northern Ireland Fire Service, have faced budget cuts and been greatly impeded in their ability to carry out their duties. Any cuts to services, such as the Fire Service, the Victims and Survivors Service or the Equality Commission, which perform important roles, have the potential to greatly impede the services the public receive and could risk job losses. I know that some Members on the Benches opposite may have issues with the Equality Commission and other bodies that provide those services, but that cannot be put before the public's right to access basic public services.

It is important, too, that, when such a review is undertaken of arm's-length bodies, we look at ways in which we can improve services and accountability in this institution. For example, we have seen the Executive move to reduce transparency in the budgeting and monitoring round process. Statutory Committees, which perform an important legislative and scrutiny role —

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

**Mr McPhillips:** — do not have access to the draft Budget or monitoring round bids.

The SDLP has proposed the amendment, as we do not want to see —

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

**Mr McPhillips:** — a cost-saving exercise being undertaken by the Executive.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member's time is up. I call junior Minister Alastair Ross.

**Mr McPhillips:** I urge support for the amendment.

**Mr Ross (Junior Minister, The Executive Office):** I thank everyone who contributed to the debate this evening, and I thank my colleagues for tabling the motion. I am happy to respond on behalf of the Executive.

It is worth noting at the start — a number of Members referred to this during the debate — that, as the motion acknowledges, on 9 May this year, which was the Monday after the Assembly election, we began a new Assembly mandate.

We did so on the basis of a more streamlined Administration, with a reduction in the number of Departments from 12 to nine. That example of doing business in a more streamlined and efficient way should be emblematic of how we intend to do business in this mandate. The reduction in Departments was a transformational change and represented the biggest shake-up of government since devolution in 1999.

A reduction in the number of Departments is not the only significant change that there has been in recent years, aimed at improving bureaucratic structures and modernising our government system. Legislation is now in place to reduce the number of MLAs per constituency. As a result, the next Assembly will be smaller and more cost-effective. We also advanced the voluntary exit scheme, which has provided an estimated annual pay bill saving of almost £90 million. Of course, it is not just at Assembly level that we have seen change. The same is true for our colleagues at local level. We now have a significantly more streamlined tier of local government, with 11 councils where previously there had been 26, and, of course, they have additional powers to help to provide greater community focus on public services and enable them to react more quickly and better to local need. Centrally and locally, our institutions have been maturing and improving. The Executive have shown that they are willing to embrace change across the board. In particular, given the financial climate, the Executive have sought to drive efficiency throughout the entire system.

I will point to a few examples of where the Executive have made significant savings. Areas such as rent, rates and service charges in the office estate, and energy consumption, have been reduced; collaborative procurement contracts have been let to ensure that economies of scale have been enjoyed across large areas of the public sector; and IT provision and telephony have been harmonised to achieve a better service at a lower cost. Of course, those do not take into account the savings that individual Departments have extracted from their own reform programmes in recent years.

Since the start of the mandate, the Executive have demonstrated that they are determined to build on these successes and are not afraid to make change where it is needed. We had a new approach on how we drafted the Programme for Government, and the use of an outcomes-based approach will focus on outcomes of societal well-being. More than ever, we need to look at how we can do things differently, use new ways of reaching people, consider alternative ways of delivering services to constituents and ensure that everything that we do delivers for the public and is cost-effective.

In that spirit, it is timely that the motion has been brought forward. Members have had the opportunity to debate and discuss the current number and function of arm's-length bodies and expressed an aspiration, where appropriate, to reduce their number. As Members said, there are almost 100 organisations made up of Executive, advisory, tribunal and non-departmental public bodies, and health and social care bodies. The public bodies cost in the region of £7.9 billion and represent in percentage spend 73.4% of the block spend. Those are figures for 2014-15.

The Executive Office is certainly content to review the current provision and will reflect on how best to take forward the intention of the motion if the Assembly

endorses it this evening. That may lead to the abolition, amalgamation or retention of existing ALBs, or it could examine sharing services or expertise in order to avoid duplication. In government, we should be continuously seeking to improve and become more efficient, and ensure that bodies are delivering what they are meant to deliver. Indeed, from next year, all public bodies must be able to demonstrate their contribution to PFG outcomes. If they cannot, they have no justification for continuing with any other focus.

That is why, as we roll out the Programme for Government, the Executive will be monitoring progress against each and every indicator. We want to identify the things that are making a positive difference and do more of them, and we want to identify the things that are not contributing to societal well-being so that we can stop doing them. Ministers, central and local government and all our publicly funded bodies must look at the societal outcomes as their *raison d'être*. If the use of public money is not contributing to the delivery of these outcomes, we will be asking for better justification. Where none exists, we will bring that spending to an end. Of course, in that context, we must recognise our legal and statutory duties. Culling quangos is not an administrative blood sport. Any change needs to reflect a specific policy focus and deliver a key objective measure in terms of public well-being.

It is already a requirement in the management statement of all public bodies that they are subject to periodic review. The Executive will ensure that future reviews maintain the focus of delivering PFG commitments.

If I may, I will turn to comments made by Members during the debate. Mr Logan began by acknowledging that there is an important role for arm's-length bodies in the present conditions. He said that delivery was a critical function. Of course, we want our ALBs to be a critical friend of government, fulfilling, at times, a challenging function and, at other times, delivering on behalf of the Executive. He talked about monitoring performance against the PFG. As I said, we will be doing that moving forward. He also talked about value for money and reducing budgets. It is important to acknowledge that, whilst there will, of course, be savings if we rationalise the number of ALBs, they will be quite modest. They can certainly become more efficient and effective in what they are doing through shared services and expertise. That is why there is an onus on us to look at doing that.

Mr Attwood, proposing the amendment, talked about a battering ram being taken to ALBs. That is a little bit of a conspiracy theory, given the text of the motion. He talked specifically about the Equality Commission and the Human Rights Commission. I will resist commenting on specific bodies, but getting rid of certain bodies or amalgamating them does not mean that their functions disappear. That is what is important. It is much the same as the realignment of Government in Northern Ireland: whilst we created fewer Government Departments, the functions simply transferred. So it is perfectly reasonable to suggest that some of the functions of existing bodies could be under a different umbrella or a different name, and it is important that we acknowledge that.

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Minister for giving way and for beginning to share his thinking on these matters, but can I press him further? Do you accept that, when it comes to any review of criminal justice, equality, rights or

policing ALBs and structures, you should proceed with great caution and tread warily, given the importance of that architecture and those functions to the new order of politics? Do you accept that those organisations deserve that sort of treatment in any review that you might bring forward?

**Mr Ross:** I am happy to say that we should proceed with caution in anything that we do, but I must agree with my colleague that nothing can be off limits. Even bodies that fulfil an important function should not be off limits in terms of reforming or restructuring them. That is something that we need to look at during a review.

Mr McGuigan, in an intervention, pointed out that the SDLP amendment is only calling for a review of financing. Mr Attwood called for a more fundamental and radical review, but, as has been pointed out by a number of Members, the amendment is not particularly ambitious. He talked about the gender imbalance on bodies, which, again, is something that other Members have talked about.

Mr Lynch said that he supported the review. He said that it was important that we did this in the context of public finances and how we do business. He acknowledged that the last time we looked at the issue was about six years ago and that it is important, therefore, that we look at it again.

When Mr Nesbitt stood up, time stood still for a short period. He talked about the relationship between the Executive and ALBs. It is important that we examine that relationship; at times there will be tension, and sometimes that can be positive. He talked about his story about the photocopier, although that is not the duplication that other Members were talking about. He also talked about the Budget review group, which was well intentioned but, unfortunately, various Executive Ministers were a little bit protective over the arm's-length bodies that they had responsibility for, and we did not see the support for rationalisation at the time that we might now. We are in a different mandate and a different environment, and I think there is more opportunity to move forward on that basis. I also suggest to Mr Nesbitt that in the next few days both he and I will know much more about pollinator initiatives and the threat that exists, and we both may live to regret that.

Ms Armstrong said that she supported both the motion and the amendment. Hopefully she will support the motion. She questioned whether some functions are still needed; the whole purpose of a review is to find out. We are not talking about a bonfire of quangos; we are talking about a strategic review to identify what is still needed in the current context.

Mr McGuigan talked about the need for good governance and a Sinn Féin commitment to looking at a review. There is a DUP commitment as well, which augurs well for the Executive trying to make progress on the issue. He talked about things moving on, which is right, because we have evolved and adapted; we need to be an agile Government in how we look at things. That is in contrast, unfortunately, to the SDLP's view. It is so wedded to what was once described as the "ugly scaffolding" of the past that it is unable to be agile and adaptive to the environment, which does not serve anybody particularly well.

There is a list of things you never expect to hear, and Mr Stafford quoting Tony Benn is one of them, but that is how he began his contribution. He talked about the role of Government and the importance of Ministers taking

decisions and being held to account by the Assembly. That is absolutely right. In devolution, we want to make sure that Ministers are able to take decisions and that they are held accountable for them instead of giving them to some bodies, which has perhaps been the aspiration of others.

He talked about quangoland and the make-up not necessarily being reflective of society. As I have acknowledged, other Members made that point, and it is something we need to look at.

### 8.15 pm

Mr Boylan talked about the support for a review. He acknowledged the good work and expertise of some of the ALBs that are in operation at the moment. Again, those ALBs have nothing to fear: if they are doing a good job and are delivering and effective, of course, we will want to keep them. There are perhaps question marks over how effective or efficient some are, and it is right that we would have a closer look at those to see whether they are necessary. He also talked — this is a fundamental point, and I made it to Mr Attwood — about the legal and statutory duties on the Executive. Those are not going away; they will remain. It is how we deliver and live up to those duties that is important, and there are different ways in which we can do that from what is, perhaps, the case at the moment.

Mr Poots talked about how a number of the quangos were a hangover from direct rule. He talked about some of them needing to go away. There are differences in some of the ALBs that are in existence. Some have a very important role, but, of course, even in the ones that deliver in education or health and social care we have seen efficiencies in recent years and a reduction in the number of bodies around education and health. That shows that you can make progress and efficiencies.

The Member talked about the membership of the bodies and jobs for the boys. Maybe that was a reference to the gender make-up. I suggest it was not, but it is a theme that we heard across the Chamber. He talked about the SDLP amendment talking about more finance. It is just not based in the reality in which we are living. The context in which we have to make decisions and the context of public finances is very different from what it was 10 years ago. We have to accept that reality. Where is the money coming from? Maybe I will resist talking about selling airports that we do not own.

Mr McPhillips talked about the fiasco of the social investment fund. Perhaps some of his councillors and colleagues who turn up for the photographs at social investment fund events have not got that memo. Members need to be cognisant of that. He talked about his concern over slash and burn: nobody is talking about slash and burn. People are talking about reviewing the current set-up and seeing if there are better ways in which we can do things. That is the whole focus of the Executive and the Programme for Government. Nobody should shy away from trying to do things differently and improve how we operate.

**Mr Attwood:** Will the Minister give way for one final time?

**Mr Ross:** Pardon?

**Mr Attwood:** Will you give way? You said that nobody is talking about slash and burn. Mr Poots said that he would

like to see very few ALBs as part of the outcome of the review. How do you reconcile those two points?

**Mr Ross:** We will review it and see whether there are efficiencies that can be made. The motion does not talk about slash and burn; it talks reasonably about having a review and, where possible, reducing the number. That is perfectly acceptable language. I do not think it should challenge or upset anybody in the House. It is something that the public would support as well.

I conclude by again thanking everyone who took part in the debate. I look forward to working with Members from across the House as the Executive bring forward the new Programme for Government. They are an Executive who are not afraid to make changes where they are needed. That has been illustrated this evening. One of the 14 outcomes that the Executive will pursue in the Programme for Government is high-quality public services. In part, that means having public services that deliver for our people. It also means eliminating waste and inefficiency wherever we find it. That means stopping doing the things that are not delivering. We will not shirk from that responsibility, and I look forward to the support of the Assembly as we bring forward the changes necessary to deliver for all of our constituents. As I have indicated, I am content to support the motion, and I am confident that progress can be made, not least because Mr Stalford is now in the Assembly.

**Mr McGrath:** I rise to speak in favour of the SDLP amendment. We felt the need to amend the motion as there seems to be a fixation on numbers by our friends in the DUP. There is some apparent struggle to meet costs, so the first proposal for them is to cut services and to cut valuable services that work well in most places for our communities. We have seen similar proposals for our schools and our jobs and benefits offices, and now, it seems, we see the same when it comes to arm's-length bodies: "We think that they are not working well, so let us cut the life out of them".

Arm's-length bodies can be good. They are an important part of our government landscape, and they allow for the depoliticising of decisions and funding around crucial parts of our public sector in which there can be no room for party politics. Not only do they take the politics out of decision-making, they allow for decision-making to be devolved down, often to experts in their field and to those who have a specialty in the work of the body and know most about the issues and initiatives. It enables decisions to be made by the people who know best and, often, by the people who will be impacted on by the decisions. It is a great example of devolving down bottom-up decision-making.

**Mr Stalford:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McGrath:** No. I think that all of us in the House would agree — *[Interruption.]* You cannot insult Peter again — that some decision-making being taken out of the hands of politicians and passed on to groups of citizens is not a bad idea, and it is one that has served us well in Northern Ireland.

Of course, the SDLP agree that examining the role and function of arm's-length bodies is acceptable and provides an opportunity to examine the work, review the resources and scrutinise outcomes. We agree that public bodies should be reviewed regularly.

**Ms Hanna:** Would the Member give way?

**Mr McGrath:** Yes.

**Ms Hanna:** Would the Member agree that all the rhetoric about streamlining and efficiency and cutting out the middleman rings a little hollow while the Government are paying an organisation like Charter hundreds of thousands of pounds [*Interruption.*] to manage a much more experienced delivery body?

**Mr McGrath:** It just manages to show up the duplicity —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Can the Member just take his seat? The Member needed to be heard, and I could not hear what she said. I ask her to make her comment again.

**Ms Hanna:** I was pointing out the hypocrisy of talking about streamlining and efficiency while paying Charter hundreds of thousands of pounds to manage a much more experienced delivery body.

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

**Mr McGrath:** I thank the Member for her intervention.

As I was saying, it just shows the duplicity that there can sometimes be in the decision-making here.

We are not suggesting that there is a straightforward need to cut the numbers, nor are we saying that we should enter a process with a predetermined outcome. Having preferred outcomes in a consultation process is misleading, and it is a disservice to our arm's-length bodies and, indeed, to those who engage and work with them.

I do not accept the concept that, because we have reduced the number of Departments, it automatically follows that we need to reduce the number of arm's-length bodies. They sit below Executive level, below departmental level, and they often carry out work that would otherwise have to be completed by the Departments. To simply cut them would mean that their responsibilities would have to pass back to the Department, and then more civil servants would need to be employed to carry out the work that the bodies did with full ministerial and, thus, political interference. Whilst I accept that there can be rationalisation of the arm's-length bodies, I do not think that this is anything to do with the number of Departments.

Arm's-length bodies — quangos, as they are known — can be easy targets, filled by those jumping on the gravy train, sucking up large expenses and getting lots of free hospitality [*Interruption.*] but to simply think of them like that is totally disingenuous and does not bring proper balance to the debate. We agree with the concept that there needs to be a review, but we want the review to tell its own story and come up with its own suggestions and recommendations of how best to go forward. We should have a discussion about how to improve efficiencies, how to share resources and how to maximise the funding available while protecting the services that are provided by the arm's-length bodies. We want to see a robust examination of them but not with the decision made on the numbers before the process begins.

We want to support the work of our arm's-length bodies and commend the service of those who work hard on them. Many of them do so for just their travel expenses — not all, but many of them — and give their free time to provide that service. We want the public to get the best value —

**Mr Stalford:** Will the Member give way?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Sorry, can the Member just take his seat? It is up to the Member to decide, and it is not appropriate to ask him to give way on three occasions when the Member clearly does not want to.

**Mr McGrath:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I take being heckled by the DUP as being a good day at work.

We want the public to get the best value for money too and believe that our amendment, without a predetermination loaded into it, allows the best method for achieving that. I ask for the support of the House for our amendment.

**Mrs Cameron:** I welcome the opportunity to wind on the motion this evening, particularly as it formed a vital part of my party's manifesto and is something that we have already done significant work on and are committed to progressing through this mandate and beyond.

Our commitment has delivered a reduction in the number of Departments and a reduction in the number of councils from 26 to 11. Going forward, we are dedicated to reducing the number of MLAs from the beginning of the 2021 mandate. We are a party of pragmatism and common sense, and we believe in getting good value for money for Northern Ireland and in looking at how we engage with arm's-length bodies. We are determined that we will achieve streamlined services and a more efficient way of working. For example, the amalgamation of the estate accommodation delivered savings through rent, rates and utility charges. There is also no doubt that we have achieved a great deal on rationalising services through the Civil Service voluntary exit scheme, but there is definitely more to do. It should be acknowledged that, while saving money is of paramount importance, this is a perfect opportunity —

**Mr Stalford:** I appreciate my colleague giving way; Cowardy Custard MLA for South Down would not. Does she agree with me that —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I ask the Member to take his seat. I ask him to be respectful at all times and to refer to people by their proper title.

**Mr Stalford:** I am happy to apologise to Mr McGrath, Principal Deputy Speaker.

I agree that it is right that we should have the review. Does the Member agree with me that, if people say that we should not go into a review with predetermined outcomes, they should not then stand up and say that certain areas should be off limits?

**Mrs Cameron:** I thank the Member for his intervention. I agree fully that there should not be any limits to the review. It should be a strategic review and should be done appropriately.

**Mr Allister:** Will the Member give way?

**Mrs Cameron:** No, thank you.

As I said, we acknowledge that saving money is of importance, but this is also an opportunity to take advantage of technological advances and the public appetite for access to online services such as the registration of births, deaths, marriages or applying for rate relief. To carry on the process of streamlining, it is vital that we look at how we can improve on how we use arm's-length bodies. Whilst the key aim is focused on reducing

capital spend, we should view this as a fortuitous time to revisit how we manage our government systems. We must do things better. We need to look at how we get best value for money and must work to provide efficiency as a strategic goal.

I will not dispute the valued wealth of experience and knowledge that we receive from arm's-length bodies, but it is right that we look at using those groups in a more holistic manner to achieve the potential savings. Through using one shared services model to provide human resources and IT, among other things, we could achieve a great deal of financial saving and efficiencies. Mechanisms such as IT Assist and HR Connect are already in place for our arm's-length bodies to use rather than setting up individual departments in each group. The savings are already evident in government. For example, IT Assist has made savings of over £29 million in the past three years.

I will move on to some of the comments made today. Phillip Logan proposed the motion and said that arm's-length bodies were necessary and the review was not intended to eradicate them. He referred to the debate in 2010 and said that we now have 103 public bodies, and that is after a reduction in the number through the creation of the Education Authority. He talked about the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission and said that, elsewhere in the UK, the two are combined. He also spoke of the need to have efficient and effective bodies. He said that it might be difficult to compare organisations and that it would be a challenging discussion. He praised the work of Invest NI and the Labour Relations Agency, among others, and said that praise should be given where it is due.

Mr Alex Attwood moved the amendment and enlightened us on his conspiracy theories. He agreed that there should be a review and was concerned about gender imbalance, especially in senior positions. He wanted us to be jealous in guarding some of the ALBs in particular.

Mr Seán Lynch supported the motion but not the amendment —

**Mr Humphrey:** I am grateful to the Member for giving way. She has moved on from Mr Attwood, but I want to say, to be fair, that he said that he wanted a review of arm's-length bodies. Does she agree with me that, had his party's amendment stated that, it might be in a better place and have got support across the Chamber? Would she also join me in calling on the SDLP, even at this late stage, to withdraw its amendment and vote for a motion that, clearly, the SDLP is in absolute agreement with?

**8.30 pm**

**Mrs Cameron:** I thank the Member for his intervention. I agree with his points fully.

**Mr Attwood:** Will the Member give way?

**Mrs Cameron:** I will.

**Mr Attwood:** I am sure that Mr Allister feels very disappointed; he may have another go later.

No, we are not going to withdraw our amendment. Why should we? The Minister and DUP Members have made it crystal clear — they have put it up in lights tonight — what their ambition is for policing, justice, equality and rights oversight.

**Mrs Cameron:** Thank you. I move back to Seán Lynch. He supported the motion and not the amendment and said that the review of ALBs should happen regardless. He spoke about the Criminal Justice Inspection (CJI) and the value of its contribution at the Justice Committee during his last term. He asked whether some bodies could be amalgamated to make efficiencies and savings, as that would demonstrate that we were serious about reducing costs. He also mentioned the under-representation of women and young people.

Mike Nesbitt spoke about why we have ALBs: they do the work that government does not do. He said that ALBs were only independent in one sense and that was in offering advice to Ministers, who are obliged only to listen to their advice, not to take it. He supported the motion, not the amendment.

Kellie Armstrong supported the motion and the amendment, and she spoke positively on both counts. She gave credit where credit was due and said that appropriate funding should be given. She also said that there should be rationalisation to do away with any duplication.

William Irwin said that the motion was timely. He spoke from his experience as a former Chair of a Committee and stated that we were oversized and over-governed. He said that a better reflection of our population size was needed and that ALBs played important roles. He mentioned in particular the Department for Communities, which has 21 ALBs, not including the Housing Executive. That is just one Department. He said that a review was the most appropriate method of working towards efficiencies.

Philip McGuigan also supported the motion; he said that it was sensible and a Sinn Féin commitment. He suggested that there was a time before devolution when all ALBs were appropriate but we now needed more democratic accountability. He said that ALBs were needed to support government. He was baffled by Mr Attwood's comment and likened it to putting the cart before the horse.

Mr Staford said that we were dealing with a new reality after the number of Departments had reduced, with the number of Members to follow. He talked about the need for radical change and the changes that we have with an Opposition. He said that the call in the motion for the best delivery for the people we have been sent here to represent was appropriate. He spoke about how ALBs or quangos were set up in the past and said that quangoland was not reflective of society in age or class and noted that ALBs exercised enormous power and that it was right to review them at this time.

Cathal Boylan questioned the amendment's suitability to the motion. He said that everybody had spoken in support of a review and agreed with the issue raised on gender representation. He said that he would look carefully at the terms of reference of the review and said that it should be not just about finances but about efficiency and doing things right.

Mr Edwin Poots said that Mr Attwood did not speak to his own amendment and that he would do it for him. He said that the Government should make decisions and that quangos should be limited in the era that we live in. He spoke of a surplus of newly retired civil servants being appointed to quangos and suggested that the SDLP should withdraw its amendment and support the motion.

I feel that the comments from across the Floor today have been in broad agreement. We all want the best service and the best value for money delivered in a timely manner. I have no doubt that efficiencies can be achieved through a review of our arm's-length bodies, and I look forward to the benefits that can be delivered.

*Question, That the amendment be made, put and negatived.*

*Main Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly notes the reduction in the number of government Departments and the associated efficiencies; and calls on the Executive to review the number and function of their arm's-length bodies with a view to reducing their number, where possible, and maximising the available revenue.*

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The House may take its ease while we prepare for the next item of business.

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

## Assembly Business

**Mr Speaker:** Members, I want to address the point of order that was raised by Mr Jim Allister this morning. It was indeed an important point of order and indeed considerable time was spent researching the issue. I want to address it at this stage given the importance of the item in next week's business.

I wish to return to the point of order that was raised by Mr Allister this morning in relation to the legislative consent motion on the Policing and Crime Bill which is scheduled for debate on Monday. It appears to me that, in this instance, the UK Government have respected the convention that they will not legislate on a devolved matter except with the agreement of the Assembly.

I am content that the Committee for Justice has been given sufficient time to consider the new amendments as it took evidence from the Department and then produced its report within the time frame that is required by Standing Order 42A(8)(a). I recognise that Standing Orders do not provide for the exact circumstances that are presented by the amendments to the Bill, to which the Member has referred. This is an area that the Committee on Procedures may wish to consider in the future.

On the matter of the legislative consent motion memorandum's being tabled prior to the new amendments being made to the Bill, I am content that a similar approach has been taken on a range of motions.

In conclusion, I am content for the legislative consent motion on the Policing and Crime Bill to remain on the Order Paper for Monday 28 November. It will be for the Assembly to decide then whether it wishes to give its consent. Members will of course have an opportunity to set out their views on this question during the debate.

**Mr Allister:** Further to my point of order, Mr Speaker. Thank you for that advice. I am bound by and do accept your ruling, Mr Speaker, but, at some appropriate point, I think that the House would benefit from some guidance in the light of that ruling as to what then Standing Order 42A(11)(a)(ii) actually means and what purpose it serves because it appears to say that, until the amendment has been made to the Bill that the legislative consent motion wishes to bring in, the memorandum cannot be laid. What is the meaning then of Standing Order 42A(11)(a)(ii)?

**Mr Speaker:** Allow me a few moments to consult on the matter.

I thank the Member for that further point of order. As I said, I am content that it is in order for the motion to proceed, but I recognise that Standing Orders may need to be reviewed, as I said in my reply to you.

*Motion made:*

*That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Speaker.]*

## Adjournment

### Road and Footpath Maintenance: North Down

**Mr Speaker:** In conjunction with the Business Committee, I have given leave to Mr Alex Easton to raise the matter of funding for road and footpath maintenance in North Down. The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes.

**Mr Easton:** I have been left appalled and deeply concerned by the level of funding from Transport NI for footpath and road maintenance, weed spraying, potholes, resurfacing and general maintenance for the north Down area. I had suspected for some time that the north Down area had been discriminated against by Transport NI through having the least funding for the general maintenance and resurfacing of roads and footpaths. That was confirmed in answers to numerous questions for written answer that I submitted. For instance, an answer to one of those recent questions revealed that the eastern division gets £2.5 million whereas the northern, southern and western divisions get a great deal more.

We see from other answers that, for grass-cutting maintenance right across the Ards and North Down Borough Council area, we get the least funding. We also get the least money for fixing street lights, footpath resurfacing and weed spraying. My North Down constituency finds itself in a truly appalling situation: it has the least funding of all the council areas across Northern Ireland despite its population being the third highest in Northern Ireland and it having a vast rural network.

Minister, the real nub of the Adjournment topic is to get a satisfactory answer to why my constituency gets the least funding. When I challenged you recently about that, you said that somebody has to get the least. I am sorry, but that answer is really not good enough. I need to know why we are not getting more. I hope that you understand.

My constituents deserve funding equal to that received by any other area in Northern Ireland. After all, the Minister's party believes in equality. I want equality for my constituents. As things stand, they are being discriminated against, and I want to know why. I want to know who made the decisions to give my constituency the least funding. What are the reasons for that? Who agreed to it? Was it Transport NI or the Department for Infrastructure?

Last year, I had to practically beg Transport NI to spray the weeds — I think that my colleague will agree. I had to beg for the grass to be cut. I had to beg to get potholes repaired. I had to beg to get street lights fixed. I even had to walk round housing estates on my own because the street-light people would not go out and fix them. I had to go out to get the street-lamp numbers. I should not have had to do that.

I have been fighting for years to get roads such as Beechfield Drive and Ashfield Drive in Donaghadee resurfaced. An answer to a question for written answer — they can be very useful — revealed that they have not been resurfaced in over 40 years despite over 50 letters from many residents to the previous Minister to try to get

that resolved. No records have even been kept of the history of William Street in Donaghadee, other than it might have been resurfaced before 1973. When I asked you to visit so that I could show you the state of those streets — they are crumbling and in a bad state — you did not want to come down to my constituency to see them. Hopefully, you will change your mind.

**Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure):** I thank the Member for giving way. It is not a case of not wanting to come and see them. If I visited every single street in the land, I would not have time to be in the Chamber or to attend other important events and meetings. It is not a case of not wanting to go; we have to prioritise a very tight diary. I have been in position for only six months. I have five years and have no doubt that I will be out with the Member on a number of occasions.

**Mr Easton:** I will hold the Minister to that promise. Other streets that need resurfacing because they have not been maintained properly are Churchill Avenue and the Shore Road in Millisle, Tower Road in Conlig, and Shrewsbury Drive, Chester Park and Hazelbrook in the Clondeboye area.

There is also a need for new footpaths to be resurfaced in Fairfield Park. They have not been maintained, but they were on the list to be resurfaced and were pulled due to a lack of funding. Wellington Drive, Towerview Crescent, Rockmount Park and Greenwich Park in Bangor all need to have their footpaths done because they have been short-changed by Transport NI and have not been maintained.

It is becoming clear why we cannot get things fixed in North Down, and this discovery through Assembly questions shows that we are the poor relations compared with other constituencies across Northern Ireland. This is a damning indictment of Transport NI, and it is no wonder I have been getting so many complaints over the last several years. I have been banging my head against a brick wall trying to resolve these issues, and I know that many of my colleagues have been banging their head against a brick wall also on the issue.

#### 8.45 pm

Minister, what I want to know tonight is this: who sets the budgets? Why are North Down and the Ards and North Down Borough Council area getting the lowest amount of funding? How long has this been going on with the lowest amount of funding for roads and footpath maintenance? There needs to be some accountability for why this is happening, and the buck stops with the Department for Infrastructure. I want fairness and equality, and I hope the Minister will listen to me fairly tonight and will, hopefully, address some of the deep concerns I have for my constituents.

**Mr Speaker:** All other speakers will have approximately 10 minutes.

**Mr Chambers:** I thank my colleague Alec Easton for arranging the topic for the Adjournment debate tonight. I know he is certainly not the only one who gets complaints; I think we all get our fair share of them.

I take the point Alec has been making over recent weeks about North Down having the least amount of the cake, as it were, in the budget. I will be interested to see how the Minister responds to that before I join in any finger-pointing about it. It strikes me as a relative thing, because,

when I talk to colleagues from all over the Province, they all identify the same problems. There does not seem to be anywhere that is Shangri-La with the grass being cut and the potholes being fixed. Everybody is complaining. You have only to go on Twitter and look at the photographs. There are competitions about who can find the deepest pothole in Northern Ireland. It is an endemic problem; it is not unique to North Down. Naturally enough, the Minister will appreciate that we, as representatives from North Down, will bat in our constituents' corner on this.

Before I say any more, I will acknowledge to the Minister that it is not all doom and gloom. A lot of good work is done by the local Transport NI in and around Bangor. Certainly, the huge capital investment in the Gransha Road roundabout is money that has been really well spent. It has contributed to road safety. I know there are issues — I have identified them, and Alec has talked about them — about the timing of the traffic lights and stuff at Gransha Road, but, when I see young kids going to school, old people on Zimmers and young mothers with a toddler in a pram and a toddler by the hand crossing that road in safety, I think it is money that has been really well spent.

There a lot of the older parts of Bangor that were built maybe 40 or 50 years ago and do not seem to have had any investment in footpaths. That means in and around the Towerview area and the Ashford area. I am not too sure, but maybe the Minister can enlighten me about this so that I have a better understanding of why the issues are there and why we are here tonight having the debate. I will refer to the olden days when we had guys who went round at night and identified the lights that were out and took the appropriate action. The lights were categorised and fixed in a certain time frame. As Alec said, the responsibility now seems to fall on us, as elected Members, to get individual light numbers and report issues. As well as that, I am not sure — again, the Minister will confirm it — whether footpaths are walked in the way that they used to be by inspectors who identified defects and marked them with paint spray for repair and so forth. Some of the footpaths in and around that area — I mentioned Towerview — are just not fit for purpose. When I ask the local office to do something about it, it comes up with all sorts of excuses.

When it comes to grass cutting, I have to put it on record that the grass was cut a few weeks ago and it is probably the best cut that I have seen for a couple of years. It is unfortunate, coming into the winter, that we will not get the benefit of it. When we were in high season and looking for tourists to visit, the place looked like a jungle. In fact, I tweeted a joke about the Department appointing a couple of big game hunters to patrol the Bangor ring road because the grass was so long and God knows what was running about in it.

Following on from that, I have a bee in my bonnet about noxious weeds. Transport NI is probably the biggest landowner in Northern Ireland if you add up all the strips of land that it owns. When I asked a question, however, about statutory notices being served on landowners for allowing noxious weeds to prosper on their land, I was told that, in the last five years, 30 statutory notices were issued to landowners but only two warnings were given to Transport NI, which, as I say, is probably the biggest landowner in Northern Ireland. It concerns me a little that one Department is not prepared to face down another Department. It is a genuine concern that those noxious

weeds are growing on Transport NI land, and they should be attended to. The Programme for Government talks about improving Northern Ireland as a tourist destination, but, if we allow the infrastructure to deteriorate, particularly in places such as Bangor and other coastal areas, we will not fulfil that Programme for Government aspiration.

We were told that contractors were unavailable in 2015-16. If I read that right — again, the Minister will confirm it — for a whole financial year, a contractor was not appointed to resurface, do patchwork or clean gullies. It is rather disturbing that, for a whole year, North Down got nothing done, never mind whether there was enough money there. The money was not spent, and nothing was done. I would also point out — I do not know whether councils are responsible for this — that somebody should take a robust approach to kerbsides and the amount of debris lying in them. That is a nursery for weeds for next year. Nobody seems to take a shovel and go along the kerbsides and clean up. That needs to be done, but the Minister will confirm whose responsibility it is.

I want to put on record something that really has nothing to do with tonight's debate but it would be remiss of me not to mention. My colleagues will be familiar with The Point, which is a street in Groomsport. It has not been adopted and is built on the coast, so it is a rocky road. It would not even take a horse and cart. Bin lorries struggle to get down it, and postmen do not want to go down it. No one wants to go down in a private car. There are about 10 houses on the road, and the residents have to endure that. The houses have been there for about 70 years, and nobody is prepared to grasp the nettle. I want to put it on record that somebody, somewhere, in this day and age needs to take responsibility for that and get it sorted out. I know that the residents would be prepared to get involved in a joint venture to get that road surfaced and adopted. I thank the Minister for his attendance tonight.

**Mr Dunne:** I also welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I am sure that the Minister is glad to hear that North Down is on the agenda again. We appreciate him coming along and look forward to him coming down to spend some time in North Down and to look at roads such as the A2 and so on.

**Mr Hazzard:** I cannot go tonight.

**Mr Dunne:** It is only down the road, you know. It is not far, and you will be welcome.

Road maintenance in North Down, as my colleagues have said, continues to be one of our residents' biggest issues of concern. Road and footpath resurfacing, weed spraying, hedge cutting and street lighting repairs are not being maintained to the required standards by Transport NI in North Down.

I genuinely mean this: it is probably the biggest issue in our office. Roads, planning and housing are generally the priorities, and they have been for years. The people in North Down pay their rates and make their contribution, and they expect to have decent standards. When they go home at night they cut and strim their gardens, yet they look over their fence and see weeds, growth and grass, which really frustrates people who make a contribution to society.

There are many housing developments in North Down that were built over 40 years ago, particularly in Holywood, Bangor and Donaghadee, and they still have the old,

broken footpaths throughout. We need considerable investment in the resurfacing of our footpaths and roadways in those residential areas. Again, it is the number one issue when you go to the doors. Those footpaths are a real risk to everyone, including the elderly, as they can be a trip hazard, and they can often become overgrown with unsightly weeds, some of which are not sprayed in a timely manner. Minister, we appreciate that you got that going this year, although it was late, but even in October people appreciated the work that was done, and the weeds are now generally under control throughout the area.

I have looked at the southern division spring report to Ards and North Down Borough Council dated July 2016, and there is evidence that North Down has done very poorly when compared with the Ards section of the area. Is that a carry-over due to the fact that we have recently moved into the southern division? I notice from the map that we are right at the edge of the southern division. There is clear evidence that we been done very badly in that report. One example is in relation to asphalt resurfacing of roads and footpaths: 20 were done in Ards and seven in North Down. For bitmac resurfacing during the same period, there were seven in Ards and one in North Down. For surface dressing, there were 14 schemes in the Ards area, compared with one in North Down. There were four footway reconstruction schemes completed in the same period, all in the Ards area. There were 14 drainage maintenance schemes in the Ards area and three in North Down. That highlights the points made by my colleague Alec Easton.

Following the many discussions we have had — we have regular meetings with the section engineers, and we appreciate their contribution in coming to meet us regularly — we now understand there were contractual issues, as raised by my colleague Alan, relating to the roads contracts, and that no contract in relation to a lot of the work was in place for North Down. Minister, the frustrating thing is that we were not advised of that. At no point in the last year or 14 months were we told that the contract was in dispute. I understand there was a legal challenge to the contract and, as a result, the work was not carried out. We were told that there were money issues. Surely the Minister recognises the need for investment in the north Down area to address the shortfall in maintenance work actually being carried out on the ground?

Again, there are real issues in the maintenance of the A2 dual carriageway — dare I mention it again this week? — and some of the points were raised during the recent debate. Resurfacing has not been carried out. Previously, a section of it was done every year causing some traffic disruption on that high-volume road. Those sections were done on an annual basis. Nothing has been done in the last couple of years in the area.

Grass cutting on the A2 is another concern, and it comes up every year. The target is five cuts per year, yet larger sections have just got their second cut in October. One area in Holywood has still only been cut once. Minister, I argue that we need a separate maintenance contract similar to that for the A1 for the A2 carriageway, which has such a high volume of traffic. It is because of the high volume of traffic that the road is so dangerous, and we need proper maintenance.

Weed control is another issue that needs to be prioritised. We got a spray, as was mentioned earlier, in October, but

frustrated residents rightly believe it should have been carried out much earlier in the year.

Finally, street lighting repairs — it has already been mentioned — continue to be a real challenge. I understand we now have a new contractor in place who has just taken on the responsibility and is working through a backlog of work to get the lights fixed. Alan Chambers MLA made the point that no inspections of street lighting are now carried out. I would like to hear the Minister's assessment of that. Are there any plans to reinstate such inspections?

#### 9.00 pm

The other issue is online reporting. How effective does the Minister think the online reporting system is? I really think that he needs to do something to increase public awareness. We need to have some increase in public awareness through PR or perhaps through television advertisements about the online system, because the man or woman in the street is not really aware of that. We need to invest some money in that. We need to see investment in our road network and much-improved maintenance programmes in North Down.

**Mr Agnew:** I thank the Member for proposing this topic for debate. I am sure that, when he did so, he did not realise that we would be here until this time. I will not blame him for that; I will blame the Ministers who made the various statements this morning. I also thank the Minister for being here so late for what is the second Adjournment debate on North Down in recent times. I do not think that it is an exaggeration to say that he has perhaps done more than any individual in Irish history to eradicate the border between North and South — Down. I appreciate him taking the time to heal some of the old wounds that we may have had in the past.

I have sympathy with the Minister on the issue, but I, of course, share many of the frustrations that my colleagues have about contacting Transport NI, in particular, about the issues. There is no doubt that it comes up time and again when I go round the doors, whether it is in respect of weeds, cracked pavements or potholes on roads. Constituents get frustrated because they have reported things many times to many MLAs, and we all get frustrated at the Department's apparent lack of ability to resolve the issues. I have sympathy because I watched his predecessor, Danny Kennedy, make the point that there would be consequences if more resources were not given to his Department, and he was told to live within his means. So, he sought to introduce revenue-raising measures, but he was told that he was not to do that.

We have to be realistic, and we have to be honest with our constituents about the fact that we have choices to make. We can choose to raise revenue, which means somebody paying more somewhere, and I reference the recent debate about reducing parking fines. Time and again, we hear proposals for where we can reduce revenue, but reduced revenue means, in most cases, reduced services, bar finding efficiencies. To be fair, a lot of work has been done by Departments to find efficiencies. We sometimes need to find more revenue. It is important to put it on record that, if we want more, we will, to some extent, have to pay more. That is why, today, I welcomed some of the Finance Minister's revenue-raising proposals on rates, some of which I have been calling for for some time, including lifting the cap on rates. That will have a

disproportionate effect on residents in North Down, but it is right that those who have more and can afford to pay more should do so. As I have said repeatedly, our constituents in Kilcooley should not continue to fund the rates of our constituents in Cultra. That might not be a popular thing in Cultra, but I think that it is fair point of view.

As I say, these are the issues that come up time and time again. One suggestion that should not have a huge revenue impact is that about communication. One of the things that are said to me time and time again is, "Our street has not been done in 30 years, yet the street round the corner was done only last week". As for street lighting, it does not help that my street got brand new LED lights. They are lovely, and I am very grateful for them, but my neighbouring streets do not have them, so people will, I am sure, look at that and say, "Oh aye, the MLA gets new lights". It is one that feels a bit close to home in that regard.

Minister, my suggestion is about communication, even if it is through MLAs, so that we can communicate more widely what the plans are. Maybe I do not do enough to find out these things, but what are the plans to roll out new LED street lighting or new tarmac pavement to replace old cracked paving stones? That communication might help with some of the frustration. If people feel that they are on the list and their time is coming, and we can communicate that, they may not put as much pressure on us, and, in turn, we may not put as much pressure on Transport NI. It is those who feel that their turn is never coming who will shout the loudest. I put that out as a suggestion and make the point about revenue raising. I thank Members for their contributions and look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for securing the Adjournment debate. I also thank the four Members who have stayed to discuss it. I will quickly start with a few points before I get into, as they say, the meat and bones.

It would be proper to put something on the record from the start. Perhaps the Member who secured the debate was not alluding to it, but he gave the impression that recent responses to Assembly questions for written answer had, in his words, confirmed a practice of discrimination against North Down. I absolutely refute that, certainly for the six months that I have been in position. I probably should say on the record that your party colleague was the Minister before me, and many of the things that you referred to were from that time. It is only right that we dismiss that idea.

The notion of equality, to me, is a notion of equity, and I think that the statistics bear that out. I was just doing the figures, and, for example, Ards and North Down have 15% of the entire roads in the southern division, yet receive 20% of structural funding. In my area of Newry, Mourne and Down, we have 40% of the roads but receive only 35% of the funding. Caitríona Ruane and I could come to the Chamber and, perhaps more legitimately, claim that some sort of discrimination is ongoing, but that is simply not the case. If we separate Ards and North Down, we see that North Down has 5% of the overall divisional roads; Ards has 10%. That is why, Mr Dunne, in your figures, there is the one third:two thirds split in an awful lot of the projects — that is how it will balance out. It is not a case of discrimination; it is a case of equity. I think that that is borne out.

My next point reflects Mr Agnew and Mr Chambers's comments. I think that the majority of MLAs have been

out taking down street light numbers and looking at grass; we have all been doing it for years. There is no doubt that the Department does not have adequate resources to deliver the sort of services that we want. I do not think that anybody in the House would argue that we have enough money to get on with the job. There are simply not enough resources to do the sort of things that we want to do. Mr Agnew is 100% right: we will have to look at where we get the money. Can we get more money? Since I came into post, I have said that we need to look at different revenue-raising options, but those have to make sense, they have to be fair and they cannot punish the public purse in the long run. I am willing to do that.

I go back to the point that roads and housing are the big issues in North Down. It is the same in South Down and right across the area. I was in the Carrtogher/Slaughtneil area in south Derry last week, and there were potholes big enough to dip sheep in. There is absolutely no doubt that it is an issue across the board, and we simply do not have enough money. I want to dispel the notion of discrimination, and you will certainly see none of that from me over the next five years.

The independently established structural maintenance funding plan, which Members will be aware of, recommends an investment of some £140 million a year, 85% of which is capital to maintain the structural integrity of our road network. The current funding available to my Department for roads capital and resource maintenance is £81 million, significantly short of that requirement. In distributing the available resources for road maintenance, allocations are made by my Department to the four Transport NI divisions on the basis of need, using a range of weighted indicators tailored to each maintenance activity, such as resurfacing, patching, gully emptying or grass cutting. Divisions also use a range of indicators when apportioning across council areas to ensure, as far as is possible, an equitable distribution of funding.

The Ards and North Down Borough Council area is allocated funding for structural and routine maintenance on the same basis as other councils, using indicators such as road mileage, structural condition and population. To put that into perspective, the council area has a total public road length of around 1,100 kilometres out of a divisional total of nearly 8,000 kilometres. I should explain, however, that yearly allocations vary to reflect funding pressures in section areas and are also influenced by specific allocations for high-priority works, such as trunk road resurfacing schemes and coastal defence repairs. On that basis, it can be assumed that no section will receive a fixed percentage of the available allocation each year.

In general, each Transport NI maintenance section office maintains a priority list of resurfacing schemes for its area, and the list is determined from a range of indicators, such as surface condition, defect numbers and traffic volumes. The section offices use that information, as well as visual inspections, to decide the best use of the available resources in their area. The priority list reflects current road maintenance needs in the area, and some degree of flexibility is therefore necessary to address any changes to the structural integrity of the roads network.

The current capital structural maintenance budget for southern division is £20 million, which includes additional in-year funding resulting from the outcome of June and October monitoring rounds. That funding is being used

to deliver significant road improvements in 2016-17 in the division, including in the North Down constituency. I should point out that, as Members mentioned, in 2015-16, limited capital works in the form of resurfacing were carried out in North Down because of contractual difficulties in the awarding of a new contract, including a legal challenge to the Department. That meant that the awarding of the resurfacing contract was delayed, and therefore only schemes ordered before the expiry of the previous contract were delivered. Those included schemes at the A2 Bangor Road, Bangor; Abbey Street, Bangor; and Ballymiscaw, Holywood. Court proceedings were prolonged such that Transport NI was unable to award the new contract until August.

I am pleased to inform Members that those matters have now been resolved, and Transport NI has, in recent months, undertaken three major resurfacing schemes at Ballymiscaw Road, Holywood; Ballyrobert Road, Crawfordsburn; and Rathgael Road roundabout. The total cost is £636,000. In addition, a combined footway reconstruction and carriageway resurfacing scheme is being carried out in the Morston Park area of Bangor at a cost of £150,000. I will continue to bid in monitoring rounds to enhance structural maintenance funding during this year to invest further in the road network.

Following June monitoring, which delivered additional funding for capital structural maintenance activities, I announced the rural roads initiative in the Assembly on 28 June. The aim of that £10 million initiative is essentially a road improvement package to stop the deterioration and to repair severe defects on the local rural road network. I can advise Members that the Ards and North Down Borough Council area was allocated half a million pounds of that funding.

On resource funding for the delivery of routine maintenance functions such as patching, grass cutting, weed treatment and gully cleaning, Members will be aware of the difficulties faced by Transport NI over the last two years. A limited service was in operation because of financial constraints, with the budget available being provided to the Department's internal workforce, and to external contractors where our internal workforce did not have the capacity. Despite the financial constraints, roads have been, and still are being, inspected as normal. However, patching repairs have had to be prioritised as far as resources permit.

In 2015, owing to the Department not being in a position to provide a schedule of work as a result of the financial constraints, the external contractor who provides services such as weed treatment and gully cleaning had to lay off much of his workforce. That created difficulties with the delivery of weed control and gully-cleaning services. I am pleased to advise Members that funding is now in place, and the external contractor recently completed a programme of chemical weed treatment and has now commenced scheduled gully cleaning. Regarding grass cutting, I can confirm that two cuts have now been completed, along with grass on sight lines, as required for road safety reasons.

In summary, I again thank the Member for generating this discussion and for giving me the opportunity to highlight the difficulties facing my Department in delivering a road maintenance service in general, and in particular to his constituency of North Down. I reiterate that my Department will continue to undertake comprehensive inspection and

maintenance activities, in line with the available funding, for the benefit of all road users in North Down. I will continue to bid for additional funding for road and footway maintenance activities to improve the infrastructure.

I have one final point to make. The issue of online services was raised. I agree entirely. The NI Direct online service for the reporting of street light faults and potholes is very successful. I think that we need to send the message out to get it reported. It may take a number of weeks to get round to it, but it will go on a work programme, and we will get there. As Mr Agnew pointed out, we need a bit of realism. We need to understand that the teams of guys out doing this are very small now because of the voluntary exit scheme and because of a lack of resources. We get them on the works programme. We will get to it. It may not be tomorrow or the day after, but we will get to it.

*Adjourned at 9.15 pm.*

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# Northern Ireland Assembly

**Monday 28 November 2016**

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

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## Assembly Business

### **Public Petition: Promotion of the Protection of Unborn Children in Northern Ireland**

**Mr Speaker:** Mr Jim Wells has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. The Member will have up to three minutes to speak.

**Mr Wells:** Last week, the Member for Belfast South Clare Bailey presented the Assembly with a petition containing 45,000 signatures seeking a relaxation of the present law on abortion in Northern Ireland. I will add, however, that that petition was done online, and there was no check whatsoever on where the people who signed it live; many may, indeed, be from outside Northern Ireland.

Today, Mr Speaker, I am presenting you with what I believe to be the largest petition ever received by the Northern Ireland Assembly. It has 300,000 signatures, not 45,000, calling for the protection of the unborn child in Northern Ireland. It has been signed by Northern Ireland residents who have given their address so that where they live can be verified. Therefore, I believe this petition is indeed authentic.

The petition Ms Bailey presented last week calls for legislation similar to that that pertains in the rest of the United Kingdom, where eight million — eight million — unborn children have been aborted since 1967. I am absolutely convinced the people of Northern Ireland do not want that law to extend to this part of the United Kingdom. In the time it has taken to make this short speech and to present this petition to you, Mr Speaker, another child will have been aborted. One child is aborted every five minutes in the rest of the United Kingdom. I think that is an awful stain on the character of our nation. Some 98-9% of those children are totally well, fit and able. They were aborted on many occasions because it was simply not convenient for them to be born.

Because we have the legislation we have in Northern Ireland and because our forefathers in this Chamber had the wisdom to prevent the introduction of the Abortion Act 1967, the statisticians tell us that 91,000 people in Northern Ireland are alive today who would not be if we had abortion on demand. They are farmers, solicitors and doctors; they are making a contribution to society. They may even be MLAs.

Sadly, some of them may be campaigning for abortion on demand. There is an irony, because they would not be here to campaign on the issue had there been abortion on demand.

Mr Speaker, this is only one box of 57 that are coming your way. Rather than bringing all of them into the Chamber, I have brought just this one as a representation of the huge petition that I am about to present you with. I know that you will note it and pass it on to the relevant bodies.

*Mr Wells moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.*

**Mr Speaker:** I will forward the full petition to the Minister of Justice and a copy to the Committee.

## Executive Committee Business

### Higher Education and Research Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

**Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy):** I beg to move

*That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Higher Education and Research Bill relating to joint working and advisory services, the teaching excellence framework and powers to fund research.*

The Higher Education and Research Bill was introduced in Westminster on 19 May 2016 by the Westminster Department of Education. The overall purpose of the Bill is to underpin a number of changes to the operation of the higher education system in England. When the Bill was introduced in May, it had no direct impact on the higher education system in Northern Ireland. However, amendments introduced during Committee Stage in the House of Commons will have an impact here, and, as higher education is a devolved matter, they will require a legislative consent motion to be passed. Before outlining the specific changes that have an impact on Northern Ireland, I want to give a very brief outline of the Bill.

The Bill falls into three broad headings that were set out in the White Paper published by the then Department of Business, Innovation and Skills. I have also noted the submissions made to the Assembly Committee for the Economy as part of its consideration of this matter, and I hope that I can deal with any issues raised through these introductory remarks. The first broad set of reforms concerns the operation of the higher education market in England. The Bill will introduce a register for all higher education providers, make reforms to the process for institutions receiving degree-awarding powers and university title, and introduce a single gateway to the higher education sector for all providers in England. It is important to point out that those provisions apply only to England and have no direct implications for Northern Ireland.

Secondly, the Bill aims to promote transparency and choice for students, primarily through the introduction of the teaching excellence framework (TEF). The framework seeks to drive up the quality of teaching in the higher education sector by measuring, benchmarking and reporting data drawn from existing sources. While it is designed to assist the teaching quality of English higher education institutions, and to reward reported performance by linking outcomes to English tuition fee caps, institutions in Northern Ireland have also expressed a desire to apply for a teaching excellence framework rating solely for the purpose of avoiding any potential adverse reputational impact if they do not take part. The Bill therefore provides a mechanism for the Office for Students to accept and review teaching excellence framework submissions from higher education providers in Northern Ireland, subject to my approval.

Finally, the Bill will set in place structural reforms to the organisation of how the higher education sector in England is regulated. It provides for the closure of the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Office for Fair Access, their functions being split between two newly created bodies: United Kingdom Research and Innovation

and the Office for Students. The Office for Students will explicitly regulate the higher education market and promote the interests of all higher education students in England. It will assume the functions of the Office for Fair Access and the non-research functions formerly carried out by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. It will be funded jointly by government and subscriptions by regulated organisations, and it will allocate teaching grants to publicly funded providers.

Giving evidence to the Committee, the National Union of Students-Union of Students in Ireland raised concerns regarding the lack of student or staff representation on the board of the Office for Students.

Whilst I understand those concerns and have some sympathy for them, they relate to provisions in the Bill that are beyond the scope of this legislative consent motion and outside the Assembly's competence. I am, however, aware that new amendments to the Bill have been proposed by the UK Department of Education to allow for a person to be a member of a board if he or she has experience of representing or promoting students' interests. Similarly, while the membership of the board of UK Research and Innovation is a reserved matter, an amendment to the Bill has been tabled to ensure that the Secretary of State has regard for the desirability of at least one of the board members having relevant experience in relation to a devolved Administration.

On the research side of higher education, UK Research and Innovation will be an umbrella organisation for the seven research councils and Innovate UK and the research funding element of the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The dual support system will be specified in legislation for the first time, thereby protecting that critical facet of the UK's research infrastructure.

I now turn to the areas of the Bill that require the legislative consent of this Assembly. I mentioned powers for the new Office for Students, once it has been established, to assess applications to the teaching excellence framework from eligible Northern Ireland institutions, subject to my explicit approval. The teaching excellence framework has enjoyed a high profile across the education sector, and I have approved participation in year 2 of the framework, which is being delivered by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. That is in response to concerns raised by our higher education institutions; I have recognised their argument that, should they be prevented from taking part, they may suffer a negative impact to their reputations. That is of particular concern to those institutions actively pursuing international students.

Giving evidence to the Committee, the National Union of Students-Union of Students in Ireland and the University and College Union raised concerns regarding our institutions' participation in the teaching excellence framework. That is reflected in the Committee's report, where the importance of using the right metrics to assess teaching quality and assessing them appropriately is underlined. Additionally, it is suggested that a Northern Ireland teaching excellence framework panel might be set up.

It is important to remember that participation in the teaching excellence framework is entirely voluntary. It goes without saying that published differential results of universities will be of interest to potential students, and our institutions have a genuine and well-founded concern

that they will suffer adversely if they do not appear on a UK-wide list of quality on teaching excellence, regardless of the teaching excellence framework's inherent qualities as a means of measuring it. Ensuring that they are allowed to take part will provide the institutions with an assurance that they are on a level playing field in the higher education sector across the United Kingdom.

I recognise the concerns raised by unions, but I reiterate that the teaching excellence framework is an English framework that has been designed for the English sector; it is not a jointly developed cross-UK policy. My aim to provide participation from Northern Ireland institutions is in response to the concern that our universities have articulated that they would otherwise be adversely affected for the reasons that I outlined. Nevertheless, officials have been working with counterparts across the UK to ensure that any applications received from outside England are assessed fairly — for example, by assessment panel members being appointed from across the UK, by contextual information being made available to assessors, including our preferred measures of deprivation, and by officials being involved in the groups overseeing the implementation of the teaching excellence framework.

It is also important to note that the Bill includes a statutory requirement that the relevant devolved Minister must approve participation in the teaching excellence framework once the Office for Students takes responsibility under powers set out in the Bill. That ensures that devolved control of participation in the framework will remain in place.

I am aware that both unions also noted concerns regarding the link between teaching excellence framework participation and a rise in tuition fees. In England, under current plans, institutions that receive silver or gold teaching excellence framework awards in year 3 of the teaching excellence framework will be able to increase their fees by inflation from 2019-2020. Those who receive bronze awards will be able to apply an increase of 50% of the rate of inflation. The unions have stated that attaching a monetary incentive to a measure of teaching quality is problematic. I take this opportunity to be as clear on the issue as I possibly can. I assure Members that, with regard to those institutions from Northern Ireland that will be participating in the teaching excellence framework, I have no plans to link teaching excellence framework assessments to tuition fee levels.

Since fees were increased in England in 2012 to £9,000 a year, they have not increased with inflation. England plans to have inflationary increases in fees from 2017-18 and year-on-year inflationary increases thereafter. From 2019-2020, the degree to which an English university could increase its fees by the inflationary increase would be dependent on the outcome of its assessment under the teaching excellence framework, as they are arguing that such future increases should be tied to certain standards in teaching, which is one element of the introduction of the TEF, as well as providing information to students when they are making choices.

### 12.15 pm

Fees in Northern Ireland have gone up with inflation since 2012, so the same issue is not a factor here. The argument from some seems thus mistakenly to be that, should local universities use the TEF, it will be a vehicle to increase fees, when, in truth, they have already risen with inflation,

year on year, which is what England is proposing to do by using the teaching excellence framework.

I hope that offers Members some assurance that Northern Ireland universities using the teaching excellence framework is nothing whatsoever to do with an increase in student fees here.

**Dr Farry:** I thank the Minister for giving way. What he is saying is very helpful, but I invite him to go a step further in the reassurance he is giving and say that that decision to link TEF to any increase in tuition fees would not simply be at the discretion of an individual Northern Ireland Minister at some stage in the future but an issue for the entire Executive and, indeed, the Assembly through an affirmative resolution.

**Mr Hamilton:** I thank the Member for his intervention. He will be very familiar with the origins of the Bill and its intentions. Whilst I thank him for accepting the assurance that has been given in respect of the purpose of the Bill, when he was in post in the previous Department for Employment and Learning, and now that I am Minister for the Department for the Economy, we would have said similar things around ensuring that the higher education sector, which is incredibly important in Northern Ireland for a host of reasons, be on a sustainable footing financially. I am endeavouring to do that as best I can.

The teaching excellence framework, because of the increase that there will be from £9,000, which has been a rigid level of fees across the water since its introduction, has been perhaps a little bit mixed up in the thinking that it would be some vehicle to increase fees beyond their current level in Northern Ireland. I hope I have offered some assurance. Our fees have been increasing with inflation, as the Member knows, and are now sitting at around £4,000 a year. This is not going to be used to increase fees. I have no current plans to do anything with this. I can give the Member and the House the assurance that any decision in respect of the future financing of the sector will absolutely be taken by the Executive, with the agreement of the Executive on how we might do that. If that was the decision, we would have to look at how that might be done. Obviously, in terms of fee levels, we would have to come back to the Assembly. I think there is a process, which the Member is aware of, whereby fee levels and increases do have to come back to the Assembly on a regular basis. So, I can give the Member assurance to a degree in respect of what he is asking.

I hope that what I have said has cleared up any confusion — or helps to clear up any confusion — that this is in itself a vehicle to increase fees in the way that maybe some have suggested.

Arrangements are also set out in the Bill for joint working between the three devolved higher education funding bodies, the Office for Students, and UK Research and Innovation. For Scotland and Wales, these essentially transfer existing arrangements set out in section 82 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. For Northern Ireland, the current power for the Higher Education Funding Council for England to provide advice on request to my Department, and to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, is replicated from section 69 of the 1992 Act.

A parallel power to underpin future joint working, including with my Department and the Department of Agriculture,

Environment and Rural Affairs, is also proposed in the Bill. This effectively reflects the way the system currently works, with the Higher Education Funding Council for England taking the lead on a number of initiatives as being the most efficient way of proceeding. Two examples of this are the research excellence framework and public information arrangements.

The Bill contains a technical change that amends the Higher Education Act 2004 to clarify that the power to make grants in respect of the arts and humanities includes the power to make and require repayment of loans. This mirrors changes to parallel powers for England, Scotland and Wales.

As the Bill primarily introduces changes to the operation of the higher education system in England, our local institutions concentrated their comments on the provisions covered by this motion. The Open University, however, commented that the Bill itself may require a wider scope to ensure that it works for learners of all ages and for those who need more flexible study options like part-time or distance learning as well as those who choose full-time. This concern was reflected in the Committee's report, and I support the expectation of full inclusivity across the sector. This is outside the scope of the motion, although I am sure the Open University will be promoting these ideas as the Bill progresses through the House of Lords. In summary, the Bill sets out a clear legal basis for joint working relationships across the UK by replicating and, in the case of joint working with my Department and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, extending the terms for joint working and the provision of advice set out in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. It will also provide for the continuing involvement of eligible Northern Ireland institutions in the teaching excellence framework and will clarify research funding powers in relation to the arts and humanities. The changes provided for by the Bill are therefore primarily technical and consequential in nature. They are required due to the establishment of two new bodies, namely the Office for Students and UK Research and Innovation. Including Northern Ireland in these arrangements ensures that we will continue to be part of how higher education is coordinated across the UK.

I commend the motion to the Assembly and trust that Members will support it.

**Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Economy):** I thank the Minister for his opening remarks, in which he has gone some distance to clarify some of the concerns that were raised with the Committee. Nonetheless, I will put some of those issues on the record anyway on behalf of the Committee.

As the Minister has outlined, the Higher Education and Research Bill will underpin a number of changes to the operation of the higher education system in England. These include reforms to the operation of the higher education market in England, including the introduction of the teaching excellence framework and other reforms to the organisation of how the sector is regulated.

The Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 19 May 2016 and received its Second Reading on 19 July 2016. The provisions covered in the Legislative Consent Memorandum, which is the subject of this motion, were

introduced as amendments at Committee Stage in September 2016.

The LCM covers the extension to the North of Ireland of provisions relating to joint working and advisory services, the facilitation of applications by eligible institutions in the North to assessment under the TEF and powers to fund research in the arts and humanities. The stated aim of the TEF is to drive up the quality of teaching in the HE sector by measuring, benchmarking and reporting data drawn from existing sources. Clause 25 provides a mechanism for a new Office for Students to accept and review TEF submissions from HE providers here, subject to the approval of the Minister for the Economy. It is the Committee's understanding that this reflects and formalises the current arrangements, where the Higher Education Funding Council for England may receive applications from eligible institutions here as an advisory service to the Department for the Economy.

The Department wrote to the Committee on 13 October to inform it of the Bill and the clauses that require the legislative consent of the Assembly. The Department informed the Committee that a Legislative Consent Memorandum to cover this was being prepared and would be referred to the Committee for consideration. As is normal practice, the Committee engaged with higher education stakeholders to ask for their views on the provisions set out in the Memorandum. The Committee received five submissions, from the following bodies: The Open University; Queen's University; Ulster University; the National Union of Students-Union of Students in Ireland (NUS-USI); and the University and College Union (UCU).

Queen's University, in its submission, made no comments on the proposed amendments to the Bill. The other submissions raised a variety of issues. The Committee received notification that the LCM had been laid in the Assembly Business Office on 28 October 2016, at the start of the Halloween recess. Therefore, the Committee first considered the LCM and the stakeholder submissions on 16 November 2016. The Committee also undertook an evidence session with departmental officials at the same meeting.

Stakeholders raised the following issues. First, on joint working and advisory services, the UCU called for the inclusion of more-robust stipulations concerning the governance structure of the Office for Students; and both the UCU and the NUS-USI called for proper staff and student representation on the Office for Students. NUS-USI believes that the lack of student and staff representation in government structures in the new Office for Students, which will be responsible for overseeing the TEF process from 2018-19, is a significant issue. Ulster University agreed with the Department's view that this is not controversial but reflects ongoing arrangements, and the Open University welcomed the joint working arrangements.

Secondly, on the facilitation of applications by eligible institutions in the North to assessment under the TEF, the NUS-USI noted the Department's assertion that the North exists in a sufficiently different and, to some extent, unique context, meaning the role of choice and competition is effectively diminished here, and it asked the Committee to question the Minister's rationale for allowing institutions here to participate in TEF at all. The Minister has gone some way to addressing that issue in his opening remarks.

They also asked that the Committee seeks a guarantee and commitment from the Minister that institutions here that choose to engage in TEF will not be permitted to link outcomes to tuition fee levels in any way; again, that has just been addressed by the Minister. The NUS-USI believes that the Department should conduct specific analysis on the consequences for institutions in the North with regard to taking steps to diminish the negative effects of the metrics used in the TEF. It would also like to see a separate TEF panel for the North.

The UCU believes that there are serious problems with the methodology underpinning the TEF and its implementation and opposes any linking of variable tuition fees to a rating system for university teaching. It urged further scrutiny and debate on the TEF and strongly disagreed with the Department's suggestion that the proposals are largely technical. However, Ulster University welcomes an arrangement that allows it to participate in the TEF, as does the Open University (OU). All the stakeholders welcomed or found no fault with the provision on powers to fund research in the arts and humanities.

Having carefully considered the proposals in the LCM, the Committee is of the view that there are some issues around the proposed amendments to the Bill. The Committee believes that it is important that the Minister make certain assurances and clarifications — he has done already and will perhaps clarify some matters when winding on the motion — to respond to stakeholder concerns. At its meeting on 16 November, the Committee agreed that its report on the LCM should highlight those issues.

Therefore, the Committee recommended that the Minister for the Economy seek to address the concerns highlighted by the OU on the need for the Bill to work for learners of all ages and for all modes of study. I understand his point that that issue is outside the scope of the LCM and needs to be pursued in England, where the Bill is being developed. The Committee also recommended that the Minister reflect on the concerns expressed by the NUS-USI and the UCU on issues of representation on the board of, and the governance structure of, the Office for Students; that he provide assurances that the participation of local higher education institutions in the teaching excellence framework will not lead to award outcomes being linked to tuition fee levels; that he ensure that the metrics used in the measurement of teaching excellence are appropriate for local higher education institutions here; that he consider seeking an element of peer review in the measurement; and that he may wish to consider seeking a separate TEF panel for the North to ensure the integrity of the devolved status of higher education policy.

As a result, the Committee supports the legislative consent motion and asks that the Minister respond to other Members' recommendations.

**Mr Aiken:** As a party, we will not be supporting the LCM. That is based on the work that we have already done in other places and other Houses on looking at this, specifically because of three key issues. I know that the Minister has gone a long way to trying to address the issues and provide clarity, but the Open University's concerns about the need for the Bill to work for students of all ages and backgrounds is the key issue that we need to look at. We also want the Minister to do more than just provide clarity and assurance that the participation of the local higher education institutions in taking the

teaching excellence framework will not lead to award outcomes being linked to tuition fee levels. Again, that is of considerable concern to the university sector here. The Minister may wish to consider seeking a separate TEF panel for Northern Ireland — that has already been mentioned — to ensure the integrity of the devolved status of our higher education policy.

**Mr Storey:** I thank the Minister for bringing the LCM to the House today. He said that the Bill has a particular narrow focus, and that is not in any way to dilute the concerns that have been raised, which have been highlighted by the Chair of the Committee. The Committee considered this issue, and its concerns are included in the report that it has presented for the consideration of the House.

Most of the Bill's provisions are required to allow Northern Ireland institutions to participate in the teaching framework in the future. That also needs to be given its place, particularly where the Minister referred to reputational damage. Let us remember the discussions that we had in the House in the past about qualification regulations and how we need to ensure that what we do in the House is done in a way that does not either increase or inhibit reputational damage. The Minister has therefore gone some way to dealing with that issue today. It is also to be welcomed that the Minister has given clarity and assurance on the concern about linking the process to the possibility of an increase in tuition fees. I welcome the fact that the Minister said that there are no plans to have a link between the framework and tuition fees. We will therefore be supporting the LCM.

### 12.30 pm

**Ms S Bradley:** In 2015, the Conservative Party manifesto promised to introduce a framework to recognise universities offering the highest-quality teaching. The outworkings of that election promise — the TEF — are in front of us today. The framework, which was scripted in an English context, as the Minister said, has been controversial and continues to be controversial even within its home parameters. It has been argued that this English model is not an easy fit even for the English universities that are working to it.

The Chair of the Committee rightly highlighted the serious concerns brought to us. In addition, some made reference to a lack of transparency or argued that the transparency clause could go further; others suggested that the metrics used to gauge good teaching are questionable. I could go on, but the most important concern referenced today is the link to student fees or, more precisely, the possibility of a future link to student fees. Strong and compelling arguments have been made to highlight the likelihood of universities using the framework to create what could become elitist institutions. It is feared that the potential hike in university fees will result in our universities being filled by those who can afford to be there rather than by those who are most suited to being there.

I take the Minister's point when he said that such is not his intention and that current plans do not involve a possible link between the TEF and fees. However, the assurances given today, and at Question Time last week, fall far short of what we in the SDLP would have hoped for. A cut-and-paste English model is not a best fit in Northern Ireland. Of course, we want the calibre of our universities and their output to be easily recognisable from overseas. It is

important that we look at creating a model that will enable potential overseas students or foreign direct investors to recognise and appreciate the value of our universities. A Northern Ireland pitch should consider not just how we compare in a UK context but have a much wider scope; we should consider how our universities appeal in a global and in a European marketplace. Our foreign direct investors and students should come from a much wider brief than the measurements in the UK.

I have to say that I note how swiftly this proposal was presented to the Committee and to the House. That raises, at least, a very curious brow. It is particularly impressive considering the revelation that 96% of questions for written answer to the Minister have not been answered on time.

Based on concerns raised in the House and through the Committee, particularly the lack of commitment to develop a framework that is more suited to Northern Ireland, it is unfortunate that the SDLP cannot and will not support the LCM as it stands. We will not be the drivers of what is essentially a Conservative Party policy that does not fit in Northern Ireland.

**Dr Farry:** Unlike my colleagues in the Opposition, we will support the motion, although not without some degree of concern and reservation. The mover of the motion would probably also reflect that the TEF is not something that we ourselves would wish for the UK as a whole; but our challenge is how to respond to it and not what the ideal situation might be. We are not in opposition for opposition's sake; we will judge everything on its merits based on what is in the best interests of Northern Ireland. Hopefully, the Minister will pick up some of the comments made by parties during his closing remarks and give some further reassurances to allay the nervousness expressed from some Benches. I think that, in some regards, that is based on a misunderstanding of what is actually being proposed and the context in which we are operating.

Just for the record, the LCM has actually been handled in a proper manner by the Department. There may well be other issues that we need to return to, but the processes around which the Committee has had the opportunity to consider this matter are certainly very much in line with the standard procedure.

In this regard, obviously most of the discussion and debate is around the concept of the TEF, and that probably goes, in some respects, slightly beyond the actual scope of the LCM, which is on more of a technical and consequential issue rather than the principle of TEF. However, the two are fundamentally intertwined in terms of people's reaction to the LCM itself. As I said, the teaching excellence framework is probably a contestable concept in itself and, in a few minutes' time, I will explain why it is difficult to actually achieve something like this, because it is an inherently subjective concept. As the Minister has already said, it is essentially an English concept, designed to service the higher education policy as it evolves in England, but there are knock-on implications for Northern Ireland.

I should say at the outset that I signed Northern Ireland up to the first year of the teaching excellence framework, largely on an exploratory basis and on the grounds that we were better being inside the tent to see how things were shaping up. I note that my successor at the new Department has followed suit and signed Northern Ireland up to year 2.

We are seeing a push-pull situation in higher education policy across the UK. Of course, higher education is devolved to Scotland, Wales and ourselves in Northern Ireland, and over the period of devolution we have seen considerable divergence in policy and practice as people adjust to the particular circumstances of the different jurisdictions. That divergence is set to accelerate, based on the legislation that is being discussed at Westminster. It is useful for people to see England itself as actually being the outlier in many respects, not Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales. It is not just the fact that it is three against one in terms of the drift in higher education policy; England itself is actually becoming more of an outlier in terms of policy across the European Union and, indeed, the rest of the world. Even on the issue of fees, the highest level of fees in the world for public institutions are now being charged in England. Even in a society such as the United States, which you associate with a high level of fees, those fees tend to be at private institutions rather than those funded directly by the state. Indeed, those contrasts were highlighted in the Big Conversation document that was published in October 2015.

The legislation currently before Westminster is going to see that divergence accelerate even further. What they are looking at is a vision of a lot more smaller institutions being recognised more readily, a proliferation of degree-awarding institutions and, in practice, a lot of institutions being formed and a lot of them going under in what is going to be a fairly ruthless market for higher education. Indeed, the ability to charge a higher level of fees will be linked to the outworkings of the teaching excellence framework. It is important that we are clear and accept that and do not pretend that it is designed to do anything else; so, we are honest about what we are actually dealing with.

That really begs the question of why we would wish to touch this and why we want to be engaged with all of this. The simple answer is that, whether we like it or not, what happens in England has knock-on implications for all three devolved institutions. Those who are looking in from the rest of the world, and indeed our neighbours in Europe, will see what is still, in essence, a single UK market in higher education. There is an overlap in how the institutions are judged against one another, and it may well be that we see prospective students from other parts of the world wishing to know the TEF outcome for a particular institution before making judgement calls and decisions to apply or not. If we do not have the ability to engage or the option of being part of TEF, we are going to be at a competitive disadvantage in terms of giving that information to prospective students.

To put this in context, we are really under pressure to diversify our higher education offering in Northern Ireland. This is not some sort of luxury that we can choose to have or not have. We are still significantly under-represented in a very large international market. We have seen considerable progress over the past 10 or 15 years in the diversification of our higher education offer but our figures are still well behind those of many comparator regions in the UK, and Queen's and the University of Ulster still have significant room to grow in that regard.

I also stress that attracting international students is not done at the expense of local students; both can be accommodated. They are funded and supported through two entirely different funding streams, so an international

student does not come into Northern Ireland at the expense of a local student.

It is worth recognising that Scotland and Wales are taking a similar approach to what I did when I was Minister for Employment and Learning and to what the current Minister is doing through the legislative consent motion. We are not alone in having to wrestle with this debate. I recall having many meetings with my former colleagues in Scotland and Wales on the issue. We all came to what was essentially the fairly pragmatic view that it was better that we were at least part of the tent and had the options of using the TEF rather than excluding ourselves from all that.

It is also worth stressing the dangers to our institutions from a less than competitive situation. We are already at a considerable disadvantage with the funding model, which, again, is not sustainable — the Executive will have to find some form of solution to that in the very near future — and in research, where there is a tendency more and more for big research projects to be centralised in the UK as a whole. There is a danger of Northern Ireland being peripheral to that. We use our universities, quite rightly, as core bodies in our inward investment narrative. We use them to provide the skilled graduates for our local companies. It is critical to our future economic growth that we do all we can to protect the place of universities in our local economic strategy. There is a clear danger already to that narrative that has to be addressed. I plead with the Assembly today not to make things even worse by excluding ourselves from the ability to offer the teaching excellence framework.

It is important to stress as well that what is on the table is not a compulsion that local universities use the teaching excellence framework or an indication that a future Minister will insist that they do. Even if the universities wish to use the TEF, the decision has to come back to the local Minister for sign-off, so they cannot go ahead unilaterally with it. I also stress that the issue today is very much divorced from the wider issue of what tuition fees should be in Northern Ireland; that is a separate debate for another day. We all have our views on how to address the current funding shortfall to universities, but we will return to that debate at the appropriate time when we see proposals from the Minister and the Executive on that. I stress for the record that, while the TEF may be used in the context of higher-level fees in England, that is not a route we are forced to go down in Northern Ireland; it is a matter entirely within our discretion. Any decision on fee levels here is for the local Minister in the first instance. That will then be brought to the Executive and the Assembly Committee as a statutory instrument that requires affirmative support. I would need to check that, but it certainly needs to come to the Committee for decision-making. There are umpteen checks and balances in the system to ensure that any decision on fees is not something that we are handing over today; there are safeguards in place for that.

The final point I want to make is on the standards of the TEF and what it will look like. It is, as I said, an entirely subjective measurement. There is not yet agreement on exactly how it will be taken forward. I have certainly had some interesting discussions with the English Universities Minister, Jo Johnson, on that, and I am sure the current Minister has done likewise. There is still a lot of confusion about it. Jo Johnson is probably the more intelligent wing of his family compared with his better-known brother.

There are issues with exactly what you measure in teaching excellence. If we look at the sister research excellence framework, which is much better established and accepted, we see that there is still a degree of subjectivity in how the weightings are given and it is not entirely without controversy. When you move to TEF, you end up with issues about exactly what you measure. If you go, for example, with student satisfaction, that does not necessarily equate to quality; it may well be a reflection of the fact that some courses are not as competitive or challenging as others. You can get strange anomalies in that. Equally, if you end up asking people to rate their academic lecturers and professors, there is inbuilt bias towards white males. We see a natural discrimination — unjustified, of course — in people's reaction to female members of staff and staff from ethnic minorities, so we need to ensure that there is no bias in the system.

#### 12.45 pm

Valid concerns have been expressed about the methodology of TEF, but the point that is worth stressing, in closing, is that we can be part of the design of TEF. If we do not like the outcome — how TEF is designed — there is no requirement for our universities to use it. The Minister has the right to authorise them to use it if they wish to do so. If we feel that TEF will not be in our interest and of no use in benchmarking our institutions against others in the international market, we can walk away from it. If, on the other hand, we find that TEF will be essential to our universities being competitive with their counterparts elsewhere in the UK, including Scotland and Wales, and with the rest of the world, at the very least, we have to be part of the design process, and that involves the Assembly supporting the LCM today.

**Ms Archibald:** I thank the Minister for his earlier remarks clarifying some of the issues raised. We believe that the Higher Education and Research Bill being introduced in England is symptomatic of the neo-liberal policies of the Tory Administration in encouraging the marketisation of the higher education sector by encouraging competition between institutions, and we feel that it is regressive in that regard. Through the teaching excellence framework, institutions are measured on matrices, some of which Mr Farry outlined, including student satisfaction, employability and course completion rates. In England, those are being linked to the fees that institutions can charge. That is not the case here, and I welcome the Minister clarifying that that will continue. As the Minister also outlined, institutions here are currently included in the TEF and have expressed their desire to continue, solely for the purposes of attracting home, EU or international students.

We share the concern that others have stated that the matrices of the TEF, as currently suggested, are not the best measures of teaching quality and are not equitable across the higher education sector. The measures have a focus on education for employment's sake. In a year when we have seen the result of misinformation and the concept of post-truth has become part of our everyday conversation, it is more important than ever to encourage education for education's sake and for the purpose of broadening minds and learning and encouraging as wide a participation as is possible. The narrow view that education is solely for the purpose of finding a job is regressive, and the Bill encourages that. Given, however, that the scope of the Bill, as implemented here —

**Mr Speaker:** May I interrupt the Member for a minute? I ask that the conversations in the Officials' Box stop. The officials are there for the support of the Minister.

**Ms Archibald:** Given that the scope of the Bill, as implemented here, will be narrow, that we have had clarification that it will not impact on the tuition fees that institutions can charge and that any further changes to the Bill that would impact in the North will require Assembly consent, with the reassurances from the Minister on the issues raised and the explanations provided, we are prepared to support the limited scope of the LCM.

**Mr Attwood:** I will start my comments by asking, "Who is Jo Johnson?". Mr Farry referred to Mr Johnson because he knows who he is. I am sure that the Minister and the Chair of the Committee know who Jo Johnson is, but who is Jo Johnson?

**Dr Farry:** A snooker player.

**Mr Attwood:** Yes, Joe Johnson won the 1986 World Snooker Championship, and it was a great night, as some of us will recall.

Jo Johnson is the Minister who has most responsibility for this legislation in Westminster. He is the lesser-known brother of Boris Johnson, which I did not know until the last few days. I am told that, last week, at a conference in England, Jo Johnson said that this was the most significant higher education legislation since the 1990s.

When the Assembly hears somebody with the name Johnson with a Tory manifesto saying something like that, it should be very vigilant about what it subscribes to. It does not mean that you end up not subscribing to it, but you make sure that you are very vigilant as you go down that road.

The Minister says that he has no plans on tuition fees arising from this legislation. However, in my view, this is how it is going to work. The Minister will comment on it, but he said that he had no plans. I am sure that most Ministers would not travel much further than saying that they had no plans about what might happen with future policy. However, I want this Minister to say that, if the LCM is passed, he will not rely on what comes out of the TEF and what we are consenting to in order to go to the Executive to say that we have to do something about tuition fees. That is what I want the Minister to say.

Whatever is or is not the answer to Mr Farry's comments about what we do or do not do on tuition fees, I want the Minister to say that he will not rely on the outworkings of the LCM in order to go to the Executive on tuition fees. That is what the Minister should be saying. He should not be saying that he has no plans. He should not be using warm words, which are useful in themselves but not definitive in practice. So, Minister, will you say that you will not rely, in any shape or form, even when the universities are on your back, as they will be, on the outworkings of this LCM, which is likely to be passed, when it comes to tuition fees?

In my view, this is how this will all work out. In the annex to the Stormont House Agreement, there is reference to the fact that, before corporation tax is devolved, the London Government have to agree with the Northern Ireland Government about a package of reforms to put public finances on a sustainable footing. That is what it says. We are not very far from the devolution of corporation tax. It was only last week that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his Budget statement, referred to the fact that, before

corporation tax is devolved, Northern Ireland's finances have to be put on a sustainable basis through a reform package agreed between our Executive and the London Government.

In my view, the risk of this LCM is that London will say to the Executive that they will have to rely on the outworking of the LCM to deal with tuition fees because they want that to be dealt with in order to put, as they see it, public finances on a sustainable footing, on the far side of which they might devolve corporation tax.

**Dr Farry:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Attwood:** I will give way in a second. There is a scenario on the far side of this LCM, which is that it will be used by people in London, including the Chancellor, given what he said in his Budget statement last week, to put pressure on in respect of tuition fees. Why should we not also be more worried about that? Have some of the leadership of our universities not said that they want tuition fees away up beyond what they are at the moment, including touching on £10,000 a year?

I will give way to Mr Farry and then to the Minister.

**Dr Farry:** The Minister will answer for himself in a few minutes' time, but the Member is very fond of quoting the Scottish Government and seeing them as an exemplar of what can happen under devolution. Of course, one of the standout policies from Scotland is that they have zero fees for local Scottish institutions. Indeed, that is written on tablets of stone — literally — and deeply ingrained in Scottish political culture. Scottish universities such as the University of Edinburgh, which receives half its students from England, know that the TEF is very much part of their interest in ensuring that they remain competitive. By implication, if, as the Member is suggesting, Northern Ireland would somehow be bullied by Westminster into using TEF and forced into having higher-level fees, surely that same logic would also apply to Edinburgh and Cardiff. However, they seem to have fewer reservations than the Member has about having to engage pragmatically with the issue.

**Mr Attwood:** I think that the Member will know what my answer is going to be. First, for their own reasons — they may have been wiser than us, but we will see about that in the fullness of time — Scotland did not ask for the devolution of corporation tax. Through the Smith commission, they asked for much else, but they did not ask for that. Frankly, if I were to rely upon any Government — I do not like the use of the word bullying, but to use the word bullying — to face down London when it comes to being bullied on tuition fees, I would rely upon Scotland. I would be less inclined to rely upon the Government here, because when it came to the equally controversial issue of welfare reform, the London Government were able to persuade this Government to hand over welfare reform to London, the consequence of which is that welfare benefits have been frozen and, as we see, inflation will rise over the next number of years and the value of the welfare pound in our people's pockets will be going down. Yes, I would rely upon Scotland to face down London, and I would be a bit more cautious about this Government facing down London when the pressure comes on, as it will come on, over the next 18 months. What are the terms for the devolution of corporation tax? The terms are what you have signed up to in Stormont House. It means sustainable public finances,

and sustainable public finances might well be them saying to our Executive, “Get the issue of tuition fees sorted out”.

I accept what the Minister has said. I do not think the Minister, in any shape or form, is saying anything cryptic when he says, “No plans”, but let us go into this with our eyes wide open. Let us look at the reality of the politics and the public financial debate over the next 18 months, and let us be cautious and work out where all this is going to end up. It may end up with London saying, “Stand and deliver”, on public finances in order to get corporation tax, and what does that mean for tuition fees? How does this LCM and those new structures work into that scenario? I will give way to the Minister.

**Mr Hamilton:** I am reluctant to intervene and perhaps encourage the Member to go on even further on an issue — I do not think that he has actually addressed the LCM so far. I am content to offer him some reassurance in seeking his support for the legislative consent motion. I am content to say to him, and indeed the House, that I will not use — to use his phrase — the outworkings of this LCM to go to the Executive to support an increase in fees. I am content to say that, and, that being said, I look forward to the Member’s support for this legislative consent motion.

**Mr Attwood:** First, I am surprised that the Minister said that I was not addressing the contents of the LCM. It was the Minister who started to talk about tuition fees before anybody else in the Chamber did. They have been speaking about it elsewhere, but they had not spoken about it today. The Minister led this debate, and he put on the record that he had no plans in respect of tuition fees, which people to my right, and elsewhere, have taken reassurance from. At least we were able to extract more than that from the Minister today, when he said that he would not rely upon the outworking of this LCM to justify going to the Executive in respect of tuition fees. Is it not curious that the Minister, certainly so far, has not said, when he asked me to give way in order to answer the second question, namely, when London comes looking for sustainable public finances for the next 18 months, where this Minister’s responsibility is when the pressure comes on tuition fees? Will you say to London that you will not go to the Executive to barter tuition fees in order to get the devolution of corporation tax? Will you put that on record today, if you are prepared to put the other matter on the record today?

**Mr Hamilton:** Mr Speaker, I feel that we have a pregnant pause here.

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to continue unless he is asked to give way.

**1.00 pm**

**Mr Attwood:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I think that the Minister listened very intently to what Mr Farry said and rightly so, because the Minister has an enormous range of responsibilities, and the former Minister had bespoke responsibilities for higher education. Therefore, his contribution was interesting, thorough and worth listening to, as I certainly did. It really is a bit of a giveaway, I think, for a Minister to come to the House arguing for an LCM with the justification that it is:

*“an English framework that has been designed for the English sector”.*

Just think about that for a second. It really is a strange political statement to make that it is an English framework designed for England.

On the far side of that, the Minister’s argument was that the TEF would be signed up to:

*“solely for the purpose of avoiding any ... reputational impact”.*

I think that we should be vigilant in subscribing to any LCM, whatever its nature, when the justification is, on the one hand, that that is what they are doing in England and, on the other hand, that we are worried about reputational impact. Whilst the latter is a good argument, the first is a bad argument. The second is a good argument because we do have to be worried about the reputational impact on Northern Ireland if we do not do x, y or z, but it is not a very strident or substantial material argument to say, “Because we might dig ourselves into a deeper hole, we have to try to get into a smaller hole”. To me, that seems to be what it is about.

I want to say a second thing about Mr Jo Johnson, who is the architect of all this. It is my understanding that, last week at the same conference, he made the following comment:

*“High-quality institutions are compliant institutions.”*

Somebody who was at that meeting said to me, “This is what Jo Johnson said: ‘High-quality institutions are complaint institutions’. Is it not that that is what this LCM and the London legislation are about?”. It is about saying to higher education institutions, “You’re going to be compliant. We are going to create a licensing regime that splits research and teaching and says to those who are compliant and do the will of the London Government, ‘This is what we want education to look like. Comply and what will happen is that you will get your money’”. That is what Jo Johnson could have been saying last week when he said:

*“High-quality institutions are complaint institutions.”*

Are we saying that to ourselves and to our higher education institutions, which may be backing this but have been a bit coy about it? Have you heard any big campaign from the higher education leaderships in Northern Ireland saying that this is essential to our future? No, it seems that they are worried about the downside rather than anticipating much of an upside.

If a Minister in London saying:

*“High-quality institutions are compliant institutions”,*

is the benchmark of this legislation, that is going to work itself through in the outworkings of the legislation. If a consequence of that will be a separation of regime between teaching and research, and research will be directed more and more in one direction, towards those who are most compliant with a Tory Government agenda, I think that we should be cautious in what we are doing today.

I think that the wiser course of action is to stand back for a moment. I say to Sinn Féin that maybe this deserves a little bit more interrogation. I say to the Minister that, if Jo Johnson is saying that this is the biggest change since the 1990s, should we not at least take the time to work through the impact of the biggest change in higher education since the 1990s? For those reasons, I urge the Minister not to proceed with the LCM.

**Ms Bailey:** I, too, share a lot of the concerns that have been expressed on the Floor today about the LCM. I represent South Belfast, where Queen's University is based and where we have a large student population. I have not heard any of the universities coming forward to ask us to support the LCM. Quite a number of people who work there have expressed their concerns about what is happening.

I will reiterate a number of issues that have been mentioned in the Chamber about the teaching excellence framework. In other studies, the measurements used have been shown to be gender-biased towards white, male teachers. If that is to be the measurement and something that we are to roll out throughout Northern Ireland, can the Minister give any assurance that we can protect women and the other identified section 75 minority groups in Northern Ireland through an equality impact assessment from any negative impacts? I have not heard any of that being spoken about.

I also share the concerns mentioned about the Office for Students, which does not have any students represented on it. What that does is open the door to businesses and corporations influencing what universities teach and what research they can do. To make those moves will take control away from experts who are working in their field and give it instead to politicians, businesses and corporations. That is not really what education is meant to be about.

We need to look at what is in Northern Ireland's best interests and what our universities need. We need a Bill to work for all learners of all ages in all modes of study, because our further education colleges, as well as our universities, will be impacted on by the LCM.

I echo what Mr Attwood said. This is the biggest shake-up in our education system provision since the 1990s, and we need to give due consideration to and have a proper conversation about what we need. Northern Ireland should not be supporting Tory policy, driven by Tory manifesto pledges, for a solution in England.

**Mr E McCann:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms Bailey:** I certainly will.

**Mr E McCann:** Is the Minister aware that the University and College Union will be making a presentation, including on these matters exactly, at 2.00 pm today in the Senate, just across the Hall? All Members are cordially invited to come along to that meeting.

**Ms Bailey:** That is a timely intervention, as I was about to wrap up anyway.

I will not be supporting the LCM. I want to see put in place something more specific to the needs of Northern Ireland, our students and our future economic drivers. We need to be able to keep supporting all levels of and all subjects in further education and not start driving towards the notion that studying 6th-century history is of no use to anyone.

**Mr Carroll:** Significant concerns have been raised about the Bill and the general ethos that lies at its heart — issues that are important to consider in the debate. Those concerns have been raised by people who work in higher education, by unions such as the UCU and by bodies, such as the NUS and the NUS-USI. As mentioned by my colleague, there is a presentation at 2.00 pm today by the UCU on the alternative vision for higher education, and I encourage everybody to go along to that.

It is worth remembering that, in the past 15 years, we have witnessed an unprecedented assault on education — an assault that is predicated on the marketisation of our universities, the destruction of any notion of an education system that is free at the point of use and the creation of barriers that have significantly reduced accessibility to the system, particularly for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. It is worth saying that many of those who are proponents of the Bill were beneficiaries of free education, not to mention the old grant system, which gave students funding to cover the costs of studying. Students now graduate with £30,000 to £40,000 of debt tied around their neck, and most students are working at least one part-time job to pay rent and other increasing costs.

The Bill will certainly lead to an ever-increasing drive towards the marketisation of higher education.

The White Paper for the Bill argued that there is insufficient competition between institutions, clearly indicating a drive towards cutthroat market-style competition in our education systems and opening the door to for-profit universities competing in the future. That will lead to worse outcomes for students, workers and, ultimately, taxpayers in general.

The real danger in general with the Bill is the fact that private providers will be able to award degrees to students, despite having no track record or evidence that they can require and provide a high standard of education and no guarantees that they will be sustainable in providing education for students in the long term. We have already seen Virgin getting access and encroaching on the health service, and we see the Bill pushing to allow private for-profit universities to get their hands on education. No doubt, the interests of the boardroom will come before the interests of proper education and what is best for society generally.

Private providers will be able to do this without any prior experience or evidence that they can deliver, and education, I argue, is too serious to play about with. Reducing the regulation of teaching standards will lead to a race to the bottom, and education as a whole across the board will suffer.

It is worth mentioning that, in the US, private providers face court action for falsifying student records and providing poor standards of teaching. In addition, it is worth saying that the current loan system is unsustainable and unfair; it will see poorer students repaying on average £10,000 more off their loans than their wealthier classmates. Most other OECD countries are making greater public investment in higher education as a consequence of the recession, and, as has been mentioned already, the UK now has the highest average level of student fees in OECD countries. That is a completely unethical way to run a higher education system.

There are many low-income mature people who simply cannot afford to take out a student loan, and the possibility that fees may increase will continue to increase the barriers for those students. These barriers to education need to be tackled and addressed.

Another aspect of the Bill and the LCM that is deeply concerning is the teaching excellence framework. If implemented, it will effectively be a form of popularity contest for rating teaching in institutions. It is extremely worrying that it is being proposed that we go down this path. I think that teaching assessments should be done in an open and democratic way where students should

be allowed to come together and collectively discuss and assess courses and teaching through the class rep system and through student unions. Research shows that there is general satisfaction with teaching across universities. The teaching excellence framework is more about Government ideology and politics than anything else.

If we are serious about improving teaching, it can be done by providing additional public funding to reverse the worsening student:staff ratio, allowing universities to keep class sizes low and by calling for an end to the casualisation process, which is seeing staff having contracts that are not secure and not knowing where they will be teaching from year to year. It can also be done by curbing academic staff workloads, which sees academics working in excess of 50 hours per week, to allow academics to devote more time to students and to keep up with innovation and developments in their field.

We also have to address the fact that we are increasingly hearing reports and proposals from universities in particular to close down courses or amalgamate and to no longer allow single honours for important courses. We have to understand that this is an attack on education that needs to be fought and resisted. Indeed, students and staff in Queen's University did this when it was proposed to stop the teaching of single honours sociology, and they won. So, the lesson is there.

Despite living in an age when we are told that money is tight and funding is not available, the Executive need to address the fact that universities often have large reserves stashed away — Queen's University has at least £500 million in reserves. That money needs to be reinvested in student services, in providing quality education for students, and in secure and well-paid jobs for staff in universities.

We need an education system designed for students that values staff in universities and further education colleges. Unfortunately, the motion does none of that. That is why we will not support it.

#### 1.15 pm

**Mr Hamilton:** I thank all Members, irrespective of the positions that they take on this issue, for their contributions during the debate. I think that it goes without saying that our higher education system is a real asset to Northern Ireland in economic and social terms. It has a dual role in providing graduates with the right mixture of skills and knowledge that current and future employers seek and in providing excellent research and innovation. It is fundamental to our aims to develop the Northern Ireland economy. Higher education is also a public good in its own right as it helps individuals to meet their own personal goals. Being part of the United Kingdom's higher education brand is a critical aspect of the international reputation of our higher education sector and the provisions in the Higher Education and Research Bill that require today's motion to be passed will ensure that that continues to be the case.

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

I welcome the recommendations that were made by the Committee for the Economy, outlined by the Chair in his contribution. As he and other perhaps better informed Members pointed out, this legislative consent motion is very narrow, covering small technical areas. That did

not stop many from finding their voice on this issue and expounding about all sorts of things related to the higher education sector that do not relate to what is in this legislative consent motion.

In short, going back over it briefly, the LCM permits Northern Ireland universities to partake in the teaching excellence framework. It is not compulsory, and it is not automatic. As Dr Farry in his contribution pointed out, repeating what I said, it requires the Minister of the day, whether it be him, I or whoever else, to authorise that participation. It is us responding to universities' request for reputational reasons. One Member said that they had not heard any university speaking in favour of any aspect of this Bill. Ulster University wrote to the Committee during its work and pointed out in respect of the TEF:

*"an arrangement that allows for our participation in the teaching excellence framework is welcome".*

Universities want to be part of this for reputational reasons, particularly, as I have pointed out before, in attracting international students. It is undoubtedly the case that we have seen in various newspapers the ranking of universities and a whole range of different measures. Whether we like those measures or not, they happen and they do have an impact on student choices. They could well particularly have an impact on international student choices as these league tables are developed. Dr Farry pointed out the importance of international students to our universities and, indeed, the under-representation of international students in Northern Ireland versus other universities in the UK or Ireland. For those back at home who are making sponsorship decisions on where they want to send students, it could well be that they are looking at the teaching excellence framework, in the context of the UK higher education brand, as to where they may fund students to go. Therefore, whether we like it or not, it will be important in those key decisions for students and, indeed, for international students. I think that it is right that we retain the right to participate in the teaching excellence framework for those reasons.

The second thing that the LCM covers is that it aligns Northern Ireland with the new UK system, that being the new Office for Students and also UK Research and Innovation. There is a risk of losing some important joint working on key aspects of the UK system including, as was much mentioned in the debate, the research excellence framework. Major reputational damage to Northern Ireland's universities could happen if we are not part of, or are out of step with, the wider UK university brand.

I want to address some of the issues that were raised by the Chair and others about the five recommendations that the Committee made in its report. The first was around the Open University's point about working for all learners of all ages and in all modes of study. I absolutely acknowledge those concerns. The Open University's input to the Committee appears to be nigh on a replica of input to the submission on the UK Bill as a whole and not necessarily specific or tailored to this legislative consent motion. This area is not part of the LCM. As the Chair mentioned, it is a matter that ought to be taken forward through the parliamentary system, and I am sure that the Open University and others will lobby for some assurances for this as the Bill moves through the Lords and other stages.

The second issue is the NUS-USI and UCU proposal for representation on the board of the Office for Students. Inclusion of someone on the board with experience of student representation has been brought forward by a Government amendment to the Bill, and that person must specifically have experience in promoting student interests. It could, in fact, include a former president of Queen's Students' Union if they so wish, but I am sure we would not want to subject anybody to that sort of onerous responsibility. That person could be — it is not specified that this is the case — a student representative, but it has to be somebody who has an interest in promoting student interests. The fact that it is a Government amendment shows some acknowledgement of the issue that has been raised by the Committee and, indeed, others from the higher education sector.

The third point is that link to tuition fee levels. I think there has been a huge misunderstanding of this. I was shocked by Mr Aiken's opposition to the Bill. He was atypically dispassionate in his opposition to it, and that rang more of opposition for opposition's sake than of anything constructive. I hope I have made this clear: the issue here is very different issue compared with that in England. In England, inflationary fee increases will in future be linked to teaching excellence framework outcomes. That is not and never has been the case in Northern Ireland. England wants to link inflationary fee increases to the TEF, whereas inflationary fee increases in Northern Ireland are automatic.

Moving to the fourth recommendation made by the Committee, which was about the metrics used for the measurement of teaching excellence in the TEF, I will say that the teaching excellence framework is, as I and others pointed out, an English policy. That was pointed out by Dr Farry in his very intelligent and useful contribution to the debate. I do not want to deny participation in the TEF to Northern Ireland's higher education institutions for the aforementioned reputational reasons. There are concerns, and I accept them, about the metrics that are used, but this is an evolving process. The current metrics are set for two years, I understand, and they will be subject to potential change. I think there were similar issues with the introduction of the research excellence framework that have been broadly ironed out and are now widely recognised by the sector as being, on balance, positive.

The fifth recommendation was on a separate Northern Ireland teaching excellence framework panel. Again, I reiterate the point that this is an English policy. However, the Government have been cognisant of the need to have Northern Ireland's views and, indeed, those of other devolved Administrations represented, so, again, there is an amendment saying that the board will have someone with devolved Administration experience included and the TEF panel will have devolved representation on it. As I understand it, a Northern Ireland representative will be on that panel. I hope that will mitigate the need for a specific Northern Ireland panel.

I want, and I am sure everybody in the House wants, to attract more international students to Northern Ireland and to attract research excellence and retain it here in Northern Ireland. The universities are saying they want to take part in the teaching excellence framework. I already referenced what the Ulster University said. That was not necessarily said from any love or particular affinity to the TEF on its part; it is because it wants to be part of that

wider UK higher education brand and wants to use it. Whatever the shortcomings Dr Farry and others pointed out, it is a strong brand internationally, and the Northern Ireland universities' participation under the umbrella of that brand helps to attract international students and research excellence to these shores. We want to use it for those purposes.

The LCM is narrow and technical, and I hope I have given some reassurance. Some Members, of course, came into the House asking for reassurance but would never accept it even if it were given to them. Notwithstanding that, I commend the motion to the House.

*Question put.*

*The Assembly divided:*

*Ayes 58; Noes 28.*

#### **AYES**

*Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Robinson, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan and Mr Robinson.*

#### **NOES**

*Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Hanna, Mr Kennedy, Mr E McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McKee, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Aiken and Ms S Bradley.*

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Higher Education and Research Bill relating to joint working and advisory services, the teaching excellence framework and powers to fund research.*

## Further Education (Governing Body of Institution of Further Education) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016

**Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy):** I beg to move

*That the Further Education (Governing Body of Institution of Further Education) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 be affirmed.*

I am seeking the Assembly's affirmation for the Further Education (Governing Body of Institution of Further Education) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016. The order will not come into operation until approved by this Assembly. It will amend the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 by removing the right of the Education Authority to nominate two individuals for appointment to each of the governing bodies of the six Northern Ireland further education colleges. In addition, the order will allow current governing body members who were appointed as a result of an Education Authority nomination to see out the terms of their appointment.

Subsequently, the intention is to replace Education Authority members through a public appointment competition aimed at recruiting those from a business, industry or professional background.

The further education sector has achieved much in recent times. Its capacity to develop our workforce, to support employers and to help stimulate economic growth must not be underestimated. Colleges engaged 120,000 learners during the last academic year and were responsible for around £200 million-worth of public expenditure.

The services that colleges deliver under the direction of their governing bodies impact on the lives of many people. My Department must ensure that the six further education colleges have in place governing bodies that are able to provide effective and efficient management of their college. The bodies provide strategic leadership, as well as performing key governance and accountability functions. Against that background, we must take their governance arrangements with the utmost seriousness, both to ensure proper accountability and to enhance the positive influence our further education sector has across our society.

A governing body's membership, role and proceedings are governed by the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which requires that each body has 12 to 18 members. Of those 18 members, 10 are from a business, industry or professional background; one is the college principal; two are elected by the staff of the college; one is elected by the students of the college; two are nominated by the Education Authority; and two may be co-opted by the governing body — for instance, to bring in specialised expertise. Importantly, 10 of the governing body members must come from a business, industry or professional background and are recruited through public competitions that are regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland.

The aim of the proposed legislative change today is to address the position of the appointments that are made on the basis of a nomination by the Education Authority, which, Members will recall, previously took the form of the education and library boards. Simply put, there is no longer a justification to retain Education Authority

nominations. The nomination rights are a residual power deriving from the 1997 Order and the education and library boards' former responsibility for the further education colleges. The original justification for the representation has been overtaken by the passage of time and the emergence of colleges as larger, self-governing, business-orientated entities with a more significant role in supporting the development of students and helping to grow the Northern Ireland economy. The new and emerging role of the single Education Authority no longer resembles the regionalised predecessor organisations that had responsibility for the colleges. Indeed, the colleges themselves have a different regional emphasis than when originally established. Therefore, the historical rationale for the nomination rights no longer exists.

Effective policy and operational linking mechanisms can more easily be developed between my Department, the Department of Education, the Education Authority and the FE colleges outside the limitations of the legislation. The ongoing use of the nomination rights also represents unregulated appointments within a body regulated by public appointments standards. That is at odds with my Department's overriding responsibility for effective governance, which assumes the appointment of members who have specific knowledge, skills and experience appropriate to the demands of the role.

Finally, the role is predominantly operational, and appointees must oversee the efficient, economical and effective management of all of the college's resources and expenditure rather than represent the interests of others.

For those reasons, it is sensible to modernise our approach. In doing so, I wish to raise the level of influence of those from a business, industry or professional background on our college governing bodies. This, in my view, can help create stronger links with our business community. To ensure a smooth transition, the order will allow existing governing body members whose appointments arose from the Education Authority or its predecessor bodies to continue in post until the end of their current term of appointment. Following that, vacancies that arise will be filled through a regulated public appointments competition that is more open. Critically, an open competition will widen the talent pool that can apply to undertake a governing body role and will focus on the recruitment of those from a business, industry or professional background. The changes proposed by the order are not expected to attract additional cost, nor will they have any negative equality impacts; indeed, it is more likely that the change will promote participation by those who are currently under-represented on our public bodies, such as women, people with a disability and ethnic minorities.

Let me conclude by thanking the members of the Economy Committee for their consideration of the policy content of the proposed legislation and, indeed, for their scrutiny of the order itself. I hope that I have provided sufficient explanation of the purpose of the order and will, of course, respond to points made by Members in my closing remarks.

**1.45 pm**

**Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Economy):** I will not rehearse the content of the statutory rule, because the Minister has adequately addressed the

matters contained in it. I will focus on the Committee's scrutiny of it. We considered the policy proposal for the rule at our meeting on 7 September 2016. The Committee was content for the proposal to proceed. The statutory rule was then considered by the Committee at its meeting on 16 November 2016, and members were content with it. Therefore, on behalf of the Committee, I support the motion to affirm the order.

**Mr Hamilton:** I am grateful to the Chairman for his contribution. This is a simple, straightforward and ultimately positive change that will have a practical benefit for our further education institutions. It should also provide more opportunity for business and professional people to play an even greater role in the sector and, in turn, allow our colleges to better meet the needs of our economy. I commend the order to the Assembly.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That the Further Education (Governing Body of Institution of Further Education) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 be affirmed.*

## **Policing and Crime Bill: Legislative Consent Motion**

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** One amendment has been selected and is published on the Marshalled List.

**Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice):** I beg to move

*That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of a number of provisions within the Policing and Crime Bill, by amendment at Lords Committee and Lords Report stage, in so far as they related to UK maritime enforcement powers; UK cross-jurisdictional arrest powers; anonymity for victims of forced marriage and pardons for convictions of certain abolished offences.*

The Policing and Crime Bill was introduced at Westminster on 10 February this year and is expected to complete its final stage in December. It is a carry-over Bill from the previous parliamentary session and contains a wide range of policy proposals that form part of the United Kingdom Government's manifesto commitment to complete the work on police reform and improve further the efficiency and effectiveness of the police. The wider provisions will also lead to closer collaboration with other emergency services; enhance the democratic accountability of the police and fire and rescue services; help increase public confidence in policing; strengthen the protection for suspects under investigation by or who come into contact with the police; ensure that the police and other law enforcement agencies have the powers that they need to prevent, detect and investigate crime; and further safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation. There are specific provisions in the Bill that either have a UK cross-jurisdictional dimension or make provision for matters that, I believe, will benefit the law in Northern Ireland by way of extension or by separate provision, subject to the legislative consent of the Assembly.

The motion is on four separate and distinct policy proposals, all of which relate to devolved matters and fall within the criminal justice sphere. First, there are provisions that deal with maritime enforcement powers for wider criminality at sea. Law enforcement officers in Northern Ireland have maritime enforcement powers under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to deal with the specific offences of human trafficking and of slavery, servitude and forced and compulsory labour. They also have separate powers to tackle the illicit trafficking of controlled drugs. The proposal will extend equivalent maritime enforcement powers for the purposes of preventing, detecting or investigating any offence under the law of Northern Ireland by a United Kingdom or foreign vessel in Northern Ireland waters. The powers to be made available to law enforcement officers will allow them to stop, board, divert and detain a vessel, to search it and obtain information and to arrest suspects and seize property. The introduction of the powers in England, Wales and Scotland and their extension to Northern Ireland via the motion will ensure that police across the United Kingdom and appropriate law enforcement officers have at their disposal the powers they need to deal effectively with broader criminal activity should it arise on board vessels in the respective territorial waters. All territorial waters will remain the responsibility of the respective authorities.

While recognising that such circumstances are likely to be infrequent, I want to ensure that reciprocal provisions are

made for hot pursuit. My Department will seek to make provision for hot-pursuit powers for the PSNI, subject, of course, to securing the agreement of the Policing Board on accountability and agreeing with the Scottish Government the oversight arrangements for Police Scotland.

Once the necessary agreements are in place, I will then seek to identify a legislative vehicle to take this forward at the earliest opportunity.

The second proposal relates to an important change to the current UK cross-jurisdictional arrest powers. Currently, police officers need a warrant in their own jurisdiction to arrest a person suspected of having committed an offence in another UK jurisdiction. What is proposed is a power for officers to arrest without a warrant someone suspected of committing a serious offence in another part of the UK. In effect, this will enable the person to be detained in police custody, for a time-bound period, pending the arrival of officers from the jurisdiction where the suspect is wanted. The person will then be rearrested and returned for questioning. The detention period will be subject to regular review, and the arrested person will be afforded the same rights and entitlements as in the jurisdiction where the alleged offence was committed. It is also intended that the power of arrest will be restricted to any offence that may attract a period of imprisonment of 10 years or more and to a list of other specified offences considered serious enough for inclusion.

The third element relates to forced marriage. Currently, a victim of forced marriage may be granted anonymity at the discretion of the court, but that is not automatic. This proposal is aimed at providing automatic anonymity to victims of forced marriage, similar to that introduced for victims of female genital mutilation, which was extended to Northern Ireland under the Serious Crime Act 2015 by use of a legislative consent motion. We know that forced marriage is a hidden crime, and this measure will give victims the confidence to come forward so that they receive the support that they deserve and that perpetrators are brought to justice.

The fourth and final policy proposal in the motion relates to pardons for convictions for certain abolished sexual offences. The United Kingdom Government have indicated their support for late amendments to the Policing and Crime Bill to provide, in England and Wales, statutory pardons for gay and bisexual men convicted of certain sexual offences that are not offences today. In order to qualify for a pardon, the activity must have been consensual and involve a person aged 16 or over, which is the current age of consent. These amendments build on an existing provision in the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, which introduced a disregard scheme for such offences in England and Wales. A successful application for a disregard results in details of such criminal convictions being deleted from relevant official records. These earlier provisions, however, do not extend to Northern Ireland. The latest amendments for England and Wales will mean that anyone who has their conviction or caution disregarded through these provisions will automatically be pardoned for the offence. In addition, the amendments will confer an automatic posthumous pardon on those with convictions or cautions for the same offences.

The draft provisions, which the motion asks the Assembly to agree, would introduce similar arrangements for Northern Ireland. A disregard scheme would be

introduced, whereby individuals could apply to my Department to have their convictions for certain abolished offences disregarded on criminal records, and, where the application was successful, an automatic pardon would be conferred. An automatic pardon would also apply in posthumous cases.

I believe that giving permission for Westminster to pass these provisions for Northern Ireland offers an immediate opportunity for the criminal justice system here to right the wrongs of the past. It will also allow us to consider additional detailed issues unique to Northern Ireland. In the meantime, we can at least ensure that the criminal law in Northern Ireland offers equality of treatment for gay and bisexual men in Northern Ireland, as it would do in England and Wales.

There is one aspect of the provisions that I know has caused some interest and concern. That is the perceived inequality of offering pardons for convictions for same-sex but not for opposite-sex activity after the age of consent equalised at 17 for all sexual activity. The Justice Committee referred to this issue when my officials gave evidence on the pardon amendments at its meeting on 10 November. The Member for North Antrim who will move the amendment to take these provisions out of the motion has also raised concerns over equality. The Department has taken account of its section 75 duty to have regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different sexual orientation.

These amendments to the Policing and Crime Bill provide an opportunity, in this respect, to address the historic wrongs suffered by gay and bisexual men who were criminalised over a long period for something that society regards today as normal sexual activity. I am, however, aware that we have an added dimension here because parity in the age of consent with the rest of the UK did not happen here until 2009, when it became 16. The criteria for a successful application for a disregard, and subsequent pardon, in England and Wales are that the activity was consensual and that the other party was aged 16 or over. In England and Wales the age of 16 has been the age of consent for sexual activity with girls since the 19th century. However, up until 1967 all sexual activity between men of any age was criminalised. It was not until 2000 that the age of consent for sexual activity between men was equalised at 16. After that, there was no longer any discrimination against same-sex activity.

In Northern Ireland, the age of consent was set in 1950 at 17 for heterosexual activity. However, all sexual activity between men was criminalised up to 1982. Again, it was 2000 before the age of consent was equalised for both genders, but here the age was set at 17. After that, it is hard to see any further discrimination between the genders and, therefore, my view is that there is no obvious requirement to offer disregards and pardons for offences where the other party was 16, as this age of consent applied to all sexual activity of whatever gender.

A specific issue for Northern Ireland arises because our age of consent changed again in 2009 for both genders and is now, as in the rest of the UK, 16. I acknowledge that this means that consensual sexual activity before 2009 where the other party was 16 is no longer considered to be criminal behaviour. However, this is the same for sex with either a boy or girl of that age. It is my opinion that the policy basis for the disregard arrangements and the

proposed pardons is not just to address convictions for offences purely on the basis that the activity is no longer considered to be unlawful, although that of course is part of it, but rather to right the fundamental wrongs brought about by a criminal law which allowed and perpetrated discrimination and social injustice for a long period against a specific group of people.

These arrangements are not, and should not be, only about the fact that these offences have been decriminalised. I do not think that there would be a consensus that, simply because decriminalisation occurred, there was an injustice to those previously convicted. The reason for such a significant gesture goes much deeper, and we need to acknowledge that. My view at this time is that we can ask Parliament to introduce legislation for us on the same footing as in England and Wales, which, for now, means disregards and pardons for consensual activity with a person aged 17 or over. I am, however, not ruling anything out at this stage. I am happy to offer a commitment to look again at the whole issue of consensual sexual offences involving 16-year-olds and to bring it back to the Assembly for consideration. As this situation is unique to Northern Ireland, it is only right that we have time to properly consider the policy and to provide an opportunity for this Assembly to make a decision.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker, I commend this LCM to the Assembly.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until then. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Jim Allister.

*The debate stood suspended.*

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

2.00 pm

## Oral Answers to Questions

### Health

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Order. We will start with listed questions. I advise the House that questions 6 and 13 have been withdrawn.

#### Ovarian Cancer

1. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Health whether she plans to deliver a campaign targeting ovarian cancer. (AQO 744/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health):** The Public Health Agency (PHA) is delivering a Be Cancer Aware campaign to improve the public's awareness of signs and symptoms of cancer. As part of the campaign, the Public Health Agency undertook a specific ovarian cancer-awareness programme in September 2014 in partnership with Target Ovarian Cancer and Angels of Hope, which is a local charity. That entailed the widespread distribution of leaflets and posters to highlight the signs and symptoms of the illness. The leaflets and posters were distributed to hairdressing salons, bingo halls, pharmacies and GP practices. They helped to raise awareness of the signs and symptoms, in particular among women over the age of 50, and encouraged women to speak to their GP if they experienced any of those symptoms. The Public Health Agency also worked with the late Una Crudden to produce a video calling on women to read the leaflets and make themselves aware of the symptoms of ovarian cancer. The agency has also developed a Be Cancer Aware website that provides information about the signs and symptoms of a range of cancers, including ovarian cancer, and explains what people can do if they are concerned. It also includes signposts to recommended sources of support.

Public awareness of the signs and symptoms of cancer is a key factor in detecting cancers early and increasing the chances of successful treatment and survival. Raising awareness, therefore, could have the greatest impact on patient numbers and tackling cancer in areas of deprivation, where survival has historically been poorest. Prevention and early intervention are very much in keeping with my vision of Delivering Together. We need to support people to keep well in the first place and, when they need care and support, services should be safe and of the highest quality. The Public Health Agency is reviewing available evidence from other cancer-awareness campaigns to help inform the next phase of the Be Cancer Aware programme. However, specific cancer sites are yet to be decided for the next phase of the programme.

**Mr Poots:** I welcome the Minister's clarification. Una Crudden and Angels of Hope have done tremendous work on raising awareness of ovarian cancer, which is generally known as a silent killer. What importance does the Minister's place on ensuring that what was desired by the late Una Crudden, which is a campaign specific to ovarian cancer, happens? What is her position on that? Does she

intend to have a full-blown ovarian cancer awareness campaign as opposed to integrating it with other cancers?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I will obviously put on record that Una Crudden was an amazing woman. She used her own difficult circumstances to highlight ovarian cancer for other women. I commend her for that. I had the pleasure of meeting her; she was an absolutely lovely lady. Quite often, the public tend to listen more when they hear a real human story about someone's cancer journey and how they dealt with their illness.

I do not have a closed mind to the idea of an ovarian cancer-specific campaign, but it is important that we analyse how effective the previous work done on awareness has been and we target our resources to make sure we reach the largest number of people possible. I really believe in early intervention and prevention. We need to do more in the public health agenda. When it comes to reviewing how effective those campaigns are, I am very happy to look at where we can have the greatest impact through patient numbers, as I said, and on tackling cancer in areas of deprivation, where survival has historically been poorest. It is not ruled out. I am happy to correspond with the Member as we develop the next stage of the awareness campaign.

**Mrs Dobson:** I also remember well, and pay tribute to, the personal crusade of Una Crudden as we approach the second anniversary of her death. Minister, you will be aware of the facts of the more aggressive cancers, but what assurances can you provide us with that new drugs developed here in Northern Ireland will be made available to local patients diagnosed with ovarian cancer?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I think the Member is referring to the cancer drugs fund that exists in England. Obviously, we have our own processes here in the North through the individual funding request (IFR) process that exists to enable access to specialist drugs whose clinical and cost-effectiveness has not been fully established. I think we all realise that the current process has flaws. It should be less cumbersome and a bit more transparent, I think, in allowing access.

Officials are working with the clinicians, who obviously have the expertise, to develop a new individual funding request process. That new process will ensure that any individual funding requests are clinically assessed and scrutinised by a regional committee to give assurances that clinical judgement and patient care are at the heart of the process. It will also improve access to these drugs, provided that there is a compelling clinical case.

We always have to be aware that reforming the individual funding request process and increasing access to drugs not fully endorsed by NICE will carry a significant cost at a time when the health and social care budget is facing real pressures. Let me be very clear, all cancer drugs that have been recommended by NICE for routine use in the health service are available in the North. It is only for those that have not been recommended by NICE that patients are asked to use the individual funding request process.

My predecessor established the clinically led task and finish group to reform the process and went out to consultation. I aim to introduce the new arrangements during 2016-17 on a phased basis. Over the next number of months, we will have the new process rolled out. For me, it has to be transparent and people need to know how to access the help that they need.

**Mr Milne:** What impact is the current Be Cancer Aware campaign having?

**Mrs O'Neill:** A range of topics are covered in the campaign evaluation, including awareness of cancer advertising and symptoms and knowledge and recognition of the relevant campaign material. The aim is to look at changes in recognition and knowledge between pre- and post-campaign interviews. For each Be Cancer Aware campaign and targeted cancer site — for example, lung, bowel and breast — there is a comprehensive evaluation process that covers a number of different indicators. Together, that gives us a detailed picture of the potential campaign effects. The indicators used in the Be Cancer Aware evaluation are, for example, how the campaign reached individuals, public awareness of the signs and symptoms of cancer, the number of people being referred urgently for suspected cancer by GPs and the proportion of urgent referrals that result in a cancer diagnosis. Evaluations have shown that each campaign phase has had a good campaign reach through the population. Other important measures of campaign outcomes include the stage of the disease, the diagnosis and survival rates. Data for these indicators take much longer to come through and are not yet available.

**Mr Durkan:** Last year, a report by the Target Ovarian Cancer charity highlighted that women in the North have the worst survival rates and the worst chance of having access to a clinical trial than elsewhere on these islands. Is that still the case?

**Mrs O'Neill:** In comparison rates with, for example, England, we do not perform as well. I am not sure about the South. I am happy to provide that detail to the Member. Suffice to say that, whenever it comes to awareness, we have to do everything that we possibly can on awareness campaigns. Whether that is for ovarian cancer, lung cancer, breast cancer or any of the other cancers, it is important that we reach as many people as possible and that we drive home that early intervention and early detection message. We all know that, if cancer is discovered earlier, the chances of survival and getting support are obviously a lot higher.

I am happy to write to the Member with the specific statistics. For the record, I will make sure that we thoroughly review the impact of the campaigns that we have had to date and make sure that, when it comes to future campaigns, we target those areas where we absolutely can make a massive difference.

**Mr Lyttle:** When he was Health Minister, it was my privilege to present Edwin Poots with a thousand-strong petition for a targeted stand-alone ovarian cancer awareness campaign, not least because of the vital importance of early diagnosis and accurate GP referral. At that time, we were told that being part of the Be Cancer Awareness campaign would be the approach to take.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Will the Member ask the question, please?

**Mr Lyttle:** Therefore, I ask the Minister to consider in her review whether being part of the Be Cancer Awareness campaign rather than a targeted stand-alone campaign was the best approach? Is she willing to meet with a deputation of women who are affected by ovarian cancer to include them in that review?

**Mrs O'Neill:** The review work happens across the PHA, and I am quite sure that it will be very happy to meet with the women who have been impacted and who actually know how it is to go through an ovarian cancer diagnosis. I am very happy to engage with individuals and my door is open. It is important that, if we are going to have awareness campaigns, we target them where we can make the best effect. So whether that be a stand alone campaign or as part of Be Cancer Aware, I am open for that conversation.

### South Tyrone Hospital: Inpatient Services

2. **Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health whether her Department will close inpatient services at the South Tyrone Hospital with a view to increasing provision at Craigavon Area Hospital. (AQO 745/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Following a full public consultation in 2014 about the future provision of hospital services for older people, the Southern Health and Social Care Trust's long-term plan is that all inpatient care will be delivered at Craigavon Area Hospital and Daisy Hill Hospital. However, it was acknowledged that the transfer of inpatient services from Loane House on the South Tyrone Hospital site would be dependent on the trust securing the necessary capital investment for the construction of a new unit on the Craigavon Area Hospital site. Therefore, there are no immediate plans for the closure of Loane House.

As set out in 'Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together', my Department and I will work with the wider health and social care system to design new partnership approaches to the planning and management of health and social care services. I want the new model of person-centred care to be designed in collaboration with people and communities and to be focused on what services people need and on how they can be provided most effectively, rather than on the buildings in which they are provided. The way we design and deliver services will be focused on providing continuity of care in an organised way and will increasingly involve working across traditional organisational boundaries.

**Mr McPhillips:** I thank the Minister for her answer. A new £450 million hospital build has been confirmed for Craigavon. How does that fit in with Bengoa and the Minister's vision for health and social care in that region?

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Southern Trust has identified the redevelopment of the Craigavon Area Hospital site as one of its key capital projects, and the Department recognises that it is a priority project. However, there are a number of similar large-scale priority projects across the HSC that will also require significant levels of funding. Plans for a new build are with the Department for consideration, and we are actively looking at them.

The key drivers for the project are the condition of the existing estate and the growing population and associated hospital activity. The capital costs for phase 1 of the new build are over £450 million, so a decision on the progression of the project will be considered alongside other capital investment priorities and will be further dependent on budgetary availability, value for money and affordability. However, given the level of commitments that we have in 2017-18 and 2018-19, this cannot be funded without substantial additional capital resource. Obviously, I am involved in the Budget 2017 process, which is

expected to conclude by the end of this year. While the redevelopment of the Craigavon Area Hospital site is a priority project, it is important that we continue to look at everything now in the context of Delivering Together and how we are going to transform health and social care. That will be part of my key considerations for future services, whether in the Southern Trust area or any trust area.

**Mrs Barton:** Minister, concerns are growing in the Western Trust that services will be downgraded in one of its hospitals to increase provision in the other. Will you give a commitment that the Bengoa reconfigurations will not merely be used as a convenient smokescreen to move stroke services from the South West Acute Hospital to Altnagelvin Hospital?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I thank the Member for her question. She will know that I am also a rural MLA and am very conscious of the needs of rural people. I want to make sure that people have full access to services on an equal basis. Bengoa and Delivering Together are not about withdrawing services. They are about reforming our health and social care system and delivering better health outcomes for individuals. There is a lot of potential there for services to be delivered at some Western Trust sites and, indeed, at many other sites.

When we look to the future, we should be looking towards opportunities. I am certainly looking towards that, because we all need to have a conversation about how we deliver better health and social care for all our population. That is what I am wedded to, but nobody should scaremonger or run ahead of themselves. I have said that I will listen to staff and patients, and I will design services with those people so there will be no surprises. All the decisions that will be taken about where we deliver services in future will be taken with full public consultation. Those decisions will be taken on board from the outset, not just as a tick-box exercise or as a consultation mechanism further down the line. From the outset, I will involve all those people in how we reconfigure services. The key goal and prize for me is better health and social care for everybody.

**Ms Gildernew:** The Minister is all too aware of just how busy the South Tyrone Hospital site is. Will she expand on how she sees South Tyrone Hospital fitting in with her approach as outlined in Delivering Together?

**Mrs O'Neill:** As I said, it is too early to say what services will be provided in any individual hospital. However, I expect that the potential of the South Tyrone Hospital will be fully explored as the transformation process goes forward. Again, there are opportunities. You are absolutely right: South Tyrone Hospital provides a range of services to the local population and is an excellent example of a flexible and resilient local hospital.

In addition to the 45-bed inpatient rehabilitation unit at Loane House, South Tyrone Hospital has a 15-place day hospital for elderly patients. It has a rapid access clinic that provides care for older people referred by their GP who need to be seen within 24 to 72 hours but are not acutely ill and do not need to be admitted to hospital. South Tyrone Hospital has the largest minor injuries unit, which sees more than 26,000 patients a year, giving it a vital role in providing care locally and reducing some of the pressure on the larger emergency departments. The hospital provides day surgery and diagnostics, including CT scanning, and a range of outpatient clinics and allied

health professional services. The hospital is also the base for many of the community care services and specialist teams that help people to be cared for in their home and in the community as far as possible, including the community stroke team, community diabetes team, acute care at home team, community palliative care team, adult mental health teams and the area's health visitor and social work teams.

It is a very busy hospital, and, as I said, the potential exists for South Tyrone Hospital to do more. I am currently undertaking a process of engagement with stakeholders across health and social care to build a collective view about how our health and social care services should be configured in the future.

2.15 pm

### Antrim Area Hospital: Outpatient Waiting Times

3. **Mr Aiken** asked the Minister of Health, given that the maximum permitted waiting time for a first outpatient appointment has increased from 18 weeks in the 2015-16 ministerial target to 52 weeks in the 2016-17 ministerial target, what has been the impact on the number of patients waiting longer than the maximum permitted time in the Antrim Area Hospital. (AQO 746/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The latest provisional information indicates that, at 31 October 2016, the number of people waiting longer than 18 weeks for a consultant-led outpatient appointment at Antrim Area Hospital had increased by 1,382 compared with the same period last year. Currently, 777 people are waiting more than 52 weeks.

In order to minimise the impact on patients, the Health and Social Care Board continues to work with the trusts to maximise the delivery of funded capacity and ensure the application of good waiting list management practice, including assessing and treating urgent cases first and, thereafter, seeing and treating patients in chronological order.

I am firmly of the view that the current waiting lists are unacceptably long. However, unless we tackle the root causes, that will remain the case, as we have a 20th-century model delivering services for a 21st-century population. This is having an increasingly negative impact on the quality and experience of care. The long-term solution is the transformation of our health and social care system as outlined in 'Delivering Together'. It is only by transforming the health and social care system and implementing new models of care that we will be able to alleviate the pressures on our health and social care services, sustain improvements in waiting times and deliver better outcomes for patients.

That said, I pay tribute to staff right across HSC. In the first half of this year alone, there have been over 240,000 consultant-led outpatient appointments and nearly 89,000 admissions for inpatient day-case treatment. Notwithstanding the structural issues, they continue to work incredibly hard to deliver the best possible service to patients.

**Mr Aiken:** In view of the awful figures that we hear from Antrim Area Hospital, can the Minister — given the recent media reports on the lengthening of waiting list times — explain how massaging targets to match the poor

performance of her Department is beneficial to the near quarter of a million cases on our waiting lists?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I am not interested in massaging anything; I am interested in making sure that people get seen in the most timely manner and get the health and social care that they deserve when they need it. That is my priority as Health Minister.

I have said clearly that we need to transform health and social care. We are trying to deliver 21st-century health and social care with a 20th-century system that is out of date and cannot keep up with the rising demand. We have more people being seen, but, obviously, people are living longer and have more complex conditions, which makes it all very difficult.

We have short-term initiatives, and we have longer-term initiatives. In the longer term, let us transform health and social care. I want to work with all the parties in the House to deliver that, because, if we do not do that, we will be having this conversation for many, many years to come. In the short term, I am about making sure that my Department does absolutely everything it can. It is about maximising the delivery of the commissioned volumes that our trusts are commissioned to deliver. It is about continuing to prioritise patients by clinical urgency. It is about the chronological management of non-urgent patients. It is about using the dedicated schedule and staff to manage the patient pathways. It is about overtime clinics. It is about a range of issues. I have identified £4 million to invest in elective care over the next number of months to allow us to do more and reach an additional 10,000 people. That shows the Executive's commitment to dealing with waiting lists.

I said that I would publish my plan in January in relation to elective care and set out targets for dealing with waiting lists. Let us be very clear: I did not inherit this problem, and it did not happen overnight. It has been the result of year-on-year cuts to the block grant by the Tory Government. It has been about their austerity policies. *[Interruption.]* You can laugh all you want, but your friends the Tories cut the Executive's block grant year-on-year and made it really difficult, and we are in the position we are in because of that.

I will not be found wanting in my approach to dealing with waiting lists. I will do absolutely everything that I can. I continually come to the House to say everything that I am doing. I will continue to do that because I want the public to get the message loud and clear: I am doing absolutely everything that I can to bring the waiting lists down. The public will thank us for that, and that is what they should judge us on.

**Ms Hanna:** I thank the Minister for her answers. Earlier this month, the government parties voted against our motion on waiting lists because they said that the figure referred to cases and not to people. The old figures may very well have referred to people. So, on the basis of the old targets, do we know how many humans are actually waiting?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I am not sure that I understand the question, but, on the figures that you refer to, it is important to note that, when we had that recent debate, Members were just adding up x, y and z. Yet when we publish the stats, we are told, "Do not do that. Don't take that approach because it is not an appropriate figure".

The figures that I highlighted in the answer to Mr Aiken are very clear, but they are for the Northern Trust only. It is important that the public understand and have confidence in the fact that we are doing everything that we can. We have to transform health and social care. That is the reality, and it is the longer-term plan. In the meantime, people cannot wait until we get to the point where our health service is transformed, so I have set out all the things that I am doing. I want to bring waiting lists down, because they are totally unacceptable to me. I am happy to be questioned day and daily about what I am doing. I will bring forward a plan in January that will clearly set out how we will do that. We have to transform and bring in ambulatory clinics and assessment centres. We have to do so much more and do it at speed.

**Ms Seeley:** The Minister mentioned the root causes of long waiting times: how does she hope to address those root causes?

**Mrs O'Neill:** As I said, waiting times are a product of increased pressure on the health service. Demand will continue to grow year on year because we have an ageing population, the emergence of new technologies and changes in practice in healthcare. Those factors will not go away, and we need to consider how we will deal with them in a way that delivers the best outcome for patients and is sustainable in the long term.

The long-term solution is the transformation that I have set out in 'Delivering Together'. We need to move to a population health model and create a more sustainable service, one that makes the best use of the resources that we have to deliver the best possible services to patients. Key areas of innovation that we are considering for the plan, subject, obviously, to securing the required investment, include the further development of ambulatory assessment and treatment centres that will allow patients to be assessed and diagnosed and, if required, to receive a treatment or procedure all in one day. I recently visited similar facilities in the Royal Victoria and the Mater. I was impressed to see the positive impact that they have on the experience for patients and staff. Elective care centres will also be established for less complex, planned treatment. The centres will be a resource for the region, and the way in which they operate will be designed around patients. Put simply, they will allow clinicians to see and treat more patients.

**Ms Bradshaw:** Minister, thank you for your answers so far. I am concerned about the emotional welfare of people sitting on waiting lists, and I would like you to tell me how people are being communicated with and updated on it. Also, are they getting access to emotional, counselling or therapeutic support while they wait? The anxiety and the not knowing can sometimes have a detrimental effect on a person's health.

**Mrs O'Neill:** I encourage anybody who is sitting on a waiting list and has been waiting for a very long time to contact their GP again if their condition is worsening. It is then up to the GP to refer them to the hospital services, to prioritise that patient and ensure that the consultant whom they are waiting to see knows that their needs have changed. That process is ongoing, and we are asking GPs to continually do that. Anybody who has been sitting on a list for a long time whose condition has worsened should go and see their GP.

I absolutely understand how frustrating it is if you have been waiting for a long time, be it for yourself, your children, your parents or anyone else in your family. It is annoying because you are worried about your health and what it means for you in the future. We have to do everything that we can; that is my focus. It is absolutely about bringing down the waiting lists as quickly as we can and transforming health and social care. I am not aware of any particular initiatives on emotional support or well-being, but, again, anybody who is concerned about that should go back and speak to their GP.

## Western Trust: Adult Learning Disability Services

4. **Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the action taken by her Department to address the underspend on adult learning disability services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust. (AQO 747/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** As is clear from my many public statements, robust action continues to be taken on the issue. To begin with, I have confirmed that increased investment of £3 million in adult community learning disability services is now in place, and a further £5 million is planned by the Western Trust.

I have also met representatives of local families and carers and subsequently spoken with the chief executive of the trust to relay the concerns of families and carers and to make clear my expectation that progress be now made on the development of a new investment plan that has the backing of the families. To support that, I proposed at a meeting that I had with the families in October that an independent facilitator should be appointed to work with the trust and the families to restore trust and confidence following the recent breakdown in relationships. That work will be taken forward in the context of the wider communication and engagement plan, and I have asked the trust to develop that. Furthermore, I have appointed a senior official from my Department to oversee progress and act as a point of contact for the families.

Those actions mark my commitment to finding a co-designed resolution to the issue and to working with the families and the trusts so that the focus can return to the delivery of much-needed front-line services on the ground for people with a learning disability and their family. I believe that we all share that focus, and I am determined to do all that I can to ensure that it is realised.

**Mr McCrossan:** Thank you, Minister, for your answer and your attention to the issue for a long number of months. It has been going on for nine months. Will she confirm to the House that she has got to the bottom of the issue? Will she also confirm what the overall figure is and who was at fault for the scandal in the trust?

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Member will be aware that we have. Based on the financial data that has been provided by the Health and Social Care Board, the average capitation variance relating to the funding of adult and community learning and disability services in the Western Trust area has been quantified at around £7 million per annum. To be clear, a capitation variance of that type does not necessarily mean that there has been an underspend, but, given that it is a complicated calculation and that capitation is complicated, when I met members of the group recently, one thing that I promised them was that they would be

given a meeting with the board so that they could go through all the calculations and understand for themselves exactly how they are worked out. They are glad to take up that opportunity. That will be important to ensure that everyone understands what is a complex subject, and they were grateful for that. I have asked officials to arrange a meeting between the group and the Health and Social Care Board, which is carrying out a review of the learning disability capitation model.

**Ms Boyle:** I thank the Minister for her involvement with the families and the work that she has done with them, the Western Learning Disability Action Group and others on the matter. Minister, will you give us an update on the progress made on appointing an independent facilitator to address the underspend and provide a timeline for that?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I met members of the Western Learning Disability Action Group and the Southwest Carers Forum on 11 October to hear directly their concerns following what we all know now to be a breakdown in the relationship between them and the trust. At that meeting, I agreed a number of actions, including that I will consider appointing an independent person to support a process of co-production between the trust and local families and carers to develop a plan for how the planned £5 million investment will be spent. That is a practical example of partnership and the co-design approach that I am very keen to promote.

I recently wrote to the groups representing the families for their comments on the draft terms of reference for the independent facilitation. They recently got back to me, and I am considering their comments and plan to respond to them shortly. The key message that I took from the meetings with both groups is that they want to get on with making sure that they have the best possible services available to their families and be part of the process of designing services. For us to be able to do that confidently, we need to build up that trust again. I believe that the independent facilitator is the mechanism that will allow us to build those relations again to give those people confidence that the trust is putting their needs first and foremost. The whole process of co-production is exactly how we need to develop services in the future. Those involved have an opportunity to lead the way in producing and designing the services together.

**Mr T Buchanan:** I thank the Minister for what she has done up until now. Will she give an undertaking that she will ensure that the families are kept to the fore of the process so that they will feel part of it and that delivery will come for them? Let us remember that they are the people who suffered and who had concerns.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Minister, briefly, please.

**Mrs O'Neill:** I can absolutely give that assurance. That is what it is about: designing the service with them. The reason that I put in the independent facilitator was to build that trust again, because confidence in the trust had completely broken down. There is a job of work to be done there, and the only way in which we will be able to do that successfully is through independent facilitation. That is the way to go. It will ensure that everybody is involved in the decision-making and the processes.

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

**2.30 pm**

### **Ambulances: Turnaround Times**

**T1. Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health, in the light of the fact that, this morning, she accused the Member of misrepresenting the figures around ambulance turnaround times, to give her assessment of the impact on patients of 7,973 ambulances taking longer than one hour to turnaround at hospitals in the past year. (AQT 536/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** During October 2016, almost half of ambulances arriving at hospitals were turned around within 30 minutes of arrival, and 95% within one hour, against a background of increasing demand for ambulance services. In 2015-16, the Ambulance Service answered 202,325 emergency calls, an increase of 5.5% on the previous year. Improved patient handover and ambulance turnaround times remains a priority for Health and Social Care. The Ambulance Service is working with the board and the trust to improve turnaround times at all hospital sites. Turnaround times at type 1 emergency departments are monitored very closely on a live basis, and appropriate action is taken by the Ambulance Service to ensure that waiting times are kept to a minimum.

**Mrs Dobson:** The original question was about the time taken to hand over a patient at an emergency care department. Your response to me says that the information is not available. Given that this data is collected in other jurisdictions, why is it not the case in Northern Ireland?

**Mrs O'Neill:** We can all share the desire that patients be transferred as soon as possible, but the overriding factor has to be patient safety and making sure that patients are not compromised. So, if the handover takes a bit longer, that is what should happen if it makes the patient safer. I am not sorry for that; it is the right thing to do. The ambulance crew will remain with the patient until they have been handed over to the relevant clinical person in the hospital and can alert the emergency department staff if a patient's condition worsens.

I have answered the Member's question. However, I think that the Member has a tendency, quite frequently, to run away with herself and try to make a cheap headline out of a story for the day. Really and truly, I am only interested in delivering excellent patient health outcomes. Delivering patient outcomes is at the core of everything that I do. I am not interested in cheap headlines; I am interested in doing a job.

### **Emergency Department Consultant Vacancies: Daisy Hill Hospital**

**T2. Mr McNulty** asked the Minister of Health, while assuring her that no cheap headlines are intended, what steps her Department has taken to ensure that permanent emergency department consultants are recruited to fill the vacancies at Daisy Hill Hospital in Newry, given that she may be aware that the only remaining senior emergency department consultant at that hospital is due to retire in a few weeks, with the post yet to be filled despite the trust advertising it three times. (AQT 537/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** I understand and am aware of the problems that the Southern Trust has had in trying to recruit. Despite it having been out three times, it has been found to be really difficult, so we are looking at additional measures to allow us to make the post more attractive. You will be aware that the Daisy Hill service has been wholly dependent on one doctor who has been providing an excellent service there, and you are right that he is about to retire. I assure you that the trust is doing absolutely everything it can to make sure that the doors are kept open and services are still provided. If we have to use locums in the meantime, that is what we will have to do, but it is about delivering services. It is reflective of the challenges that we have across the health and social care workforce. We are finding it very difficult to recruit consultants, particularly for emergency departments, so we have to look at new and innovative ways of attracting people to the posts.

**Mr McNulty:** I thank the Minister for her response. The emergency department at Daisy Hill is a valuable service to the local community, and it is imperative that we retain the facility and retain acute hospital status. Will the Minister give me and the people of Newry and the surrounding area a categorical guarantee that Daisy Hill will retain its 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week emergency department for many years to come?

**Mrs O'Neill:** It would be foolish of me to stand here and say that nothing will ever change; I cannot say that to any Member. If we are serious about transforming health and social care, we have to be serious about how we deliver that care. I am open to designing services with staff, patients and locally elected representatives because I think that we will have to have some hard conversations.

We are standing here having a conversation about waiting lists, and we have to change the picture in relation to waiting lists. We have to see people more quickly and we have to bring waiting lists down. In order to do that, we have to transform how to deliver health and social care. We cannot keep doing things the same way. I could never give a cast-iron guarantee to anybody, and it would be irresponsible of me to do so, but I will give a guarantee that I will work every day to deliver better health outcomes for individuals. If I have to redesign services anywhere, I will do it in conjunction with local representatives, patients and staff. That is the difference that we have never seen before in relation to the health service. My guarantee to the people of Newry, the people who use Daisy Hill Hospital, is that I will deliver first-class health and social care for everybody who needs it.

### Fatal Foetal Abnormality Working Group Report

T3. **Mr Aiken** asked the Minister of Health, while assuring her that he sought not a cheap but a very sad headline, to state when the report from the working group on fatal foetal abnormality will be published, given that it has been over six weeks since the group completed its work. (AQT 538/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Justice Minister and I received the report of working group on fatal foetal abnormality on 11 October. The First Minister and deputy First Minister have now seen the report, and the Justice Minister and I will continue to work closely on the matter. We hope to bring forward proposals early in the new year.

**Mr Aiken:** Minister, many people are now calling out the establishment of this working group for what it was: a political whitewash that provided a convenient escape for the DUP when it needed one. Will the Minister try to restore some of the rapidly waning confidence in this report by, at least, giving us an anticipated timescale? How long will it take her and the Justice Minister and the Executive to be able to form an opinion? We are very interested to hear.

**Mrs O'Neill:** I was very interested in the work of the working group. I think that it was a very important piece of work so far as it sought the views of woman and their families who have been directly impacted by a diagnosis of fatal foetal abnormality. That had to be a core element of the work that the group did. I very much welcome the input that it has provided, and I want to take the opportunity to thank the group's members because I appreciate what they have done. I also appreciate the upset that lies behind their own personal experiences. It is not easy to share your own personal story.

I believe that the work has been invaluable. The group also sought views of health professionals, including midwives, gynaecologists, nurses and GPs and views from the royal colleges. It also took into account the views of other interested parties who responded to the recent Justice consultation on the matter of fatal foetal abnormality. On the time frame; I have said that we will bring proposals forward early in the new year. We are almost at the end of the year now. Now that the First Minister and deputy First Minister have also had sight of the report, we will work on it collectively —

**Mr Aiken:** Can we say January?

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Order.

**Mrs O'Neill:** I will be bringing forward proposals in the new year.

### Ambulance Response Times: Bangor

T4. **Mr Chambers** asked the Minister of Health what she would consider to have been a satisfactory time for an ambulance response in Bangor on Saturday afternoon past. (AQT 539/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** I do not think that I could answer that.

**Mr Chambers:** Perhaps I can help the Minister then. Does the Minister consider it acceptable that one of my constituents, an 87-year-old man with a pre-existing heart condition who collapsed in Bangor leisure centre on Saturday and displayed all the symptoms of a heart attack, had to wait 45 minutes for a first responder to attend? Indeed, the member of staff who made the 999 call had to wait for nearly 10 minutes in a queue because of the high volume of calls. Does the Minister find that acceptable?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I wish the individual well, and I hope that they are recovering. No, I do not find it acceptable if the ambulance did not get there in time to support the individual. If the Member wants to write to me on the individual issue or wishes to take it up with the Ambulance Service Trust, I am very happy for that to happen.

Let us be very clear about our ambulance staff and personnel. They are doing everything that they can, working in difficult situations. I referred earlier to the figures on the target and how the Ambulance Service is

delivering. It is under a lot of pressure. It is responding to more calls. I do not think that it is acceptable if someone had to wait for longer than they should have done for their care, but, again, I am very happy to take on board what he has raised with me. If he wants to send me an email or write to me about it, I am very happy to receive that.

### Health Hub: Limavady

T5. **Mr Robinson** asked the Minister of Health to outline her plans for a new health hub in Limavady so that all existing services, including car parking and full out-of-hours provision, will be located on a single site. (AQT 540/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** I do not have the detail on that, but I am happy to write to the Member to give him more detail on the future plans.

**Mr Robinson:** Will the Minister give a commitment to prioritise this vital project in a rural area and area of high deprivation if she secures the necessary funding?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Fair play to the Member for fighting the corner of the area in which he is elected, and rightly so. I consider all capital projects. I am not sure where it is in relation to the trust's capital priority list, but I am happy to look at that and respond to the Member in writing about where it sits. I am a big believer in investing in primary care. I think that we do need to build services in our communities.

If we are going to transform health and social care and take the focus out of hospitals, we have to invest in our communities, and that is very much at the core of what I am trying to do with Delivering Together.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Question 6, in the name of Pam Cameron, has been withdrawn.

### Rural Communities

T7. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Health to detail how the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 will be implemented during the process of transformation, especially how that will impact on rural communities, particularly in the light of the recent publication of the Bengoa report and her vision. (AQT 542/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Member will know I brought forward that legislation, so I am passionate about it. I will make sure that everything we do in decision-making will be rural-proofed and that we will apply the legislation. More than that, I want to go right into the heart of communities. If we are going to transform services, we need people to understand why and get them on board. There needs to be full understanding that this is not about stripping services from anybody but about how we can invest more in our community and build up primary care. I talked about that in the previous answer. How can we invest more in our GPs and make sure front-line services are in communities and closer to people's homes? We know people want to stay at home instead of going into hospital, so how can we do more of that? I will be very serious about co-production and co-design, and that means going in to consult right at the heart of communities on any changes we take forward. I will be very mindful of the needs of rural people when we take those decisions.

**Mr Storey:** I thank the Minister for her response. She will be aware, given the rural nature of my constituency of

North Antrim, which includes the glens, Ballycastle, Rathlin and other locations, that people want to have confidence that, in the co-design, there is a play with all the elements of our health professionals, particularly our GPs and our health centres. Does the Minister see a pivotal role for those health centres, particularly given that some of them have a very rural nature?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Yes, I see a pivotal role for them. We can also be more innovative about working in clusters, with a number of centres working together. If we have multidisciplinary teams in communities, that is all about investing in primary health. I believe people need to see that change in their community before we can make all the bigger changes that will need to happen. I am very committed to that.

I am going to visit the Member's constituency on Wednesday. I have a range of engagements that he may already be aware of. I am sure that the people of the area will make sure that their views are well known to me before I leave.

### Individual Funding Request Review

**Ms Armstrong:** Minister, earlier in Question Time, you provided a slight indication about the review of individual funding requests. I am asking for a bit more detail. You mentioned it will, potentially, be rolled out in 2016-17. Are we talking about the start of the financial year from April? As you are well aware, some of the people who are on the list are waiting the outcomes —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Can we move to the question, please?

T8. **Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister of Health when the review of the individual funding requests will come out. (AQT 543/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** I intend to try to announce the way forward before the end of this financial year. As I said, the current process is not transparent enough. People do not know how to access it properly, and it seems to be quite problematic. The review has looked at all that and at how we can improve the process to make it more streamlined. What I am saying is that, before the end of March, I intend to bring forward the new process for how it will be developed for the next financial year.

**Ms Armstrong:** How does the Minister envisage that the review 'Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together', which is currently being consulted on, will take account of the needs of those who are in the palliative stage of their cancer?

**Mrs O'Neill:** When it comes to designing services, at the heart of Delivering Together is designing services with patients, staff and carers. Whether it be palliative, emergency or GP care, we have to listen to those who have lived experience. I am very committed to that, and that is at the core of Delivering Together. We will design services with those people because they have that lived experience. They bring to it a new expertise that has never been taken into account, I believe, fully in the past. We have a real opportunity for people to be very bought-in and understanding of how we deliver services.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Mr Trevor Lunn can have a quick question, but there is no guarantee of a supplementary.

## European Medicines Agency: Brexit

T9. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Health, given that it is likely, under Brexit, that the European Medicines Agency will be relocated to outside Great Britain, to outline the impact that that will have on the life sciences industry in Northern Ireland. (AQT 544/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** You are right. I have had indications and individuals have told me that a lot of the pharmacy companies will relocate to wherever the agency relocates to. I think there will be implications. I am aware that the Dublin Government are engaged in conversations about the potential of it coming to Ireland. Obviously, there would be potential knock-on implications for us too.

2.45 pm

## Infrastructure

### York Street Interchange

1. **Mr Allen** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline any discussions he has had with Executive colleagues in relation to securing funding for the York Street interchange project. (AQO 759/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure):** Members will recall that I recently announced the notice to proceed with the scheme. This will allow my officials to begin consultations with key stakeholders, including the local community. The scheme remains a priority for me, and I am committed to doing all that I can to deliver it in the current financial context, working with the Finance Minister and, of course, other Executive colleagues.

As I have already said to the House, the scheme has to fit within a programme of works, and we need to do more to ensure not just that we have the funding to start the project but that we have funding in place until the end. Therefore, I will need to consider the funding for the project together with other priorities as part of my budget 2017-2021 considerations before deciding whether to award the York Street interchange contract.

There are huge demands on the infrastructure budget, and they are all competing. It is my job and that of my Department to put our priorities in place so that we can deliver as much as we can with the finances that are available to us and to do so strategically in the years ahead.

In light of the Chancellor's autumn statement, I will continue to work with my Executive colleagues to do all that I can to deliver this important scheme, as well the Executive's flagship projects.

**Mr Allen:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Does the Minister believe that there is any prospect of the £250 million for infrastructure announced in the Chancellor's statement being used to ensure that this vital project is commenced?

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his supplementary. It will be for the Executive to come to a decision on how the £250 million is divvied out. Of course, the £250 million that the Member mentions is for a range of infrastructure and capital projects, some of which, I have no doubt, my Department will be able to deliver, although I presume that

the money will also be used for schools, hospitals and new homes.

**Mr McGlone:** Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister. Will the Minister outline whether he has done any sourcing of potential funds that could be used for this specific project and whether those sources are coming back to him with anything definitive?

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for the supplementary. Yes, I have established an alternative financing unit in my Department to look at all available streams, not just for this project but for all projects as we go forward. I have somewhere in the region of £5 billion worth of projects sitting on my desk that we could proceed with. However, I will have in the region of only about £1 billion to £1.5 billion over the next number of years. If we are to progress with the schemes that I think are important for society, it will be important that I look across society and at all possible means by which to deliver them, but we need to do so in a way that is effective for the public purse. In recent times, methods have been used that were not effective for the public purse, and, today, Departments still suffer the consequences of bad financial decisions.

**Mr Humphrey:** I thank the Minister for his answer so far. I am sure that, like me, the Minister welcomed the announcement in the autumn statement last week by Her Majesty's Chancellor of an extra £250 million for Northern Ireland. It is welcome news. I welcome the comments made by the Minister and his colleague the Finance Minister to the House last week. The Minister will know the importance of the interchange to business, travel and tourism and to Northern Ireland plc. Given that it will go ahead, will the Minister commit to working with constituents whom I represent in Tiger's Bay, New Lodge, North Queen Street and Sailortown to make sure that their community, which will obviously be affected by this, is not adversely affected?

**Mr Hazzard:** Yes, absolutely. Only last week — maybe it was the week before; I cannot remember — I stressed the point that the decision to proceed allows my Department to go out and, as the independent inspector's report mentioned, engage with communities such as those that you have just outlined, so that the proposals going forward do not adversely affect them. There are final amendments to detailed design in and around, for example, the situation regarding the McGurk's bar monument and Little Georges Street and antisocial behaviour under the bridge. There is work that my Department can engage in, and I would be more than happy to extend that to communities around the project.

**Mr McAleer:** Will the Minister give an assurance that any future funding allocations will, as well as addressing pressures such as those at York Street, target the long-standing infrastructure deficits in the west?

**Mr Hazzard:** Absolutely. In infrastructure terms, there has been a regional imbalance for far too long in the North. That is why, since coming into post, I have been very careful to say that I want to address that infrastructure deficit. I have also gone to great lengths to say that road safety will be a priority of mine. As bad as congestion is — we absolutely need to tackle the growing congestion in and around the York Street area — people are dying in their scores on roads such as the A5. In the last decade alone, close to 50 people have been killed in road traffic accidents on that stretch of road. When I come to strategic

priorities, there could be nothing more strategic than saving lives.

**Mr Dickson:** Thank you, Minister, for your answers thus far. What criteria were used to prioritise other road schemes over the York Street interchange?

**Mr Hazzard:** As I outlined in answer to a previous question, my Department has four Executive flagship priorities. Your party will also have agreed to those priorities, as they were set out in the previous Executive, and I have embraced them. Unless the Alliance Party has changed its position and is now opposed to the development of the A5 and A6, the development of the Belfast transport hub and the rapid transit project that is coming live to Belfast next year, the Member will know full well what criteria were used.

## Coastal Defences

2. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline his Department's plans to improve coastal defences. (AQO 760/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for that question, but I will provide some clarification from the outset. In addition to formal or designated coastal defences, there is infrastructure, such as roads and railways, along our coast that performs a coastal protection function. In most cases, that was not the original purpose of their construction.

DFI's Rivers Agency manages a network of designated coastal defences, which are approximately 26 kilometres in length. Those designated coastal defences are designed to protect against coastal flooding and are subject to annual condition surveys carried out by the Rivers Agency. There are no major improvement works planned for the designated coastal defences, but there are ongoing works — such as those in east Belfast to protect properties in the Sydenham area that are at risk from a tidal inundation — that will add to the length of designated defences. A major study has also commenced to determine how to increase the standard of protection against a tidal flood event in Belfast city centre. Again, that may add to our designated coastal defences.

My Department also has to maintain its road and railway network assets and protect them from the effects of coastal erosion and coastal flooding. Storm surges and high tides after Christmas 2013 caused extensive damage to such protective works along the Antrim and Down coast roads. In light of those severe winter storms and tidal surges, a detailed inspection of the road protective works was completed during 2014. In addition, an extensive survey of the coastline around the Ards peninsula, where it abuts the road, was carried out earlier this year. The information from those surveys is being assessed and will inform the prioritisation of necessary repair works.

In recent years, almost £2 million of capital investment has been spent on the installation of new protective works along the coast road in Antrim. That includes £800,000 of work completed during 2016 at seven sites. I am very conscious that prevention is better than cure, so my Department seeks to identify areas where damage may be caused by the ravages of the sea to target our resources. However, it is often difficult to predict where damage will occur.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I remind the Minister of the two-minute rule.

**Mr McMullan:** I thank the Minister for his detailed response. Minister, I am sure that you agree that giving the public confidence again is paramount. Have you any plans to increase visits to the coastal flood defences, especially those in my constituency of East Antrim?

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his interest in the issue, which is one that we have discussed at length at separate times. I also thank the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Minister, Michelle McIlveen, whom I will meet again next week to discuss the issue. Our officials from both Departments are working tirelessly behind the scenes to compile reports for us to take decisions on the best way forward.

Inspections of flood defences are risk-based. The higher the risk of failure, the more frequent the inspection. All but two of the coastal flood defences are very high consequence; ie substantial economic, social or environmental impact if the defence fails. Defences are given a detailed inspection annually or after each extreme weather event. The other two flood defences are medium-consequence and inspected every three years or after extreme weather events.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Would the Minister agree with me that the Executive need to adopt a new policy to replace the old, outdated and discredited Bateman formula of October 1967 and, further, that we would benefit from a lead Department coordinating coastal management issues?

**Mr Hazzard:** I do not think that there necessarily has to be a lead Department. We have two Departments in this Executive that have to deal with these issues. To date, I have met my colleague Michelle McIlveen twice on this issue. We are due to meet again next week, so that is three times in the first six months of this Executive. I think that demonstrates our determination to do something regarding coastal erosion. We cannot stop coastal erosion, but we have to manage its effects, and that is something that, I think, the Agriculture and Environment Minister, Michelle McIlveen, and I are keen to do.

**Mr McNulty:** In relation to inland flooding, can the Minister outline what works his Department has completed to improve flood defences in my constituency, particularly along the Callan, Clanrye and Blackwatertown rivers?

**Mr Hazzard:** This question is, obviously, about coastal erosion, so I applaud the Member for getting in a question about his own constituency. I do not have that detail to hand. If the Member wants to correspond with me, I am more than happy to reply.

**Ms Armstrong:** I thank the Minister very much for mentioning coastal erosion. Does the Minister intend to introduce legislation to create a framework for managing and reducing coastal erosion and flooding?

**Mr Hazzard:** This is one of the issues that Michelle McIlveen and I will be picking up on. Is there a requirement for legislation? Will it be of use, or will it be a hindrance? Will it be effective in what we want to do over the next number of years? As I say, I do not think we can approach this with wanting to eradicate or somehow end coastal erosion. We cannot but we have to manage it, so that is certainly something that we will be discussing next week.

**Mr Humphrey:** Minister, you may be aware that, last week, the Infrastructure Committee visited the Ards peninsula. Indeed, the Agriculture and Environment Minister joined us for that visit. We saw at first hand the coastal erosion that is taking place on various parts of the peninsula. I agree with what the Minister said about early intervention being better. It is also cheaper. Will the Minister commit, budgetary pressures taken into consideration, to working with groups like Eric Rainey's in Ards to deal with the issues that are affecting them and those communities where footpaths are being washed away, young children are being left exposed and old people with no lighting —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I think we have the question.

**Mr Humphrey:** — going to school or whatever in the mornings?

**Mr Hazzard:** Absolutely. The groups and individuals you met, for many a year, have been doing this work tirelessly themselves. They have a passion for it and the local communities, and, to a large extent, they have been ahead of the curve, so I am more than happy to meet those groups.

In my part of the world in south Down, there are activists who regularly plant willow and look to somehow copper-fasten the coast against this. Extensive works have taken place around Rostrevor and Warrenpoint to help this as well. As you say, it is local volunteers in communities who, for a very long time, have been involved in this. Yes, I would be more than happy to work with those people, because, as you say, prevention is certainly better than cure. It is also cheaper than the cure.

## Speed Limits

3. **Ms Seeley** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on reducing speed limits outside primary schools. (AQO 761/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** Schoolchildren and young people are amongst the most vulnerable groups using our roads. My Department delivers a wide range of road safety educational activities and engineering initiatives to improve their safety. Various protective engineering interventions have been developed over the years, leading to the production of Transport NI's policy and procedure guide, which traffic engineers can draw from when assessing safety at individual schools. These measures include provision of enhanced signing and road markings; central islands; lay-bys; and traffic-calming features such as road humps. The enhanced signing largely incorporates flashing lights programmed to operate during term times at school opening and closing times.

A more recent innovation has been the development of part-time 20 mph speed limits at schools, especially on roads where the national speed limit applies. The speed limit at these schools is reduced to 20 mph at school opening and closing times during term time.

I am particularly keen on this approach. However, the cost of providing these initial systems has been significant, with the most recent schemes costing, on average, £50,000 to install. I have therefore asked my officials to consider whether more cost-effective solutions are available that would allow us to increase the current level of provision and treat more schools, subject to available funding. I remain committed to continuing to work towards reducing

deaths and serious injuries on our roads, especially amongst vulnerable road users such as school children.

## 3.00 pm

**Ms Seeley:** I thank the Minister for his answer. I recently received a letter from the pupils at St Mary's Primary School, Derrymore, which is a rural primary school. Why is the Minister focusing on rural schools where the national speed limit applies?

**Mr Hazzard:** It is fair to say that we need to target limited resources initially on schools on roads that present the greatest risk to the safety of children. There is clear evidence that the higher the speed a vehicle travels at, the greater the severity of the injury to a pedestrian. Research shows that, for every one mile an hour reduction in speed, there is a 5% reduction in collisions. We also have to consider that rural schools are frequently located on unlit roads, which further adds to the hazards that schoolchildren are exposed to, especially in the dark winter days. Many schools in urban areas are already located in traffic-calming zones, where traffic speeds are already reduced to well below 20 mph due to the self-enforcing effects of speed-reducing features, such as road humps and crossing facilities.

**Mr Beggs:** I thank the Minister for his answer and, indeed, for piloting further 20 mph schemes outside schools. Can he give an indication on when the pilot scheme for the Model Primary School in Carrickfergus will be delivered? How soon thereafter will other schools, such as Eden Primary School on the busy A2 road or Toreagh Primary School, where there is a 40 mph limit outside the school door, be able to apply —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I think we have the question.

**Mr Beggs:** — and be considered for future schemes?

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his questions. As good as I have become at retaining information, I apologise that I do not have the specific information for those particular schools in the Member's constituency. Again, if he corresponds, I am more than happy to get back to him. Especially with regard to rural primary schools on roads where the national speed limit applies, I am actively seeking ways in which we can address their needs as soon as possible. There are approximately 150 of them, so it is something that I am very keen to do, and I want to move on it as soon as possible.

**Mr Dunne:** I thank the Minister for his answers today. I welcome the efforts in relation to the 20 mph speed limits. What is his assessment of the introduction of voluntary one-way systems, where applicable? Does he agree that it is important that we get inter-agency support to improve safety outside our schools?

**Mr Hazzard:** Yes, if we have any sort of solution that involves a partnership or inter-agency approach, it is to be welcomed, not just from a financial perspective but because, when you have more people working together with a single destination in mind, it is beneficial. I would probably give a guarded welcome to voluntary one-way systems. However, I urge caution because whatever we do — it goes back to the roundels etc that we use — it has to have a basis in law. It is important to ensure that if, God forbid, there is some sort of accident, we have not created

a grey area where we do not know who is right and who is wrong. We need to ensure that there is a sound legal basis, whichever way we go forward.

**Mr Lunn:** Would the Minister consider devolving speed limits to local councils, on the basis that it might allow them to reduce speed limits near facilities other than schools?

**Mr Hazzard:** No, it is not something that I have given any consideration to. I am not opposed to devolving powers to local councils; a range of powers between local councils and central government can be a good and healthy thing. When it comes to this, I am personally responsible for it, so I am more than happy to consider other facilities, such as leisure or community facilities, where it could be done. I was recently at a GAA club that is located on a rural road, much like a school and with similar numbers, and if we could come to similar arrangements, it would be fine. The Department can be just as sensitive to those demands as local councils.

**Ms Hanna:** I thank the Minister for his answers. I welcome the expansion of the safety zones, but the average safety zone is about 300 metres, and the mean average for a journey to school is around 1.8 km, so it will not make that much of an impact on active travel. Has the Minister given any consideration to extending the 20 mph zone in urban areas?

**Mr Hazzard:** I would love to extend the 20 mph zone to everywhere. I have to start somewhere, and, strategically, the areas of high priority are the, I think, 157 schools that currently sit on roads, especially rural roads, where the national speed limit applies. Again, the message has been key. Over the past week, there has been the tragic news of fatalities. We cannot engineer out some of the tragic news. More than 95% of road traffic collisions, some of which involve fatalities, are due to human error. We cannot end accidents and collisions simply by extending 20 mph zones. Doing that can have an impact surely, but we need to get the message out to drivers that they should pay attention to their speed, should forget about the phone and should never, ever drink and drive. It is important that we get that message out.

## Greenways: Strategic Plan

4. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, given his £150 million commitment to develop a greenway network across Northern Ireland, to outline the timescales for the delivery of his strategic plans for greenways. (AQO 762/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** I launched 'Exercise Explore Enjoy', my strategic plan for greenways on 9 November. The plan sets out my vision and a framework for a more strategic and ambitious programme to develop a greenway network across the whole of the North. Greenways can make a huge difference to the daily life of people by providing the opportunity to enjoy safe and easy access to fresh air and exercise; by encouraging more people to commute to work by foot or bicycle and more children to walk or cycle to school; and by providing an accessible leisure resource for local people and visitors alike.

The strategy outlines a longer-term plan for the development of a primary network of around 400 kilometres and a secondary network of around 600 kilometres. Page 23 of the strategy outlines a number of 10-year targets, including to have 75% of the primary

network and 25% of the larger secondary network delivered by 2026. I have also set a target of increasing the number of journeys on the greenways network and the national cycle network to 50 million per annum by 2026. On 9 November, I also announced grant funding to councils for 20 greenway feasibility studies. Those studies will lay the groundwork for the development of detailed plans and designs so that councils will be in a position to move as quickly as possible to start construction.

**Mr Douglas:** I thank the Minister for his answer thus far. I declare an interest as a trustee of the Connswater Community Greenway. I know that we invited the Minister out there recently. I congratulate him for having the vision for a greenway strategy for a number of years. To make short-term gains, will he look at the potential of supporting initiatives such as lighting for the Comber greenway or linking up the Comber greenway and the Connswater Community Greenway?

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his ongoing appetite and enthusiasm for the issue and for active travel in general. I am more than happy to meet the guys there. That has been a great success. I should put on record that I apologise that I was in the Chamber and could not get to the launch of C S Lewis Square. It is a fantastic venture, and I wish the guys involved in that all the best.

The strategic plan for greenways refers to guidance on engineering standards for greenways, and more-detailed information is included in the AECOM and Sustrans report, which is available on the Department's website. My Department will shortly undertake a public consultation on the Belfast bicycle network, which includes the Comber greenway. The consultation will seek views on a number of improvements to the greenway, including lighting part of the route. Following consultation on the network, consideration will be given to whether lighting is appropriate on parts of the route, taking into account environmental concerns and the needs of the adjacent properties and neighbours.

**Mrs Palmer:** Will the Minister give a commitment to meet the Lagan Navigation Trust to explore the unique opportunities that exist in linking the greenways network with Lagan valley regional park and the blueways network to allow for the greatest possible benefit to the network?

**Mr Hazzard:** Absolutely, yes. I declare an interest, in that I am a regular user of the Lagan towpath in particular. It has great heritage and also great potential for the future. You only have to go on to it at the weekend to see that it is absolutely buzzing. It is like a high street in the town. It is great to see. The long-term vision of the Lagan linking into the restoration of the Ulster canal and even further is a project that is worth good attention in the years ahead.

I only wish that I had the money to start work tomorrow. As I say, it would be a fantastic project. Yes, I am more than happy to do so.

**Ms Mallon:** Given the call by the CEO of the Titanic Quarter for another major attraction in Northern Ireland, what is the Minister's assessment of whether greenways could be that attraction?

**Mr Hazzard:** I was delighted and privileged to launch the greenway plan just outside Dundrum on the old Belfast and County Down Railway line, which used to bring hundreds, if not thousands, of tourists from Belfast to north and

south Down, including to Newcastle, my part of the world. There is no reason why we cannot extend out for active travel and cycling. When you talk to anyone involved in the tourism industry, they tell you that they want active tourism or activities that take people out of the city to destinations such as Newcastle. This can definitely be part of that. Some of the schemes for the glens and another one to link Carlingford lough and Lough Neagh are very exciting. There are some great schemes for us to be excited about over the next five to 10 years.

**Ms Bradshaw:** What discussions have you had with the council to progress the proposed greenway in Carryduff? As you know, the feasibility study is under way, and it would be great to get that greenway up the priority list.

**Mr Hazzard:** I have not had any specific discussions with Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council. The scheme first came on to my horizon when the Finance Minister, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, talked about it. As someone who knows the lay of the land in that part of the world, I think that it would be a fantastic asset. It could also play a vital role in alleviating congestion from the city, considering the success of the Cairnshill park-and-ride facility. A greenway there from Carryduff through Belvoir forest would be a great asset. I encourage the council to do all that it can during the detailed design. Like other schemes that I have mentioned, it could be a huge asset.

### Ballygroobey Roundabout: Safety Barriers

5. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline his plans to install safety barriers at the Randalstown Road exit of the Ballygroobey roundabout. (AQO 763/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department's Transport NI is aware of a number of collisions in the vicinity of the Ballygrooby roundabout, including loss-of-control incidents for vehicles exiting the roundabout onto the A6 Castle Road travelling towards Antrim. Following an investigation of the causes, a scheme is being developed to provide high-friction surfacing and an amended white-lining layout on the exit towards Antrim from the Ballygrooby roundabout to address loss-of-control incidents. It is anticipated that that work will be completed in early 2017.

As part of the investigation into collisions at the roundabout, an assessment was carried out for the provision of additional vehicle-restraint systems on the exit from the roundabout towards Antrim. The location, however, did not meet the criteria for a scheme proposal to be taken forward. There are therefore no plans to provide additional vehicle-restraint systems at the roundabout at this time. It should be borne in mind that vehicle-restraint systems are used to protect the occupants of a vehicle from striking an off-road hazard after loss of control of the vehicle. The provision of high-friction surfacing is aimed at preventing loss of control of the vehicle in the first place.

**Mr Clarke:** I thank the Minister for his answer. The Minister will appreciate that I travel the road daily. All the accidents happen on the Randalstown Road section where there are no safety restraints. Those that there are were placed on a section of the road where there are no hazards. Would the Minister, through his office, review the original decision to put in the vehicle-restraint systems, with a view, if they are in the wrong place, to putting in a more adequate mechanism than high-friction surfacing in the area where most of the accidents happen?

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I ask the Minister to give a speedy answer.

**Mr Hazzard:** The logic applied to previous questions was that prevention is better than cure. In this instance, we have engineered solutions that have the highest impact. I have no problem, when the works are complete in the next couple of months, in corresponding again with the Member and looking at this again if he feels that there is still a problem.

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

### Infrastructure Projects: Finance

T1. **Mr Aiken** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline any discussions he has had with the Minister of Finance about working with councils on infrastructure projects. (AQT 546/16-21)

#### 3.15 pm

**Mr Hazzard:** Yes. Formally and informally, as I have mentioned in previous answers, I have had discussions with the Finance Minister quite regularly since coming into post, most particularly regarding finance. As I have mentioned, there are somewhere in the region of £5 billion of projects sitting in my Department at different stages. Some of them are simply concepts on a piece of paper but some of them may be nearing the end — we all know well. I will get approximately £1.5 billion over the next few years to develop infrastructure capital projects. You can see that there is a massive gap between what we could do and what we can do. I have certainly put on record from the start that I want to look at equipping myself with a toolbox of funding arrangements and ways to finance these. I am aware that a number of councils are very keen. At the NILGA conference, I took the opportunity to talk about greater partnership and about delivering some of these projects. Certainly, I have got from the business community a sense of a fresh approach; they want to do more also. I do not want to say no to everything. For me, everything is on the table. Let us consider it, but I caveat that by saying that it has to work in the best interests of the public purse in the long term.

**Mr Aiken:** I thank the Minister. You know what is going to come next, do you not? Can the Minister support the use of the infrastructure fund in joint-venture partnerships between the Northern Ireland Executive, councils and private enterprise for the much-needed Ballyclare bypass relief road and the dual carriageway to the airport? Please? [Laughter.]

**Mr Hazzard:** Again, there are a number of these projects across the place. I know that Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council is looking for one. In my area of Downpatrick, there is a need to address this type of project — projects where, up to now, finances from central government have dictated, "Look, we just simply do not have the money. Sorry, folks. Sin é. It is on the shelf, and that is it." I think that we should certainly look at whether there are other ways out there. Are there tools at our disposal here that we are not using? So I say to the Member that I am more than happy to look at it. If he wants to correspond with me, put some of these ideas down and have a discussion, I am more than happy to do that.

## A5: Irish Government Money

T2. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he believes that the Irish Government should reinstate their commitment of £400 million to help construct the A5. (AQT 547/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** In short, absolutely yes. I think now is probably a timely period. Once the £400 million was promised, and then the crash occurred and the Dublin Government seem to have got nervous and put £75 million back on the table. As we approach a mid-term review of national infrastructure investment in the South, it is timely for the Dublin Government to consider putting all of the £400 million back on the table. I think that a lot of people see the A5 simply as a project for the North and the Northern Executive. That is simply not the case. This is a key infrastructure project that would open up the entire north-west region, so I think there is a responsibility on us in Belfast and on the Dublin Government to do all that we can.

I was recently in Carrickmacross speaking to local people who said that their town would be dead if it were not so close to the major infrastructure linking Belfast and Dublin. I have spoken to the chief executives of councils along the proposed route of the A5 — Donegal, Cavan, Fermanagh and even into Mid Ulster — and they are crying out for this piece of investment. I am determined, obviously, to work with partners in Dublin to deliver. It was not perhaps as short as saying absolutely yes, but yes, they should.

**Mr Sheehan:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I ask the Minister briefly whether he has any plans to meet his Southern counterparts on this issue in the near future.

**Mr Hazzard:** I recently took the opportunity at a North/South sectoral meeting to speak with Michael Ring TD, the Minister of State for Regional Economic Development. I think that Fine Gael is certainly sensitive, coming out of the last election, that perhaps it was rejected in western and more regional parts over the lack of development in regional areas. So I think that Michael Ring has a sense that he wants to do something. He is very keen to work on projects such as this, to bring regional balance to investment. Also, next month — actually, in a couple of weeks — I have a meeting with Shane Ross, the Minister for Transport, to discuss a number of transport issues. Top of the agenda, of course, will be the A5.

## Parking Bays: Bangor

T3. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he would consider a review of the loading bays that have been put in place in Bangor town centre by Transport NI, leading to mass confusion among shoppers and residents who are trying to park. (AQT 548/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** Again, I have nothing instinctively against reviewing something like that. If the Member wants to correspond with me to shed some light on what he believes to be the problem, I would be more than happy.

**Mr Easton:** I thank the Minister for his answers so far. A lot of businesses have approached me. The loading bays are causing a lack of car-parking facilities in Bangor town centre and are affecting trade. Will the Minister maybe grant me a meeting to discuss this with some of the traders?

**Mr Hazzard:** Yes. The Member will appreciate that the diary is hectic, but, looking into the future and the new year, I would be happy to sit down and take five minutes to discuss it.

## A6: Update

T4. **Mr Middleton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the A6 upgrade following the recent court decision and to state whether work on any section of the A6 will be able to begin in the meantime. (AQT 549/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** Not a problem. As I said last week, while I was disappointed, of course, that Justice Maguire came to the decision he did, I was not overly shocked or surprised, given that the bar is quite low when you are applying for leave to challenge that. I was pleased that he rejected five of the six grounds of the appeal. My Department will very speedily get our papers into the courts. I even welcome the remarks from Justice Maguire when he recognised the strategic importance of that piece of investment and that we need to have a speedy resolution to it. I am absolutely confident that, when it comes to the substantial hearing in the new year, the Department will be successful.

On the back of the decision, I took the opportunity to discuss with officials the technical possibilities of moving forward with the Moneynick section, which the Member, as a commuter, will know all too well. That is something we are actively now looking at. Preliminary work is ongoing on the stretch. That work will continue on that stretch at the very least. If we can progress with works within the legal contracts that have been agreed, we absolutely will.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I call Mr Middleton for a supplementary question.

**Mr Middleton:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker —  
[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Order. I ask those Members with penetrating whispers to be a little quieter.

**Mr Middleton:** Thank you, and I thank the Minister for his response. Will he give a commitment that whatever finance has been allocated to the A6 will be secure and will not be spent elsewhere, as other Members suggested?

**Mr Hazzard:** Absolutely. The upgrade of the A6 is an Executive flagship project so, in short, the money is going nowhere else.

## Translink: Wages

T5. **Mr Carroll** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he plans to intervene to ensure that Translink becomes a fully accredited living wage employer, given that Translink management has betrayed the pledge that it made to do just that, with the result that it has refused to offer minimum wage workers anything more than the bare statutory annual increase, which will see the lowest paid workers lose out, with a 2% increase given to all other members of staff. (AQT 550/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** I engage regularly with Translink officials. I also had the opportunity to meet them. We had a very productive meeting with union members from Translink lately. The Member has raised an important issue, and the next time I meet Translink officials, I will raise it.

**Mr Carroll:** I thank the Minister for his reply. Will he agree to meet unions and staff affected by this particular proposal to hear their concerns about how low pay affects them and their families?

**Mr Hazzard:** Yes. I took the opportunity recently when meeting the unions to open up a continual and regular engagement with them. I sensed a frustration on their behalf that they maybe did not have that in recent years. I am certainly keen to open that up. I think it could be productive for my Department to do so.

### York Street Interchange/A5/A6

T6. **Dr Farry** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, while recognising that the A5 and A6 are absolute priorities, to comment on figures he provided that show that the peak number of movements at the York Street interchange is 111,000 cars, whereas the A5 and A6 peak at 20,000 and 26,000, and to state whether he believes that the York Street interchange is utterly essential not only to the economy of Belfast but to all of Northern Ireland. (AQT 551/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** There are other statistics we could bring out. I mentioned that already. Had you asked for the fatality statistics for York Street interchange and compared them with the fatality statistics for the A5 and the A6 — you just did that with something else — you would have an entirely different set of statistics. I may be wrong, but I am not aware of any fatalities at the York Street interchange. I may be wrong about that. I am aware of nearly 50 fatalities on the A5 in the last decade. As I said, for me, strategically, there are a number of criteria that we can base this on. Certainly, one of the most important, for someone in my position, is to make our roads as safe as possible.

**Dr Farry:** I accept, of course, that good road design is important in road safety, as is enforcement of the traffic legislation by the police, but will the Minister recognise that the benefit-to-cost ratio for the York Street interchange is 2:33? I accept that the figure for the A6 at Randalstown is of a similar nature. Those two are the most beneficial to our economy. If the Minister is being rational in his approach to allocating funds in order to maximise the benefit to the economy, does he recognise that those two projects are top of the pile?

**Mr Hazzard:** I would not have stood in the House recently and made the decision to proceed with the York Street interchange if I did not accept the arguments that it is a strategic piece of infrastructure that not just the city of Belfast but the economy as a whole requires. I absolutely accept that, but, as I also pointed out, right now, I do not have the financial ability at my disposal to build everything that we want, so I need to prioritise. When looking at the economy — we need to get to this as well — we continue to talk in the House and on the public airwaves about moving cars. We need to talk about moving people. Moving people in and out of Belfast city is good for business; moving cars is not. What are we to do after York Street? Are we to bulldoze half of Great Victoria Street because we need two extra lanes in Great Victoria Street? Are we to demolish Belfast City Hall because we need a big roundabout at Belfast City Hall? We need to talk about moving people, not cars, in and out of Belfast.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Good luck with that one.

**Mr Dickson:** Minister, you will be relieved to know that we probably have flogged the York Street interchange to death for today, but, believe you me, we will be coming back to it.

### Rural Roads: Landslides

T7. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure what action he will take to ensure that, this winter, the coast road in East Antrim will remain open, given that rural roads, particularly the coast road in East Antrim, can be, from time to time, closed due to landslides. (AQT 552/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** As outlined, I am meeting the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Minister, Michelle McIlveen, next week to take forward a number of proposals for dealing with coastal erosion. It is an issue that we have to deal with and manage. We cannot eradicate it, so we need to work with it. I come from a rural background and a rural constituency. When I came into post, I made clear that we needed to do more in rural areas. It may be a drop in the ocean — excuse the pun — but the £10 million that I put towards investment in rural roads has gone down well in rural areas and is providing a good service. It is only a drop in the ocean. We require hundreds of millions of pounds more for structural maintenance. Due to the economic climate over the last number of years, there is somewhere in the region of a £1 billion backlog in structural maintenance. I will not solve that today or tomorrow. We need a longer-term strategic view on how to do that. It will be a very difficult thing to do in the economic climate in which we find ourselves.

**Mr Dickson:** The Minister referred to a strategic view, and it is important that there is a strategy for this road, not only for the tourists who use it and are regularly stopped because of landslips on to the road but, in particular, for the residents for whom it is the only way to get to work or school.

**Mr Hazzard:** Absolutely. I accept that. I know that £2 million has been spent on dealing with coastal erosion in that part of the world. I know that the Committee visited the Ards peninsula just recently. When you travel down the County Down coast to Warrenpoint and Rostrevor, you find similar problems that the Departments are starting to have to grapple with, and they will have to continue to grapple with them, perhaps at an accelerating rate, over the next number of years. That is why Michelle McIlveen and I have brought a bit of focus to this issue, and the two Departments will have to work together and set out a number of targets that we want to meet over the next number of years.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I call Mr Phillip Logan for a quick question. There may not be time for a supplementary.

### Minor Works: Northern Fund

T8. **Mr Logan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, given that he will be aware that the Member wrote to him recently about Transport NI's northern fund for minor works, whether he will commit to reviewing that fund, particularly in the light of the fact that over 100 projects on the list will, with the fund that is available, take up to 10 years to complete. (AQT 553/16-21)

3.30 pm

**Mr Hazzard:** I do not mean to be facetious, but everybody in the Chamber could say exactly the same thing about their part of the world. That is the situation that we find ourselves in. As I mentioned, we have a structural maintenance backlog in the region of £1 billion. We know the economic forecast that is coming, especially from the Chancellor's statement last week, and that will not change over the next number of years — if anything, it may get sharper. We need to take a longer strategic view. I know that projects in a number of areas deal with road safety, so we need to look at what and how we prioritise. While in post, I will certainly continue to do that.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Time is up. I ask the House to take its ease while we make changes to the top Table.

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

## Executive Committee Business

### Policing and Crime Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

*Debate resumed on motion:*

*That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of a number of provisions within the Policing and Crime Bill, by amendment at Lords Committee and Lords Report stage, in so far as they related to UK maritime enforcement powers; UK cross-jurisdictional arrest powers; anonymity for victims of forced marriage and pardons for convictions of certain abolished offences. — [Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice).]*

**Mr Allister:** I beg to move the following amendment:

*Leave out all after the second "powers;" and insert*

*"and anonymity for victims of forced marriage."*

In moving the amendment, as is clear from it, I am wholly supportive of the first three measures in the legislative consent motion but totally opposed to the fourth component. In essence, in addressing the issue, my opposition probably falls under three interrelated headings. First, there is the process deployed to get us to the point that we are at. Secondly, there is the principle involved in what we have been asked to do. Thirdly, there is the active discrimination involved in what we are being asked to do. As I work my way through those, I begin with the process.

The House needs to come to terms with the novelty of what we are doing today. Never in the history of this jurisdiction has legislation been used to give retrospective pardons. I say that on the strength of an answer from the Minister when I asked her to detail on how many occasions a pardon in legislation in Northern Ireland had been provided for in respect of obsolete criminal offences. The answer was very clear:

*"I am not aware of any statutory provision, in modern times, for a pardon for obsolete criminal offences."*

What we are doing today, in granting a pardon for obsolete criminal offences, is without precedent, making it all the more remarkable that we have arrived at this rushed position without any consultation.

The House and the Executive like to pretend that they are big on consultation and like to consider what public opinion and stakeholders have to say on an issue; indeed, if you go to the NI Direct website, you will read many platitudes about public consultation. It says:

*"It is an important part of the policy-making process."*

It goes on to say:

*"running a consultation is not simply about more open government. It is about making policies more effective by listening and taking onboard the views of the public and interested groups."*

Yet, here we are today with a totally novel proposition to grant pardons for obsolete criminal offences and there has not been one iota of consultation on the matter. Then we

compound that by saying, “In fact, we are so unconcerned about the issue, we will pass over the legislative function to Westminster”. We are so disinterested, we are not even going to consider it ourselves.

A legislative consent motion is and always should be a serious matter. It is the House saying to all and sundry, “We are passing up our opportunity to legislate about something and gifting it to Westminster”. When you do that without even consulting on the issue, it is all the more stark. When you do it in respect of an anticipated clause in a Bill that was not even in the Bill when it was published, it gets even more ridiculous.

The process by which we got here — the rush to get here — is very informative. We have a Standing Order — Standing Order 42A — that says that there is a stipulated, prescribed process for passing and getting to the point of passing a legislative consent motion. It requires the laying of a legislative consent memorandum, and it requires that to be laid within 10 days of the clause it wants to activate becoming part of the Bill. In this case, it seems that the relevant clause only became part of the Bill on 9 November in the House of Lords, yet the legislative consent memorandum was issued on 7 November. Such was the haste and the rush, we could not even wait for our own processes on this issue. There are many reasons in terms of the process —

**Mr Agnew:** I thank the Member for giving way. He outlines a number of procedural reasons for him not to be happy with this proposal. If all manner of consultation had happened and all checks and balances had been gone through, would the Member support it?

**Mr Allister:** No, the Member would not. I make no secret of that, but I am legitimately entitled to object to the farce that the process has turned into. I would have liked a consultation. I would like to have heard what Mr Storey’s Caleb Foundation said about the proposal. I would like to have heard what various Churches that many Members belong to and that still preach that homosexuality is a sin thought of the proposal. The elders of some of those Churches sit in the House. Certainly, I would like to have known what, in consultation, they thought of validating homosexuality by virtue of pardons. We are not to be given that opportunity — maybe that is why — because this is something that the powers that be in the House want to rush through.

This proposal did not even come to the Executive. It was activated by the First Minister and deputy First Minister signing it off under emergency procedures, and then the Executive were told that it had been done. There was not even consultation within the Executive about the proposal; indeed, there was not even consultation in the DUP about the proposal. The members were simply told, “This is it. Suck it up”. Not only was there an absence of consultation with the public and with stakeholders; according to some press, the only stakeholder the Minister met on the issue was the LGBT community. No one else had the opportunity to bend her ear about the issue. I make fundamental objection to her coming to the House today with a proposition that has been rushed and that she is attempting to push through the House without due process, never mind an equality impact assessment or anything else. The process is, I suggest, flawed.

What about the principle? What about the notion that we as legislators in 2016 can rewrite the statute book retrospectively and decide not what the law was in the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s or 1970s but what it should have been? My goodness, we as a House have difficulty enough legislating for 2016. The arrogance of it — we are going to now decree what the law should have been 20, 30, 40 or 50 years ago. The principle is wrong. It is not for the House — it has never done it in the past, and there is good reason for that — to rewrite history. If something was a criminal offence, it was a criminal offence. For the House to think that it should impose its moral standards or immoral standards retrospectively is plain wrong.

Of course, for some, it is a matter of rewriting their party history. For the DUP, it is a matter of rewriting the party history on Save Ulster from Sodomy. What we are involved in here today has all the appearance of some contrived, collective act of contrition whereby, in the words of the Minister, we will:

*“right the wrongs of the past.”*

It is certainly a matter of what is right and what is wrong, but it is not for the Assembly to rewrite the statute book. That is the effect of this pardon: to validate as non-criminal that which was criminal. To wish, pretend, sweep it away —

**Ms Hanna:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Allister:** I will.

**Ms Hanna:** Like many others, I think, I see this as righting a wrong of the past. Does the Member think that those acts should still be illegal?

**Mr Allister:** That is not the issue. The issue is whether the House in 2016, in its arrogance, thinks that it can take it upon itself to rewrite the law of 40 years ago. It cannot, and it should not. The law was the law. If those who chose to break the law, knowing what the law was, paid a penalty, that was the law taking its course, whether they were homosexual or heterosexual. I will say more about that in a moment.

It is not for the House to impose its standards retrospectively, because the inescapable effect of pardoning posthumously and creating a path to pardon for those still alive is to validate that which was a crime and to say that it should never have been a crime. That is what the Minister says, but is it what everyone who will allow this through today says? Yes, on this side of the House, that is probably so, but what about those who were going to save Ulster from sodomy?

Are they now validating sodomy? Are they now saying, “Let us rewrite that” or “Let us rub that out”? That is what you are doing the moment that you assent, either by acquiescence or active voting, to a pardon for this obsolete criminal offence. You can twist, turn or try to run away from it, but that is the reality.

**3.45 pm**

Indeed, it has been put very specifically by the Minister in answer to another question for written answer that I tabled to her. She said — she has said it again today — that it is about addressing:

*“historical wrongs suffered by gay and bisexual men who were criminalised over a long period for*

*something that society regards today as normal sexual activity.”*

Listen well: all who will endorse this pardon, by their silence or their vote, is accepting that homosexuality is a “normal sexual activity”. Many of their Churches teach that homosexuality is still a sin and that buggery is still wrong. That is the teaching that many of them have. This is the challenge to the House and to everyone as an individual with his or her own conscience. Are they prepared, by their inaction or action today, to embrace and endorse the validation of homosexuality as “normal sexual activity”? There is no ducking and there is no diving: that is the question. That is particularly the question for those who are ruling elders in certain Churches that still take that stand. Some will have sat in the pews yesterday of Churches that still teach that homosexuality is a sin. Will they sit on their hands today and validate the view that it is not, as some of them hide in their room, running away from the debate —

**Ms Bradshaw:** Will you take an intervention?

**Mr Allister:** In a moment. They are hiding in their room because they do not want to be faced with that. There will come a day — it will not be here — when they will account for all that they have said and done. I will give way.

**Ms Bradshaw:** Given everything that you have said, do you believe that the chemical castration of the war hero Alan Turing was a suitable punishment after his service to this country?

**Mr Allister:** No, I do not think that chemical castration was ever a suitable punishment, but that does not mean that the law should not have been as it was in terms of what was legal and what was illegal. Just as we cannot undo that, it is not for us, 50 or 60 years later, to proclaim sanctimoniously, from these Benches or elsewhere, that that is how the law should have been. Fellow Members, it is not for us to do that. The law was as it was, and it is not our responsibility. If it was wrong, it was the responsibility of those who made that law, not this House’s.

What this is clearly all about is a fashionable pandering to a particular interest. It is now so fashionable to jump on board the LGBT bandwagon that you simply abandon all principles and leave your beliefs outside the door. I remember a debate not so long ago when Members on the DUP Benches told us how they could not and would not leave their beliefs outside the door. That is what they are going to do today, because they are not prepared to stand against the fashionable pandering to an interest.

That brings me to my third point. That fashionable pandering reeks of active discrimination, because it is only for homosexual crimes that we are embracing the idea of pardons. There are many heterosexuals who still, to this day, carry the stain, if you want, of being convicted of a criminal offence that is no longer a criminal offence, but no one is proffering pardons to them. As an afterthought, the Minister today said, “Oh, yes. We could look at that”. Let me make my position clear: I do not think that it is right to give pardons retrospectively for homosexuals or heterosexuals. The law was the law whatever it was, and if you chose to break the law, you chose to break the law, so I do not believe in rewriting history, but the discrimination involved here is self-evident.

In my time professionally I appeared for a number of 17- or 18-year-old men who maybe had consensual sexual relations with a 16-year-old girl. They committed the crime of unlawful carnal knowledge, and many were prosecuted for it. Today, having sexual relations with a 16-year-old girl is not a crime because the age of consent is now 16, but for decades in this Province it was 17. So, why is no one up on their indignant high horse saying, “What a shame. What a stain on our collective history that we must perform this act of collective contrition and give pardons to all the young men convicted of unlawful carnal knowledge when, today, it would not be a crime”. Is that not the hypocrisy of this situation? We are prepared to embrace the active discrimination that is wrapped up in this proposal; we only show interest in, concern for and act for the homosexual community, but, in our rush to get this through, we turn our backs and do nothing for the heterosexual community.

There are parties in this House — the SDLP is one of them — that loudly proclaim their undying devotion to equality. Where is the equality here? It is absent. Yet, today, the SDLP will enthusiastically engage in this act of societal redemption.

**Mr Agnew:** I thank the Member for giving way. Will he not accept that there is a qualitative difference between the two points that he makes? A homosexual man was attracted solely to homosexual men and, therefore, was being outlawed effectively from having sex in a way that was natural to him, whereas, the example that you gave where the person had sex with a 16-year-old, their sexual attraction was not solely to 16-year-olds. They were not discriminated against by the state.

**Mr Allister:** They were discriminated against by the fact that the criminal law said that the act that they were engaging in was unlawful; that is the common denominator. That which the criminal law decreed as unlawful was unlawful in respect of heterosexual and homosexual offences. That is the common denominator.

What this really points up is the enthusiasm of this House to turn its back on that gross inequality. I make it plain again that I am not urging in that this House go through our statute book and offer pardons for every now obsolete offence. My goodness, where would you stop? It used to be an offence to be an incorrigible vagrant. An incorrigible rogue was the criminal offence. Some might think that it is a good job that it is not an offence now, but it used to be a criminal offence. Across the water, in recent years, they took 300 old criminal offences off the statute book, but they did not offer pardons.

They did not take it arrogantly upon themselves to rewrite the law. They said, “Those offences serve no purpose. Let’s remove them”. Our own Criminal Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1968 took away in this old House many old criminal offences but no one ever said that you must pardon those because they really never should have been offences. Why the difference today? Why are we so overrun and overwhelmed by this fashionable fad that we have to do something for the single community of LGBT? The attitude seems to be that we have to cleanse ourselves, but, for everyone else: tough. That is how the law was. You chose to break it: tough. That is how it should be for everyone, and this is a totally unnecessary and fruitless exercise that only exposes the inequality that this House is prepared to embrace as well as some embracing that which in their

past they said was wrong but apparently today is going to be right.

**Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice):** The Minister of Justice has already outlined the purpose of the legislative consent motion, so I do not intend to rehearse everything that has already been said. However, I do want to outline the Committee's consideration of the policy areas covered by the motion. Whilst the Justice Committee is of the view that, where possible, legislative change should be taken through the Assembly, on this occasion it agreed that a legislative consent motion would be the most appropriate course of action.

First, I want to set out the background to the Committee's consideration of all the proposals submitted to it for possible inclusion in the Policing and Crime Bill. At its meeting on 16 June 2016, the Committee considered departmental written briefing papers on three proposed LCMs for the Policing and Crime Bill. The LCMs covered maritime enforcement powers, police powers across UK jurisdictions and biometric retention in relation to foreign convictions. At the request of the Committee, departmental officials attended the meeting on 15 September to give evidence on the proposals. On the same day, the Committee also considered a written departmental briefing on a fourth proposed legislative consent motion on lifelong anonymity of victims of forced marriage.

At the meeting on 22 September, the Committee agreed that it was content with the proposals to extend the provisions for lifelong anonymity of victims of forced marriage and police arrest powers across UK jurisdictions to Northern Ireland. It also agreed that it was content with the proposal to extend the biometric retention provisions in relation to foreign convictions in the Policing and Crime Bill to Northern Ireland by way of an LCM. Sinn Féin members of the Committee, however, indicated that they were opposed to this proposed legislative consent motion. At the meeting on 6 October, the Committee reached agreement on the LCM on maritime enforcement powers. The Committee agreed that it was content with the proposed legislative consent motion on maritime enforcement powers subject to a number of conditions. The reasons for the Committee's conditional agreement will become clear when I come to talk specifically about the maritime enforcement provisions.

On 27 October, the Department of Justice laid a legislative consent memorandum for the Policing and Crime Bill which included a consolidated draft motion covering three out of the four previously considered policy areas: maritime enforcement powers, not including hot pursuit powers I might add; UK cross-jurisdictional arrest powers; and anonymity for victims of forced marriage. Therefore, we had one LCM covering three out of the four policy areas considered — not four as had been originally intended — and one of those areas had changed considerably since it was last considered by the Committee. The Committee learnt later that the Department had circulated a draft paper on the proposals for consideration by the Executive at their meeting on 27 October and, following feedback on the draft, the final paper tabled and ultimately approved did not include the provisions relating to biometric retention in relation to foreign convictions.

#### 4.00 pm

On 7 November, the Department of Justice laid a further legislative consent memorandum for the Policing and Crime Bill that superseded the memorandum laid on the 27 October. The further legislative consent memorandum covered the three areas in the 27 October memorandum and an additional policy area, that is, pardons for convictions of certain abolished offences.

Now that I have outlined how we got to this point, I will cover each provision separately. I will deal with the provisions relating to UK maritime enforcement powers last, as the Committee spent a considerable amount of time on that area and not without difficulty or frustration.

On the UK cross-jurisdictional arrest powers, the Home Office is proposing an amendment to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to fill a long-term gap that prevents an officer in their own jurisdiction arresting a person without warrant on suspicion of having committed an offence in another UK jurisdiction.

The Policing and Crime Bill will allow police officers in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to arrest a person in their own jurisdiction for a serious offence committed in another. Consequential changes will also be made to the existing powers of entry and search but only for offences that are indictable, and it is noted that consequential amendments to current PACE codes of practice will also be required. At its meeting on 22 September 2016, the Committee for Justice agreed that it was content with the proposal to extend the police powers across UK jurisdictions — these are provisions in the Policing and Crime Bill — to Northern Ireland by way of the LCM.

The Committee was fully supportive of the provision on anonymity for victims of forced marriage being extended to Northern Ireland. At present, a victim of forced marriage in Northern Ireland may be granted anonymity only at the discretion of the court, so, in reality, anonymity is not automatic. The proposed amendment to the Policing and Crime Bill would provide automatic lifelong anonymity to victims of forced marriage and prohibit publication or broadcast of any information likely to result in the victim being identified, whether that is in traditional print, broadcast or social media. The prohibition can be reversed only if the victim applies to the court to remove it. Anyone found guilty of breaching it will be subject to a fine not exceeding level 5, which is £5,000 on summary conviction.

The Committee agrees that there is significant value in making provision for the anonymity of victims of forced marriage in Northern Ireland at this time. The Committee understands it is a very rare crime in Northern Ireland, but it concurs with the Department's view that it is important that victims here are afforded the same level of protection as those in England and Wales. At its meeting on 15 September, the Committee agreed to seek clarification on whether anonymity for a UK citizen who is a victim of forced marriage extends to other jurisdictions outside the UK. The Department responded, clarifying that the offence of breaching a prohibition on publication of the identity of a victim of forced marriage will apply on a UK-wide basis but does not extend beyond the UK. In relation to social media, any domestic service providers established in England and Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland who

publish a prohibited matter in a European Economic Area state, other than the UK, may be liable to prosecution.

At its meeting on 22 September, the Committee for Justice considered all the information available to it and agreed it was content with the proposal to extend the provision for lifelong anonymity of victims of forced marriage to Northern Ireland by way of the legislative consent motion.

At the meeting on 10 November, the Committee for Justice considered for the first time new provisions that were in the legislative consent memorandum laid in the Assembly on 7 November to provide for pardons for convictions relating to now-abolished homosexual offences. Departmental officials attended the meeting to update members on the revised legislative consent memorandum laid on 7 November and the new provisions. Officials advised the Committee that on 7 November the Minister received through urgent procedure Executive agreement to seek agreement from the Assembly to extend the provisions to Northern Ireland.

Late amendments to the Policing and Crime Bill tabled at Lords Committee Stage would provide in England and Wales statutory pardons for persons with convictions, including military convictions under service law, for abolished homosexual offences involving consensual activity with persons over the current age of consent. Those amendments build on existing provision in England and Wales in the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, which introduced a disregard scheme for such offences.

Subsequent amendments tabled by Lord Lexden would make provision for Northern Ireland by introducing the disregard powers in the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, along with the new provisions that will provide statutory pardons for abolished homosexual offences. Officials informed the Committee that inclusion of these provisions in the legislative consent memorandum would allow the UK Parliament to include Lord Lexden's amendments and thereby provide the same arrangements in Northern Ireland as are proposed for England and Wales in relation to the pardoning of abolished homosexual offences.

During discussions, Mr Roy Beggs expressed reservations about the pardoning of abolished homosexual offences that were illegal in the context of the age of consent at that time. Ms Clare Bailey asked whether the pardon would be accompanied by an apology from Westminster or the Executive Office. In response, departmental officials advised that an apology did not form part of the provisions being put forward in the House of Lords.

While the Committee agreed at its meeting on 10 November that it was content with the proposal to extend the provision for pardons for convictions for abolished homosexual offences to Northern Ireland, it also agreed to ask the Minister of Justice whether she is minded to undertake a review to identify the scale of other anomalies specific to Northern Ireland that may need to be addressed in relation to heterosexual offences. The response received from the Minister was that she has asked officials to consider this matter, and her comments today have expanded on that. I thank the Minister for giving the House that clarification. It was a very, very clear statement, so thank you very much, Minister, for that.

I turn to the provisions on maritime enforcement laws and powers. In April of this year, the Home Office wrote to the Department seeking legislative consent for law

enforcement officers in England and Wales to exercise maritime enforcement powers in Northern Ireland waters in hot pursuit situations. Following that, the Scottish Government requested that law enforcement officers in Scotland be provided with powers corresponding to those conferred on members of police forces in England and Wales and on certain other law enforcement officers. They included powers of hot pursuit from Scottish waters into Northern Ireland territorial waters, which also required the legislative consent of the Assembly. The Department advised the Committee that, given the Scottish Government's request for powers corresponding to those conferred on members of police forces in England and Wales, officials consulted the PSNI on whether a case could be made for equivalent maritime enforcement powers in the Bill to be extended to Northern Ireland. In response, according to the Department, the PSNI advised that it had limited maritime capabilities and that there was no pressing need for additional powers to be made available to its officers at present. Based on the PSNI's view, the Department indicated that it was minded not to extend the maritime powers to Northern Ireland. However, officials highlighted that a legislative consent motion would still be required to provide legislative consent for law enforcement officers in England, Wales and Scotland to exercise their powers in Northern Ireland waters, but only in hot pursuit situations.

The officials also advised the Committee that discussions were ongoing between the Department and the Home Office on the accountability arrangements for the hot pursuit powers in the Bill, which, at the time of introduction, were contrary to that which the previous Assembly provided legislative consent for in relation to the hot pursuit provisions in the Modern Slavery Act. The Modern Slavery Act memorandum provided consent for the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland to investigate any complaints made against officers from police forces in England and Wales in the exercise of hot pursuit powers in Northern Ireland waters. However, the Bill contained a clause that would have the effect of extending the jurisdiction of the Independent Police Complaints Commission in England and Wales to the hot pursuit powers in the Modern Slavery Act and the Bill.

Following the oral evidence session with departmental officials on 15 September, the Committee agreed to request information from the Minister of Justice on accountability arrangements in relation to the Police Ombudsman. The Minister confirmed that her Department had agreed an approach with the Home Office that makes provision for local accountability where hot pursuit maritime powers are exercised in Northern Ireland waters, to ensure that officers are properly held to account, and that the Police Ombudsman was content with the oversight arrangements.

The Committee also wrote to the Chief Constable asking why the PSNI held the view that maritime enforcement powers in relation to hot pursuit should not be extended to Northern Ireland. In response, Assistant Chief Constable Todd stated that while, at present, it was unlikely that the PSNI would have occasion to use hot pursuit powers in Northern Ireland waters, it was not its intent to in some way create a safe haven. The PSNI was of the view that, to ensure consistency across UK waters, it would be in the national interest to extend the proposed enforcement

powers to Northern Ireland by way of a legislative consent motion.

The Committee's concerns, however, did not centre on law enforcement officers from other UK jurisdictions being provided with maritime enforcement powers in Northern Ireland waters in hot pursuit situations. Rather, the Committee was considering whether the PSNI should get equivalent powers to go into other UK jurisdiction waters.

The Committee considered the responses from the Minister of Justice and the PSNI and agreed to seek further information from the Minister of Justice on the accountability arrangements to the Policing Board for incidents involving law enforcement officers from any of the UK legal jurisdictions exercising hot pursuit powers in Northern Ireland waters. The Committee also agreed to advise her that it was minded to recommend that maritime enforcement powers of hot pursuit be extended to Northern Ireland but would consider the matter further on receipt of the additional information requested.

The Committee agreed to seek clarification from the Chief Constable on his position on extending the powers of hot pursuit to the PSNI and on the reasons why the PSNI did not seek or support maritime enforcement powers of hot pursuit being extended to Northern Ireland in the first instance.

The Minister of Justice responded on 21 September, providing information on the proposed accountability arrangements to the Policing Board for law enforcement officers from any of the UK jurisdictions exercising maritime hot pursuit powers in Northern Ireland's territorial waters. She indicated that she was not minded to include a provision that required either the Chief Constable or chief officers of other GB forces to report to the Policing Board on the exercise of hot pursuit powers.

Assistant Chief Constable Todd confirmed in his response that he was content that the powers of hot pursuit be extended to the PSNI. He also clarified that the original position attributed to the PSNI appeared to be the result of an informal conversation between staff who were trying to be helpful in progressing the matter and had not been fully considered at a senior level at that time. That is absolutely astounding.

At the Committee meeting on 29 September, members considered the responses from the Minister of Justice and the PSNI and indicated that they still did not have the level of clarification necessary to reach a decision on the proposal to extend maritime enforcement powers in hot pursuit circumstances. The Committee, therefore, requested further information from the Minister on whether the PSNI had ever had to stop a hot pursuit operation because it would have resulted in officers going beyond Northern Ireland's territorial waters; what implications, if any, there would likely be for the PSNI in terms of additional resources and funding if maritime enforcement powers were provided; and the legislative changes required to provide the accountability powers to the Police Ombudsman, details of the amendments and how they would be taken forward.

In relation to law enforcement officers from any of the other UK jurisdictions exercising maritime hot pursuit powers in Northern Ireland's territorial waters, some members indicated that there needed to be an accountability mechanism to the Northern Ireland Policing Board for such operations and suggested that that could take the form of retrospective accountability by the Chief Constable. The

Minister was, therefore, also asked to outline her proposals to address that issue.

In the Minister's response, she advised that engagement had taken place at assistant chief constable level in the PSNI and that the Chief Constable was also sighted on the matter. The Minister reiterated that the PSNI would welcome reciprocal maritime powers, including powers to cover cases in which PSNI officers might enter other UK territorial waters in hot pursuit circumstances. In such circumstances, the Department clarified that it had been agreed with the Home Office and the Office of the Police Ombudsman that the Police Ombudsman would continue to have oversight of PSNI officers operating in England and Wales waters. The Minister also advised that, to date, there had been no cases in which the PSNI had had to stop a hot pursuit operation because it would have resulted in officers going beyond Northern Ireland's territorial waters.

In respect of the likely resource and funding implications of the PSNI being given maritime enforcement powers in hot pursuit situations, the Department confirmed that the PSNI had purchased new boats in 2015 that were capable of going beyond the 12 miles required to leave Northern Ireland waters. The only identifiable cost, therefore, would be minimal and related to participation or training in any exercises that arose as a result of the new powers.

#### 4.15 pm

In relation to the legislative changes that would be required to provide accountability powers to the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, the Minister informed members that amendments would need to be made to the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998 and the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 and to some associated subordinate legislation. The Minister advised that the amendments would be incorporated into the Policing and Crime Bill and would ensure that the Police Ombudsman retained proper powers of investigation in relation to all officers when exercising the powers of a constable in Northern Ireland waters and PSNI officers when in other UK territorial waters.

In the same response, the Minister referred to an issue around accountability that had arisen in relation to Scottish officers. The Minister informed the Committee that the Scottish Government were not in a position to agree to the proposed model of oversight of Scottish officers by the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. However, the Department was working with the Home Office and Scottish Government to resolve that issue. The Minister suggested that, to progress the legislative consent motion, the appropriate provision relating to the exercise of powers by Scottish officers in Northern Ireland waters should remain in the Bill but on the firm understanding that they would remain only when all parties were agreed on appropriate accountability arrangements.

At its meeting on 6 October, the Committee for Justice agreed that it was content with the proposed legislative consent motion on maritime enforcement powers, subject to the following: the addition of maritime enforcement powers in relation to hot pursuit being extended to the PSNI; that the Policing Board was content with the proposals for retrospective accountability by the Chief Constable to the board; and that the provision for maritime enforcement powers in relation to hot pursuit by Scottish officers in Northern Ireland territorial waters should remain only if the Scottish Government agreed the proposed

model of oversight by the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.

At the Department of Justice evidence session on 10 November, officials advised members that, following the Committee's conditional agreement to the proposed LCM on maritime enforcement powers, departmental officials attended a meeting of the Policing Board on 22 October and discussed the proposed oversight and accountability arrangements. The Department advised that, whilst some board members were supportive, the board was unable to reach an agreed position and sought further time to consider this matter. The Department also advised that it had not been possible to secure the agreement of the Scottish Government to oversight of Police Scotland officers when operating in Northern Ireland waters. The Department indicated that the issue was around Scottish officers being subject to greater scrutiny in Northern Ireland waters. When asked whether the hot pursuit provisions could be extended to Northern Ireland, England and Wales only, departmental officials advised that it was the Home Office's view that any arrangements for maritime enforcement powers in hot pursuit situations should cover all jurisdictions and be included in the same legislative vehicle.

In the absence of agreement, and given the tight legislative timescales associated with the passage of the Bill through Westminster, the Department removed from the legislative consent memorandum the provisions for hot pursuit into Northern Ireland waters. The Department confirmed, however, that it remains of the view that there was merit in seeking to resolve these issues and reach a mutually acceptable agreement in slower time. Therefore, the draft motion included in the legislative consent memorandum, tabled on 7 November, does not cover hot pursuit powers.

In relation to maritime enforcement powers, the draft motion seeks the extension of wider maritime enforcement powers that would give the PSNI powers to seek to prevent, detect, investigate and/or prosecute offences committed on vessels in Northern Ireland waters. In practice, the PSNI would be able to stop, board, divert and detain a vessel; to search and obtain information; and to arrest and seize evidence of any offence on vessels in Northern Ireland territorial waters. This, of course, is to be welcomed and was supported by the Justice Committee.

Members, I apologise for the length of time I have taken to set out details of the scrutiny that the Justice Committee has taken in respect of this legislative consent memorandum and motion, but it is vital to highlight the need to consider proposed LCMs in detail — after all, it is legislation — and to illustrate the handling of it, in particular the maritime enforcement hot pursuit element, by the Department.

I refer to the Committee's report:

*"... the Committee expressed extreme disappointment and frustration at the series of failures by the Department in its handling of the issue of maritime enforcement powers in hot pursuit situations, which ultimately resulted in hot pursuit powers being removed completely from the Legislative Consent Motion and the Bill. Concerns included delayed engagement with the Policing Board when it was clear there were accountability issues, and the informal arrangements for engagement between the Department of Justice and the PSNI on legislative matters."*

The Department went to the Policing Board only on 22 October. This Bill had its First Reading in February, yet the Department only saw fit to go to the Policing Board, at the request, if you like, of the Justice Committee, on 22 October. It also alarms me that there was a very loose informal arrangement between the Department of Justice and the PSNI on these legislative matters. It is something of very great importance, yet it seems that the PSNI were being helpful when they did not request, require or see the need for hot pursuit powers going the other way. It was obvious to the Committee at the very first meeting that we would require or ask the Department to have those same powers. If it is good enough for England, Scotland and Wales to come into our waters in hot pursuit, how would it not be the same, then, for PSNI officers going the other way?

*"The Department acknowledged that it could have done better and apologised that it had been distracted by trying to solve the issue of oversight by the Police Ombudsman, and as a result had omitted to engage earlier with the Policing Board. The Department also confirmed that formal arrangements had now been put in place for engagement at the proper level with the PSNI, on legislative and other important matters."*

I think this is a lesson for everyone on the importance of proper scrutiny of LCMs by Committees, appropriate attention to detail and provision of accurate and clear information on the relevant provisions by Departments.

The Committee for Justice agreed, on 10 November 2016, that it was content with the proposal to extend maritime enforcement powers to Northern Ireland by way of a legislative consent motion, subject to the Minister giving a commitment during the debate on the legislative consent motion that work will be progressed as quickly as possible by the Department of Justice to make provision for maritime enforcement powers in hot pursuit situations for PSNI officers and to identify an appropriate legislative vehicle to give effect to this at the earliest opportunity.

The commitment outlined by the Committee has now been given by the Minister, subject to the agreement of the Policing Board in relation to accountability and reaching agreement with the Scottish Government on the oversight arrangements for Police Scotland officers when in Northern Ireland waters. Therefore, the Committee for Justice supports the Minister of Justice in seeking the Assembly's endorsement of the legislative consent motion. However, I want to point out that the Committee is of the view that the PSNI getting hot pursuit powers should not be dependent on agreement with the Scottish Government. The Committee would like to see the PSNI getting hot pursuit powers regardless of Scotland's position, and would expect the Department's negotiations with the Home Office to take this into account, although it is a matter for the Department of Justice and, indeed, the Home Office.

In conclusion, this has not been an acceptable way of dealing with LCMs between the Department and the Committee. There has been a litany of errors throughout the process since our first briefing. It is not good enough to go the Policing Board in October when the Bill had its First Reading in Westminster in February. It is not good enough that the Justice Committee has to remind the Department of the accountability structures in Northern Ireland and to ask for the consent of the Policing Board and the Police

Ombudsman. It has not been acceptable that we have had to extract all of this from the Department and its officials throughout the process.

It left time very tight for us to get the LCM before the House today.

I have seen many messes in my time as an MLA. I was on the ETI Committee when it had to deal with the energy branch — horrendous — and was on the PAC when things have gone wrong in Departments, but I must say to the Minister of Justice that this mess, with its litany of errors, ranks right up there. I do not want to lose my temper. I will leave it at that, but I expect much more from the Department of Justice when it comes to engagement with the Justice Committee and with organisations that are stakeholders in any legislative process, whether it be the Policing Board, the Police Ombudsman or any other theatre of justice on legislation that the Department brings before the House. I hope that lessons have been learnt in this case. I will leave it there.

**Mr Beattie:** I support the LCM in its entirety, as outlined by the Justice Minister. I do so personally and on behalf of my party. I will not reiterate what the Chair of the Justice Committee said. He went into it in quite some detail. He really did need to go into that detail, because, since we started dealing with the LCM in June, it has been incredibly frustrating. Things could certainly have been done differently. We were exasperated weekly by the lack of progress on the maritime enforcement powers and the hot-pursuit issues. I welcome the Justice Minister saying that she will pursue this at a later stage. Hopefully, we will be able to get around that.

I do not want to go through the different component parts of the LCM, but I am slightly disappointed that the provision on anonymity for victims of forced marriage does not go further. As it stands, if you are a UK citizen, it is chargeable offence to mention the name of somebody who is a victim of forced marriage, but, if you leave the country and use a server in another country — Pakistan or somewhere like that — you can quite openly use the name and then return to the United Kingdom, and no offence will have been committed. It would have been nice to see that provision extended further. I am still thankful that we have it as it stands now, however.

It is right to say the Justice Committee has had time to scrutinise the LCM in detail, and it has been important for it to do so. I do not want to focus too much on the fourth component of the LCM and change the whole debate, but the pardon for convictions for certain abolished offences did come late to the Committee, and, because of that, it is fair to say that scrutiny was possibly rushed. I can concede that. I see this as a legislative process and these things being viewed on a case-by-case basis. Those who were shot at dawn were pardoned 90 years after. That was a good pardon. Alan Turing was pardoned in 2013. That was right. The decriminalisation of homosexual acts in Northern Ireland came into force 34 years ago. This LCM puts right the consequences of a bad law. Therefore, I believe, like the Chair, that the Justice Committee has scrutinised the LCM at the right level. I will certainly be supporting it.

**Ms Boyle:** I thank the Chair for the level of detail that he gave the House on the LCM. On behalf of the Sinn Féin Justice Committee members and, indeed, my party, I

put on record and register our concerns about the way in which the Department handled the process, particularly the maritime pursuit powers in the LCM.

#### 4.30 pm

We believe that departmental officials must take a methodical approach to handling these matters; they must respect other accountability mechanisms, specifically the Policing Board. Full transfer of policing and justice powers must work effectively and efficiently, and we welcome the full sweep of policing and justice powers here. However, by the same token, all the accountability mechanisms must work together for open and transparent reporting on such matters. Indeed, I would like to echo a valid point raised with officials at the Committee meeting on 10 November by the Chair, Paul Frew: when legislation goes to the PSNI, it must be dealt with at the highest level by a person with the skills and expertise to form an opinion on whether it is good or bad from a policing point of view. I want to echo the Chair's sentiment. That is critical for the legislative process.

The appropriate level of communication is key to many aspects of accountability. As the Chair stated, lessons need to be learned from what happened. This matter would probably not have been pursued other than at the behest of the Committee. That is what a scrutiny Committee is all about: ensuring accountability and ensuring that accountability is upheld. However, we appreciated the Department admitting that it could have done better.

The LCM makes provisions in four areas: maritime enforcement powers, excluding hot pursuit for reasons outlined by the Chair; cross-jurisdictional arrest powers; and pardons for convictions of abolished gay and bisexual offences. I want to speak briefly on the latter. These should never have been offences in the first place; this was a cruel, unjust, homophobic law — a dinosaur law — and lot of people have been harmed as a result. No one should be discriminated against or found guilty of a crime for falling in love. The Minister's proposals are a step in the right direction, and we welcome them. The Minister's approach to such laws has to be welcomed in the House.

We support the motion and ask others to do so. We will not support the amendment.

**Mr Attwood:** I apologise to the Chair of the Committee and to Mr Allister: I was called away to an unscheduled meeting and missed both their contributions. I did, however, hear the Minister's contribution prior to Question Time. I apologise if I cover ground that has been addressed by others.

From what I have heard, questions have been raised, and rightly so, about the management of this business, on both PSNI and Department of Justice sides. My view is that what may be revealed by how the Department managed this is a failure of understanding at Department level of the thresholds and requirements of Patten as regards accountability for police actions in the North. What worries me, whatever the detail of how it was managed at Department level in response to the probing of the Committee, is the wider issue of the understanding at Department level of the requirements for policing accountability in Northern Ireland. I would be more alarmed by a systemic problem than by the management problem that was clearly identified in how this was approached by the Department. When there is a management problem,

you can put in place processes and tick boxes to make sure that it is managed properly. However, if there is a cultural problem — a failure to understand that the actions of anybody with police powers in Northern Ireland, besides the PSNI, should be accountable to the Policing Board — that is a much deeper issue.

The reason why I am concerned about the wider, deeper issue that may or may not be advertised by what happened in this case is that it is not so long ago that a lot of time and effort was engaged in trying to rectify the false approach that was being adopted by the Home Office and some in the Department of Justice when it came to accountability for the National Crime Agency. It was only in February 2014 that that matter was corrected in the right thresholds of accountability when it came to the conduct of the NCA. Yet it appears that, a short time later, the Department of Justice was making proposals that did not give due authority and recognition to the role of the Policing Board in the conduct of police officers in Northern Ireland. I would like the Minister to respond to that issue.

Is there any failure of understanding at departmental level that, when a police officer or a person with police powers is operating in Northern Ireland, be it the PSNI, the NCA or police officers from another police service in Britain, there must never be any doubt about accountability to the Policing Board? A doubt was created in that regard by this particular LCM. I think that this is fundamental, and it needs to be fundamental going forward because, in the view of the SDLP, accountability around policing has been degraded over a period of time. We do not need to see any more degradation when it comes to the authority of the Policing Board and accountability for police actions in Northern Ireland. I would like the Minister to give that reassurance, to ensure that, at departmental level, there is no lack of understanding as to the thresholds that were established. They should be jealously guarded, otherwise we will be in a much more severe place.

It may be that this particular instance about the accountability of police officers outside Northern Ireland for their activities here might not arise very much, but once bitten, twice shy. Let us ensure that there is no repetition of the failure of management, on the one hand, and, hopefully, on a much worse level, the failure to recognise how these things should be conducted when it comes to these matters.

I also want to be fair to the Chair, the Deputy Chair and the Committee. This is a personal view, and I was on the Justice Committee for only a very short period of months, but the Justice Committee in the last mandate, in my view, in my experience and from what other people said, when it came to the conduct of Committees, actually fulfilled higher levels and thresholds when it came to calling to account Ministers and public policy generally. That was a recognition of the membership and the Chair and Deputy Chair of the last Committee. I have to say that my experience in the short life of this Committee is that those thresholds and standards are again being upheld. That is good for the life of the Assembly and good for the life of the Justice Committee.

However, just as the Committee has been attentive and vigilant — I also have to acknowledge the work of the Committee staff, and the Clerk in particular, in all of this — this does tell the Assembly to be very vigilant when it comes to LCMs. We had an unfortunate experience in the

Chamber this morning where an LCM was pushed through, the consequences of which I do not believe the Assembly fully understand, about how third-level education is being fundamentally reconfigured. Therefore we should be very mindful about LCMs. The conduct of the Justice Committee, and the work of the Chair in particular, in this matter is worthy of further consideration.

The third point is that an interesting concept is now being created. I am not going to challenge the words of this, but police officers from other jurisdictions in Britain who might come to Northern Ireland through their maritime activities will now retrospectively account to the Policing Board. Well, they might want to retrospectively explain, but I do not know if “retrospectively account” is the right phrase. Under Patten, the police legislation and the NCA, very rigorous requirements are laid down in terms of what accountability looks like, and retrospective accountability for what a police officer might have done in Northern Ireland is different, in my view, from the thresholds that apply now in respect of the NCA and in respect of the PSNI to the Policing Board.

I put down a marker that, if we think retrospective accountability will look identical to the other examples of accountability to the Policing Board, we might be disappointed.

The SDLP supports the LCM across the range of its content, including that which has arisen most recently on pardons for abolished offences. We should take any opportunity in the Assembly to right wrongs. That is what the proposal does with pardons for abolished offences. For that reason, we will oppose Mr Allister’s amendment.

**Mr Lunn:** We also support the LCM in its entirety. Like others, I do not want to repeat a whole lot of what has been said. The Minister laid out the terms of the LCM quite adequately. Mr Frew certainly did justice to the concerns the Committee had about the process and the hoops we had to go through. Every Committee meeting seemed to have another twist and turn. I agree with the Minister to the extent that the Department did not cover itself with glory in that episode. To my mind, neither did the PSNI, which could not seem to make up its mind whether it wanted hot pursuit, even though it has two lovely new boats that will go more than 12 miles. The Policing Board also could not seem to make up its mind; it could not come to an agreement about the way forward. It was not the Department’s best day, but it was not helped by those other organisations.

As regards the hot pursuit issue, words fail me. I wonder what happened to the “U” in “United Kingdom” in all this. The fact is that we have a 12-mile limit in Northern Ireland, and so has England, Scotland and Wales. Presumably, so has the Isle of Man; I do not really know, but maybe it has.

**A Member:** It does.

**Mr Lunn:** It does? Well, there you are; there is another one. They are going to have to carry a computer to decide whose water they are in. This is all to do with trying to apprehend criminals and chasing boats around the Irish Sea, which is not much bigger than a big pond. It is ridiculous that we are having to go through all this just to try to establish whose jurisdiction it is in the United Kingdom, who should be accountable to whom and who can enter whose territorial waters. I had better not go on about that. We are not talking about the Baltic Sea or

the Red Sea or that wee bit of water between Cuba and America.

**Mr Aiken:** Thank you very much indeed for giving way. The unfortunate point is that, if we still had a Royal Navy left, we could let it do the hot pursuit, as was traditional.

**Mr Lunn:** Presumably, if Mr Aiken had his way, we would use submarines to do a bit of hot pursuing; they would not even know they were there. This is over the top, frankly, but we are where we are.

Another bit of the LCM is to do with maritime enforcement powers; they are now being extended for Northern Ireland — the PSNI — to operate in its own territorial waters. That is a good thing. Prior to this LCM, the police had to try to establish whether the boat was one they were suspicious was operating in human trafficking, slavery, forced labour or servitude. In other words, if the police thought it was carrying drugs, they could not do anything about it. Presumably, if they thought the boat was stolen, they could not do anything about it either. Now, at least, that has been tidied up. That is a good thing. Maybe it is a good start for the PSNI, in that it can now rigorously enforce our law in our territorial waters.

The cross-jurisdictional arrest powers are also a very good piece of tidying up that is probably long overdue. I note it applies only to very serious offences that carry the potential for a 10-year sentence. That is pretty severe. It means the police can do the natural thing. If they see somebody who is wanted, with or without a warrant, they can arrest them for a fixed period while the necessary paperwork comes through, for want of a better description.

#### 4.45 pm

The last section is the pardon for homosexual offences. I do not know what to say about this, but I will say something anyway. I just hope that Mr Allister never has a relative who is LGBT, because, frankly, I wonder what he would say to him or her. I listened to Mr Allister with considerable respect because he has a very good legal brain, although he let himself down eventually. He talked about process and pointed out some defects in the not quite normal way in which this has been dealt with. There should have been a consultation and all the rest of it, but that does not make it any less desirable that we do something about a law that, as Ms Boyle said, should never have been passed in the first place. This is putting something right that was never right to start with. Frankly, I think that Mr Allister, as he went on, betrayed his own prejudice and his own feelings several times. I will not detail what he said — it is in Hansard — but it is pretty obvious. Even the way in which he says LGBT, as if he has a bad taste in his mouth, is disgraceful, and he refused to answer questions from various Members. Mr Allister's problem is that he does not like homosexuality.

**Mr Allister:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Lunn:** I will in a minute. He finds it distasteful. He has said so, so many times, and now it is on the record. He has said it in the open, in the Chamber, and it is there for posterity. In the future, people will decide what they think about it. I will give way to him.

**Mr Allister:** The Member referred to me refusing to answer questions. I think that I gave way to any and every Member

who asked me to give way, as is my wont. What did I fail to deal with?

**Mr Lunn:** You did not answer Claire Hanna's question, for a start.

**Mr Allister:** I did.

**Mr Lunn:** No, you did not. I suggest to people like Mr Allister that they should reflect on their views on this issue. On a different side of the issue, Members will be aware that I had a change of mind on homosexuality and same-sex marriage. I suggest to Mr Allister that he should engage with those in the LGBT community and find out what their feelings are about this and the sort of attitude that he portrays. He might also have a word with the British Psychological Society, which had such an effect on me in the circumstances. I am putting on the record that I think that his amendment is disgraceful. I sincerely hope that he cannot get the second teller because, if it is forced to a vote, it will be a sad reflection on the House.

**Ms Bradshaw:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on the legislative consent motion and thank the Justice Minister for bringing it to the Assembly. Other Members have spoken about its various elements, but, like my colleague Trevor Lunn, I want to focus on the convictions of homosexuals for certain abolished offences. I would like to remind Members of Jim Allister's behaviour in 2013, when, without consultation, he signed an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill 2013 that aimed to ban Marie Stopes clinics here. A lot of what he said today hinged on this being put forward without consultation. I call that hypocrisy. The Bible calls hypocrisy a sin, and, if he wants me to, I will go through some of the verses that refer to that. I would just like to put on record that I was really disgusted by the tone and the content of Mr Allister's remarks today. He is talking about nearly 76,000 individuals.

I will focus on Alan Turing, whom, as some of you may have heard, I mentioned at the start. What happened to him was absolutely deplorable. He gave years of his life to national service, was pivotal in breaking the wartime Enigma code and, as a result, made significant contributions to the Allied forces winning World War II. Despite this, his dedication and contribution to his country were repaid by chemical castration, and, sadly, he committed suicide at the age of 41. Had Alan Turing been heterosexual, there would have been an outcry in the Chamber and across the UK at the shocking manner in which someone so pivotal to the World War II effort was treated, but he was guilty of just one crime: being a homosexual and embracing it in a consensual relationship. Accordingly, it is good and right that he was pardoned by the Queen in 2013, but we must remember that his case is well known for the disrespectful way in which this war hero was treated.

Although Alan Turing popularised the issue, 75,895 other individuals underwent the mental trauma of being vilified for who they were and the shame of a conviction for something that should never have been deemed illegal. I acknowledge that the number of people who will be affected by the outcome of the motion is small compared with the numbers in England and Wales. However, the gesture in and of itself from the Chamber today will be far-reaching because it will be a positive public gesture of goodwill to and compassion for the LGBT community, who often feel ostracised and separate from Northern Ireland society.

We are also faced with an irony today in that the conviction is overturned as if it is perceived that the crime had never taken place, but marriage equality remains a distant reality. That means that, privately, homosexuals can engage in a consensual and loving relationship, yet that relationship continues not to be recognised by the state as it would be with the marriage of a heterosexual couple. I stress: that is by the state and not the Church. I hope that the motion will go some way to recognising that in the Chamber and that, one day, we will see marriage equality.

To conclude, I support the LCM but not the amendment. I hope that the pardons will go some way towards making amends and that we can spark a more positive relationship between the Chamber and the LGBT community.

**Ms Bailey:** I support the LCM in its entirety. As a member of the Justice Committee, it has been fascinating to watch the level of scrutiny, the hard work and the sheer determination and perseverance that Committee members have put into this. It certainly sets the bar very high for the years to come. It has been a huge learning curve for me, so well done and thank you for being part of that.

The majority of the work has been highlighted, and we talked about maritime powers. I will not go through everything again, except to say that the Green Party does not object to anything in the LCM. However, we cannot support the amendment. We welcome the last piece of the LCM: pardons for convictions for now abolished offences, specifically statutory pardons for persons with convictions for now abolished offences under what was historic anti-gay legislation. We welcome that, but I also expect that this will be the first time that the House has ever affected positive, progressive change through a vote on a matter of equality related to sexual orientation.

Our social attitude towards gay people still has a long way to go. Transphobic and homophobic hate crimes are still largely under-reported, if reported at all. We still have people elected to public office who advocate the re-criminalisation of LGBT people and others who believe that it is possible to cure being gay. Many people in the past, who had to carry these convictions with them, ended up taking their own lives. Who knows what and who they might have gone on to be — perhaps doctors, lawyers or Members of the House as parliamentarians? Others carried the shame with them for the rest of their lives without being able to speak to family members or loved ones about it. There are some who might be alive today who are classed as criminals for now non-existent crimes. I hope that all Members can support the extension of the LCM in its entirety and help to send out a very clear message to our LGBT community that they are not criminals any more than the rest of us.

For these reasons, the Green Party will not be supporting the amendment, which seeks to exclude the posthumous pardons altogether and leave LGBT equality lagging behind the rest of the UK yet again. I hope that the extension of this LCM can bring a focus on equality legislation, in general, to this House over this mandate. If the Programme for Government seeks a more equal society, where we care for others and help those in need and where:

*"We are a confident, welcoming, outward-looking society."*

then we must make moves on equality for all people. This must include the equal treatment of people on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity. This is a cornerstone principle of a modern democracy. We support the LCM.

**Mr Agnew:** Often when we talk about privilege in our society, we mean wealth. I was not born with a silver spoon in my mouth, but I recognise that I have many other privileges that I was born with rather than earning them. I am white, I am able-bodied, and I am a cisgendered straight male, and with that comes many privileges that I have been fortunate to benefit from.

I want to be part of a generous majority. As someone with privilege, I want to extend, as much as possible, the benefits I have to others. As somebody who grew up in a society, and certainly in the school playground, where the term "gay" and other derogatory terms to allude to sexuality were used as terms of abuse, I would like to apologise, on my own behalf only, because I do not have the status to do so for the state or for others. I apologise if I used any of that language or those derogatory terms in ignorance as a child.

This should be and is a proud day for this Assembly. In fact, it is a proud day for Northern Ireland. As my colleague Clare Bailey pointed out, assuming it is passed, this will be the first piece of legislation to come to this House to promote and advance the rights of the LGBT community to be passed in Northern Ireland. Civil partnerships came into being in Northern Ireland under direct rule, and homosexuality was only decriminalised through court action. I welcome the fact that we stand on the verge of making a democratic decision to support and enhance the rights of our LGBT community.

I do not accept it when Mr Allister used terms such as "rushing enthusiastically" for LGBT rights or said that we jumped on the bandwagon. That is the last thing we can say this Assembly has done, although I would welcome it if we had. Today is an important first step.

I do not accept that today we validate homosexuality. It is valid. We do not have the power or the right to do that. It is normal sexual practice by virtually every definition of the word normal. I welcome the large degree of consensus here today, but let us not overstate our power. We do not validate homosexuality; we are not so arrogant. It is normal, and it is valid.

There is an important distinction to be made between the criminalisation of homosexuality and other laws that have become obsolete. In cases of clear discrimination, whether it be against, as in this case, the LGBT community, on the issue of slavery or, further back, with the burning of so-called witches, there is shame in our past. We as a state and as legislators should recognise that and seek, where possible, to make reparations and put it right.

#### 5.00 pm

As I say, today, we, acting as a generous majority, take the first step towards our LGBT community. It is a small first step, and others must follow.

**Mr Allister:** I do not, for one moment, question the sincerity of those who have spoken against my amendment; they have done so honestly and with integrity. In a way, I respect their contributions more than those who

chose to have nothing to say about this subject. I will return to that in a moment.

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

I will pick up on one of Mr Agnew's latter points. He said that there have been many wrongs in the past. The point I was making is that that may be right, but why is it that we are being selective in the pardoning process? Why is it that we are choosing only obsolete offences within the realm of sexual crimes committed by homosexuals? Why is it, indeed, that in the wider criminal calendar — he referred to witches; we had the Islandmagee witches, but there has been no pardon for them, so to speak — we are being so selective in deciding that we are going to push aside all the due process and rush forward with this single proposition relating to gay pardons and everything else does not matter? That is the message that this House is sending out. There are multiple obsolete offences in every sphere of the criminal law, but only one recommends itself to this House for retrospective pardon. That is the point that I am making. The selectivity of that is wrong; the discrimination of it is wrong. I illustrated that with the many heterosexual offences that have now become obsolete.

**Mr Agnew:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Allister:** Yes, certainly.

**Mr Agnew:** I come back to my previous point. He talks about heterosexual offences, but they were not by virtue of heterosexuality. This was discrimination against the whole homosexual community, and therein lies the difference. There is no law that has been repealed that discriminates against the whole heterosexual community in this way.

**Mr Allister:** With respect, the Member is wrong. The offences that I referred to were sex offences. Unlawful carnal knowledge with a 16-year-old, committed by heterosexuals, was a significant criminal offence that is now obsolete. Buggery committed by a homosexual has been chosen specially for pardon. Why? It is because, as I suggested, the fashionable fad is to be on that bandwagon. This House betrays its true intent by the fact that it has glossed over and rushed past all those other offences in order to get to the point of offering these pardons. That is the point about the principle of it being wrong.

We foolishly think that we can rewrite the law retrospectively and that we, the legislators of 2016, should take upon ourselves the burden of being the legislators of the 1950s or whenever. We have enough to do looking after 2016. Yet that is the purpose of this added amendment.

I said that I respected those who disagreed with me, and I understand entirely the logic of their position. I indicated that I have more respect for them than those who have kept silent in the debate. We have not had a DUP speech in the debate. We had a speech by the Chairman of the Committee, but he did not at any point, as is normal, speak on behalf of his party. Why? Because his party does not want to have anything on the record about the matter. That is why. The party of "Save Ulster from Sodomy" does not want to have it on the record that it said anything about the matter, which is why it is so anxious that there should be no vote in the House on it. It is because of its embarrassment. The DUP has those in its ranks who carried the placards saying, "Save Ulster from Sodomy", and they know that the action that the House is taking is

validating that very thing by saying that it was wrong for it to have been an offence. That is the inescapable import of the retrospective pardon. It is a collective, societal contrition for the fact that it was ever an offence. That, of course, embarrasses the party that is the DUP, because it was so lined up with that campaign.

I am disappointed that the DUP's instruction to its Members is a three-line whip against the amendment. Of course, they are hoping that it will not come to a vote. They have been strangely silent on the issue — not so strangely but totally silent. This is the party that told us, properly, during the Asher's case what a shameful assault it was on freedom of conscience, yet, when it comes to this issue, its Members are not allowed to have a conscience, even though I know that there are those on those Benches who do not agree, they say, with the retrospective pardon. They are not allowed a conscience on it.

I must say to the Ulster Unionists that I have often heard Mike Nesbitt boast of the fact that his party takes pride in having free votes on issues of conscience. Not today. Mr Nesbitt too has Members who are unhappy about the matter, so where is the freedom of conscience?

**Mr Nesbitt:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Allister:** Yes, certainly. Where is the freedom of conscience on that side of the House on the issue? Why is it being suppressed?

**Mr Nesbitt:** It is frankly close to outrageous for the Member to suggest that there has been any suppression of opinion in the Ulster Unionist Party. We debated the matter at length this morning and are treating it not as a moral issue but as a legal one. End of.

**Mr Allister:** Not end of. What that means is that there is a party policy to vote against the amendment. Of course, both the Ulster Unionists and the DUP are hoping that there will be no vote. Some of them do not want the embarrassment of having to go through the No Lobby on the amendment, in favour of the retrospective gay pardon. They are hoping that Allister might shout out for his amendment but that no one else will, and that, even if he gets a Division, there will be no Teller. They can then go around the country and pretend and say, "There was no vote" and "Oh, we did not vote for that". That is the stratagem that is being deployed, particularly by the party that made a central plank of saving Ulster from sodomy. It is now going to validate that very thing.

As I said in my opening remarks, we are told that there are many in the ranks of the DUP who have a strong religious view and who are ruling elders in a Church that still proclaims homosexuality a sin and believes that buggery is wrong. Yet, today those elders like Mr Storey, Lord Morrow and Mr Tom Buchanan will sit on their hands, and, if it comes to it, put party before principle. Mr Buchanan, just a couple of years ago, addressing schoolchildren, was quoted in the 'Ulster Herald' as saying that homosexuality "isn't right" and is "an abomination". Which Mr Buchanan is here today? Where is he hiding? Where is Mr Storey hiding? Where is Lord Morrow hiding? Where are the others who sat in pews yesterday in a Church that still holds that homosexuality is a sin? That is the real challenge for those people. Are they going today to walk in their first ways like Jehoshaphat? Are they going to follow the fashionable crowd? Are they going to take the hard

road or the easy road? Are they going to do what is right or what is wrong? Very soon we will know, Mr Speaker.

**Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice):** I thank Members for their contributions to the legislative consent motion. Specifically, I wish to put on record my sincere thanks to the Justice Committee for its report and the Executive Committee for its consideration of the issues at hand. I entirely take on board the Justice Committee's criticisms of my Department in respect of the accountability around the legislative consent motion.

I also want to put on record that I fully respect the role of the Committee; I appreciate its scrutiny of the legislative vehicle and, more generally, of the Department. I am also fully respectful of the role of the Policing Board and the Police Ombudsman. Yes, my Department could have performed better, and for that I apologise. We will perform better and be fully cognisant of the accountability mechanisms that exist in and around my Department.

In particular, I want to assure Members that I am entirely mindful of the role of the Policing Board and that my Department is in no doubt of the role of the Policing Board either.

I am pleased generally by the support that has been shown around the Chamber for the four elements of the legislative consent motion, and I believe that it is sensible that the provisions be carried forward in the Westminster Bill.

Mr Allister outlined three reasons for putting forward his amendment. The first was process. Mr Allister accused me of not consulting on this area. However, I think that these late amendments to the Policing and Crime Bill in Westminster have shown that we need to take these opportunities where possible. Indeed, we did consult on the process, and I want to put on record my sincere thanks to Mr Allister for his contribution because, if anything, it has made me more mindful of seizing this opportunity and what we need to do: right the wrongs of the past.

He refers to principle and whether we should be rewriting the statute book, as he put it, and asked whether we are arrogant. No, I do not think that we are. I think that this was always a wrong piece of legislation. There is an opportunity, through this legislative consent motion, to right the wrongs of the past, and I congratulate all those Members who will support us in doing so because, as Mr Agnew said, this is a first step, and I stand here very deeply proud as Justice Minister of Northern Ireland that we will support it.

The second reason is discrimination. Again, I thank Mr Allister for bringing this to my attention because, at the outset, when it was revealed that we would move to table the LCM, and this part of the LCM in particular, Mr Allister raised concerns about Northern Ireland's difficulties around section 75 areas. We listened and we took those on board, and we are quite happy to proceed with the age of 17. It is only for Mr Allister's intervention that we can proceed on that. So, I thank Mr Allister for enabling this legislative consent motion to go through in the way that it will go through because it has strengthened what we can do moving forward. So, thank you, Mr Allister, for that.

I believe that, on this occasion, it is appropriate that the amendments will be made in the Westminster Bill. I ask the House again to support the passing of the motion, and I thank all those who will do so.

## 5.15 pm

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*Question put a second time.*

**Mr Speaker:** I am satisfied that Standing Order 27(4) provides that, if within a reasonable time two Tellers for each side have not been nominated, the Question shall not be carried.

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Main Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of a number of provisions within the Policing and Crime Bill, by amendment at Lords Committee and Lords Report stage, in so far as they related to UK maritime enforcement powers; UK cross-jurisdictional arrest powers; anonymity for victims of forced marriage and pardons for convictions of certain abolished offences.*

**Mr Speaker:** I ask Members leaving the Chamber to do so quietly.

## **Civil Legal Services (Scope) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016**

**Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice):** I beg to move

*That the draft Civil Legal Services (Scope) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 be approved.*

The draft statutory rule is made under article 12(6) of the Access to Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. The purpose of the statutory rule is to bring two new public protection orders — the violent offences prevention order (VOPO) and the slavery and trafficking prevention order (STPO) — within the scope of legal aid services as services that may be funded through legal aid. To ensure that legal aid remuneration is available for these proceedings in the civil and criminal courts, separate consequential amendments have also been made to the Legal Aid for Crown Court Proceedings (Costs) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2005 and the Civil Legal Services (Remuneration) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015.

It would be helpful to remind Members of the background to the orders. The violent offences prevention order is a new civil preventative order aimed at helping to mitigate the risk of violent reoffending. The new order was developed with a very similar legislative framework to that for the sexual offences prevention order, which is used by relevant criminal justice practitioners to help to manage the risk of serious sexual harm. The violent offences prevention order will allow the court to place relevant prohibitions or requirements on the behaviour of violent offenders. Those subject to the order will also be automatically subject to notification requirements similar to those for the sex offender register. The requirements involve the offender providing personal information to police, and they remain in place for the duration of the order. The order can be made only where the court is satisfied that it is necessary for the purpose of protecting the public from the risk of serious violent harm caused by the offender. It will not form part of the person's sentence, nor will it automatically apply to all violent offenders. Breach of the order's conditions or notification requirements without reasonable excuse will be a criminal offence punishable by up to six months' imprisonment on summary conviction or up to five years' imprisonment on indictment.

I know that Members have been supportive of the proposals during the passage of the legislative provisions, and, like the criminal justice agencies that will use them, are keen for their introduction. I believe that the introduction of the order will strengthen the existing public protection arrangements for violent offenders and enable public protection agencies to more effectively manage the risk posed by violent offenders in the community.

The slavery and trafficking prevention order is aimed at protecting the public in general or specific persons from the physical or psychological harm that would result if the defendant committed a slavery or trafficking offence. The orders are a preventative measure to deter unlawful and harmful activity and can be made only against individuals aged 18 years or older. They place prohibitions or requirements on the activities and behaviour of a slavery or human trafficking offender. The orders are intended to be an additional tool available to law enforcement agencies to regulate the behaviour of individuals who may otherwise cause harm by committing slavery and human trafficking

offences. The order does not form part of a person's sentence and is not automatically applied to all slavery and human trafficking offenders. The orders are made by the court on consideration of the risk posed by the defendant. While they are civil orders, an offender who fails to comply with a prohibition or requirement contained within the order commits a criminal offence. Similarly, a breach of the notification requirements is a criminal offence.

In putting forward these enhanced public protection measures, I have listened carefully to concerns raised by Members, the public and the justice agencies that will be responsible for delivering and managing the new arrangements. Both orders draw on the experience in England and Wales. However, we have strengthened the provisions to make the orders more effective in this jurisdiction.

The regulation that is the subject of today's debate will amend the Access to Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 to allow for publicly funded representation for the orders. Given the demand-led nature of cases appearing before the courts and as is the case in any demand-led environment, it is difficult to establish precisely the potential costs of introducing the new orders. The costs to the legal aid budget have been estimated at approximately £220,000 per annum: the VOPOs are estimated at £213,000 per annum and the STPOs at around £6,500 per annum. The Legal Services Agency will keep the costs under review.

I commend the draft statutory rule to the House.

**Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice):** I am pleased to speak very briefly — you will be glad to know that, Mr Speaker, as will the House — on the motion on behalf of the Committee for Justice.

As the Minister has outlined, the statutory rule amends schedule 2 to the Access to Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 to provide that representation in a court of summary jurisdiction in relation to applications for slavery and trafficking prevention orders and applications for violent offences prevention orders may be funded as civil legal services.

The previous Justice Committee considered the policy intent of violent offences prevention orders as part of its scrutiny of the 2014 Justice Bill and supported the creation of the order. The Committee also supported the introduction of the slavery and trafficking prevention orders that were introduced by way of a legislative consent motion as part of the Westminster Modern Slavery Act 2015.

On 27 October, the Committee considered the policy aspects of the Department's proposal to make the statutory rule and agreed that it was content that the rule be made. On 23 November, the Examiner of Statutory Rules confirmed that she had no issues to raise with the technical aspects of the rule. At a meeting on 24 November 2016, the Committee agreed to recommend that the statutory rule be affirmed by the Assembly and, therefore, supports the motion.

As an MLA and someone who has been pushing the Department on VOPOs, I say that this is a good day for Northern Ireland and for the Assembly. It is good to make sure that the system is backed up and funded by the civil legal services. This is an essential piece of kit to rid our society of domestic violence and other heinous crimes.

**5.30 pm**

**Some Members:** More, more, more.

**Mr Speaker:** Is somebody calling for order? Sorry.

**Ms Sugden:** The draft regulations are before the House following consultation with and the approval of the Justice Committee. Any increase in legal aid expenditure can be seen as negative, and balancing spend against access to justice is a sensitive issue. Since taking up post as Minister of Justice, I have been clear that one of my priorities is protecting the most vulnerable in our society, and the introduction of the orders and the funding for representation fully reflect that commitment.

The purpose of the statutory rule is to bring violent offences prevention orders and slavery and trafficking prevention orders within the scope of civil legal services that may be funded. I invite Members to support the motion.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That the draft Civil Legal Services (Scope) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 be approved.*

## Assembly Business

### Extension of Sitting: Standing Order 10(3A)

**Mr Speaker:** I have received notification from members of the Business Committee of a motion to extend the sitting past 7.00 pm under Standing Order 10(3A).

*Resolved:*

*That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 28 November 2016 be extended to no later than 8:00 pm. — [Mr Clarke.]*

## Private Members' Business

### House Sales Scheme

**Mr Speaker:** The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

**Mr F McCann:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Communities to suspend the house sales scheme until such time as a full review into the long-term impact of this scheme on the provision of social housing stock has been carried out.*

The motion is straightforward. It is folly to continue to sell off the social housing stock. Whilst the number being sold has dropped dramatically, a sudden upturn in people's economic fortunes could change that. In 2002-03, more than 6,000 social homes were sold to tenants. It is estimated that, since the scheme was introduced, we have sold up to 120,000 social dwellings, thus seriously impacting on our ability to deal effectively with social housing waiting lists.

I admit that the scheme was hugely popular among many, but it has had a detrimental impact on those who require a home. It would be interesting if we could establish how many of the houses were sold on again. In many cases, houses have been sold on for huge profit. How many people who were encouraged to buy have lost their home due to the collapse in the economy? How many of those who lost their home have ended up in hostels for the homeless requiring a social house or in the private rented sector? No doubt, the number is well into the thousands.

I have spoken to many people over the past year who curse the day they ever bought their social house. Not only have they lost their home but they are now in debt for a lifetime because they were encouraged to borrow to renovate and repair. I was looking at figures, a few days ago, that told me that, in 2004-05, 17,000 people presented as homeless. In 2006-07, that had risen to just over 20,000, and, in 2014-15, 19,621 presented as homeless. Of course, there are many reasons why people take the step of presenting as homeless. The common thread is their need for somewhere to live.

If you look at the figures over the past 10 years, you see that they remain stubbornly high. We have constantly debated the issue in the Chamber to try to make sense of the persistently high numbers of people who make up the waiting lists, and we come to the same conclusion, which is the need to build more social housing. That is correct, but the reality is that we are not spending enough to provide the number of houses required to have an impact on the waiting lists.

Whilst new build provides a safety valve, it is not the only aspect of supply that housing providers depend on. When a new estate comes up for allocation, they will take people directly from the waiting list, but they will also allocate to transfers, which will allow them to get two for one.

However, the main source for social housing is allocating from within the existing social housing stock. These are people who have given up their tenancies for a number of reasons or people who have passed away. In 2004-05, there were 8,766 allocations and 3,384 transfers — a total of 13,042. In 2014-15, there were 8,129 allocations and 2,763 transfers — a total of 10,892 transactions. Some of those came from the new build that was provided. However, it also shows how dependent social housing providers are on relets becoming available and then being allocated. There is no doubt that the house sales scheme has impacted directly on the number of relets becoming available. If we continue to sell off our housing stock and there is an upturn in sales, we are looking at the total erosion of the social housing stock in a generation.

All housing experts agree that the house sales scheme is wrong and has outlived its usefulness. Many thought it was useful. They would say that we need to be protective in investing in our stock for future generations. That is the road that Scotland has gone down. Some say that over 300,000 houses were sold off, but, by 2014, they realised that they were in danger of losing what was left of their social housing stock, and the Scottish Parliament passed legislation that reduced the incentive and set a date for right-to-buy to end, which was enacted on 31 July 2016. The Welsh Government were concerned about the demise of their social housing stock. They moved in the first instance to halve the incentive available to tenants, this ahead of abolishing the scheme before the end of their mandate. It makes sense that we should begin that process, because it will send out all the right messages.

**Mr Stalford:** I am grateful to the Member for giving way. The Member knows that there are nearly 90,000 social housing units under the control of government. Last year, the total sold was 400, and there is a wide range of reasons for that. The idea that the right-to-buy scheme is taking a scythe through our social housing stock is not borne out by the figures.

**Mr F McCann:** I thank the Member for that, but, when you consider that, at one stage, there might have been 220,000 social houses, you are looking at the loss of 120,000 over that period. I know the respect that the Member had for the architect of this — Margaret Thatcher — at the time. Over that period, we have lost well over half the social housing stock that was available.

Whilst there is a dependence on new build, the big dependence is on relets. The more you sell off, the less likelihood there will be for those relets to come through. There is a need to suspend and review the scheme. If Scotland and Wales have shown that they are willing to protect their social housing, it is not much to ask that we go down the same route.

**Mr Agnew:** To further counter Mr Stalford's point, whilst 500 out of 88,000 does not seem a lot, it is a significant number when we are only proposing to build 2,000 a year.

**Mr F McCann:** It has a big impact, and, in the Assembly, we have seen the different political parties that held Social Development over the past number of years make it easier for people to acquire their house by increasing the incentive and the ways that they could staircase onto the property market. People were not told that once they went down that road, they were responsible for all repairs, and

many people had no idea about that and ended up losing their home as a result.

I will try to bring my contribution to a conclusion. I was reading a briefing paper from NIFHA, which was provided to everybody here, and it said that the house sales scheme has reduced the capacity of the social rented sector to provide accommodation for those in housing stress. Housing associations are building to meet ambitious targets at present for new social homes, and they say that it is counterproductive to mandate the sale of homes at substantial discounts. It went on to say that the house sales scheme is increasingly ineffective in delivering home ownership. Other interventions, such as co-ownership, have proven more successful in recent years. Other voluntary housing groups believe that the scheme should be suspended. I have spoken to individual Members who said that whilst they support the right to buy, they see the merits of suspending the scheme because of dwindling supplies.

I appeal to the House to support this motion and send out a clear message that we want to protect what is left of the social housing stock for future generations. That is where it lies. If we can get an agreement to move forward by speaking to everybody involved in the broad housing family, then we will send out that message. It is the right thing to do and it is the best way to develop the protection of social housing for future generations.

**Ms Bradshaw:** I beg to move:

*Leave out all after "Communities" and insert*

*"to commission immediately a full review into the long-term impact of the house sales scheme on the provision of social housing stock."*

I thank Sinn Féin for tabling the motion this afternoon and welcome the opportunity to address the Chamber on the amendment. Over the last few months, the Assembly has debated housing reclassification, the make-up of the common selection scheme and the issues facing our private sector housing. Last month, we even saw this very motion in the form of an amendment from Sinn Féin. It is clear that the delivery of housing is a complex issue facing the Department for Communities and decisive action must be taken over the course of this mandate to address shortages in housing stock and the increasing demand from a growing population.

The Alliance Party believes that housing is essential for a good quality of life. A home that is both safe and of good quality is vital for the lives of those who live in them. This can be done in a number of ways, as we know, through social housing, co-ownership, though to a lesser extent now, home ownership and private rental. The question at the heart of today's motion is the right of people in social housing to have the opportunity to purchase their home from the Housing Executive or a Housing Association.

Sinn Féin's motion acknowledges that there is a significant issue in social housing, and it aims to address this via the suspension of the house sales scheme while a review is undertaken on how it can be operated better. The scheme gives eligible tenants of the Housing Executive or a registered housing association the right to buy their property from their landlord at a discounted cost. This starts at 20% of the market value of the property, with an increase of 2% for each additional year's tenancy. This has been an option over the last number of years and has

assisted, we believe, to stabilise neighbourhoods. Through the house sales scheme, it has been possible for people who have struggled to get on the property ladder to do so and mould a house into a home that they can be proud of. The benefits of this are far-ranging and include giving people pride in their area, encouraging family stability and fostering good community relations.

**5.45 pm**

As Mr McCann stated, in 2002-03, almost 6,000 properties were sold under the scheme. Since its introduction, the numbers have fallen year-on-year. We appreciate that the figures are low. However, the great beginning and dramatic fall demonstrate that the scheme began too ambitiously and was the victim of its own success. That is why I believe that the solution is not to abandon it at this stage despite its merits and bury our heads in a review that could last for an unspecified period.

Our amendment recognises that the house sales scheme needs to be refined and that a review is necessary to move forward. However, it operates as a fair compromise that acknowledges the issues in the social housing sector but, rather than throwing the baby out with the bathwater, allows those people who are currently seeking to buy their home under the scheme to be given the freedom and support to do that while a new framework is developed.

Our amendment shows faith in the scheme, and we believe that, through conducting a review as a matter of urgency, we can begin to investigate the issues that the house sales scheme has had and its long-term impact on the provision of social housing stock and can look to how we can make it better and more sustainable. The Minister said that, next year, he ambitiously plans to build at least 1,600 new social houses in Northern Ireland. If the house sales scheme were to continue, the figure could essentially, roughly speaking, be 200 to 300 lower owing to those houses that are sold, especially in redevelopment areas. That further demonstrates that it is not the fault of the scheme that is the issue but how it is poorly applied.

Tightening the discounts, for example, could be looked at, as could reducing the number of sales. Those could figure in that review. We need to balance the finances and potentially ensure that, every time that a house is sold, a replacement is built so that we do not continue to deplete the housing stock. At the same time, I acknowledge that such a like-for-like scheme is difficult to achieve under present budgetary constraints. However, given that there are 20,000 properties lying dormant across Northern Ireland, as noted in previous debates, perhaps a cheaper avenue is to explore looking at houses that are currently void and derelict. A review could look at ways of establishing that.

Aside from the scheme being poorly applied at times, there is the wider issue of our divided society. The lack of will in the Assembly to promote shared social housing and a common selection scheme that can be abused by paramilitaries mean that we are perpetuating social dysfunction by creating a population that is frightened to think beyond their own area. In your constituency of East Belfast, Mr Speaker, leaflets were distributed at the weekend by anonymous individuals in an attempt to strike fear into their community. What image does that create for someone from a nationalist area in, for example, north Belfast, which is an area that has massive housing

shortages, who might consider moving to other parts of the city? Does that not send out a message that they are not welcome in other parts of our great city?

Finally, it has been argued that by suspending the housing —

**Mr F McCann:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms Bradshaw:** Yes.

**Mr F McCann:** I understand what you are saying, and I respect your position, but, in 2014, your sister party, the Liberal Democrats, realised the damage that was being done to the social housing stock by the house sales scheme and pushed for its suspension as a way in which to protect what is left of the social housing sector.

**Ms Bradshaw:** We are not suggesting that the scheme is perfect. What we are saying is that it is unfair to penalise people who are currently in the process of buying their own house. A precedent has been set, and, until we have a new set of frameworks and rules governing the sales, it is unfair to suspend the scheme entirely.

It has been argued that suspending it may ensure the swift return of housing associations to the private sector. I do not agree with that assessment, as reclassification came in because it was clear that our housing sector was operating in an unsustainable fashion. Accordingly, suspension is a broad-brush approach. Instead, we need to demonstrate that we are willing to operate the system on a sound financial footing and promote a fair and sustainable system that encourages shared housing, like so many other modern housing association systems. I commend the amendment to the House.

**Mr Bell:** It is important, when looking at housing policy and at this particular aspect of it, that, first, we look towards the goals that we seek to achieve. What we are seeking to achieve is more affordable homes. That is why I am very proud that our party and Minister have decided to take forward one of the most ambitious housing policy proposals of any Programme for Government. Let me spell it out so that there is no confusion: 9,600 additional social homes during this Programme for Government.

I will vote against the motion, but let me put one thing on the record: I respect the Member's integrity on the housing issue. Many Members around the House have enjoyed his expertise and witnessed his hard work and effort. So, while I will vote against his proposal, the goals that we want to achieve are, I believe, identical: more affordable homes, more socially affordable homes, and more social housing.

John Donne is famous for saying, "No man is an island." In housing policy, no single aspect can be considered in isolation from other aspects. The mistake today has been to look solely at the right to buy, a hugely successful policy that I endorse going back some four decades to 1979 when it was first conceived.

What do we need to do? We have to get a larger land bank; we also need to look at what we can do with the private sector. Here is the deal as far as I am concerned: by the end of this Programme for Government, let us have those 9,600 additional homes across Northern Ireland; let us have the 3,700 affordable homes by 2021.

I would like the Minister to discuss with us, if he can, what progress has been made to date with the £100 million successfully secured from government loan funding to

support co-ownership and what progress is intended over the next period.

There is the view that, if we were simply to stop the scheme, there would be additional costs. The reality is a lot more complex. When somebody buys their own home, there are no longer social maintenance costs for that home. There are other ways —

**Mr Stalford:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Bell:** Sure.

**Mr Stalford:** People talk about the loss of 120,000 social housing units, but the reality is that they have been bought by people who live in them, by and large. Instead of someone paying rent all their days and having nothing but the furniture in the house to show for it, at the end, when they have paid their mortgage, they own an asset.

**Mr Bell:** The honourable Member makes his point very well.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Bell:** The amendment has been well proposed. However, a comprehensive review has already taken place and concluded in the last number of weeks. If that comes out factually, the Alliance Party may want to consider withdrawing its amendment. A review has taken place. It is relevant, up to date and current; it is under analysis at this point. It would be a waste to seek another review when we have one on the table.

Let the detailed work be done. I know that people have said that, in England, there are research reports showing that some of the houses that are owned ultimately go into the private sector and to the private rented sector. I am not sure that there is sufficient data in Northern Ireland to stand over that.

Let me conclude by saying what we want to do as a party. I am delighted that we have a Minister who is interested in, ambitious about, and is delivering on increasing the number of new homes, bringing empty homes into use, looking for the housing to be of good quality —

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

**Mr Bell:** Finally, it allows affordability so that people can buy their houses. Right goal; wrong method, I think. I encourage Members to vote against.

**Mr Allen:** As a public representative, I can confirm that the biggest single issue for the people I see coming into my office is the need for social housing. Indeed, a number of years ago, albeit not through the house sales scheme, I had the honour and privilege of purchasing my own home. The pride I felt in being able to provide that roof to put over my family's head is immeasurable.

As elected representatives, we should be doing all we can to give our citizens — our people — the opportunity to purchase a home, and the house sales scheme does just that. I understand and take on board fully the concerns that some have about the scheme. They have highlighted those quite clearly. In 2002-03, 6,000 Northern Ireland Housing Executive houses were transferred to individuals. However, those numbers have dramatically decreased over the years.

The problem here does not lie, in my belief or that of the Ulster Unionist Party, with the house sales scheme

per se. The problem we have before us is the lack of social housing and the lack of housebuilding. During the Opposition debate, I welcomed the commitment that we got from the Minister. He is going to build 9,600 new social builds over the course of this mandate and that will go a long way to providing much valuable social housing to those in need. It has been recited throughout the Chamber on numerous occasions that there are 37,347 households on the social housing waiting list, of which 22,986 are deemed to be in housing stress and 15,747 are deemed to be statutorily homeless. To put that into context, the number of households on the housing waiting list would fill Windsor Park twice or the SSE Arena three times. That is startling. We are in an epidemic here. We need to address this. We have far too many people languishing on the housing waiting list. Placing the house sales scheme at the crux of the argument is invalid. The scheme is not the problem; the problem is the lack of houses that we have built over a number of years.

We also have concerns. If the scheme were suspended, what would happen to those who have already signed up to it? Would they be left to languish?

**Mr F McCann:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Allen:** Yes.

**Mr F McCann:** It is happening in Wales at present. They are having a graduated approach. They have reduced the incentive and they are saying that they will move to abolish it. In Scotland, they took a decision in 2014 but it only came into force at the end of July 2016.

The other point that I want to make is that, whilst we rely on social new builds coming through, the biggest supplier of social housing at the minute is through relets. The more houses you sell off, the fewer relets you will have left to allocate.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Allen:** I accept the Member's point but I will make it clear: the Ulster Unionist Party believes in the values of the house sales scheme and we will not renege on them. We do believe that a review has been carried out, as the Member pointed out. Perhaps the Minister, in his response, can give us a clear and detailed overview of that review.

**Mr Stalford:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Allen:** Yes.

**Mr Stalford:** In relation to Scotland, does the Member agree and recognise that the actions of the Scottish Government in relation to the right to buy were nothing more than vicious party politics because the SNP was so imbued with hatred for the person who introduced the scheme in the first place?

**Mr Allen:** I take that point from the Member, and I thank him for that. He mentioned vicious party politics; we often see that in here.

## 6.00 pm

I will go back to the point I made before I gave way to the Member for West Belfast. What will happen — maybe the Minister will clarify this point — to those currently in the system who signed up to the scheme with the outlook of purchasing their own home? Will they not be able to avail themselves of the scheme if it does not go ahead? If an

individual signs up to the scheme to purchase their social house, the reality is that they were going to remain in that home anyway. If they purchase the home from the housing sales scheme, the argument is irrelevant; that is not going to free up housing stock. Yes, it is going to remain within the Housing Executive, but that person is still going to be there. At the end of the day, we will still have 37,000-odd households on the housing waiting list. That brings it back to the reality of not building enough houses over the course of the mandates. We will address the problem by building more social and affordable houses.

**Ms Mallon:** I support the motion, and I thank Fra McCann for bringing it to the Floor today and giving us the opportunity to debate the issue.

The SDLP supports home ownership. We support positive measures to assist as many people as possible to purchase their own home in a way that is affordable. The issue we have with the house sales scheme is that we currently have a housing crisis. As has been highlighted in the Chamber several times of late, there are almost 40,000 households on the social housing waiting list, of which 23,000 are living in housing stress and over 15,000 are statutorily homeless. In light of those facts and the fact that the number of new-build social housing units to be delivered in this mandate falls below what is required to meet demand, to our minds it is counterproductive for the Executive to, at the same time, pursue a policy that reduces our social housing stock. That is particularly acute, given the added dimension of the scheme having no mechanism for taking into account housing need in areas of high demand, such as in my own constituency of North Belfast. While purchase levels under the house sales scheme have fallen significantly in recent times, that still results in a depletion of urgently needed social housing stock, often in areas where it is needed most and at a time when it is needed most.

To further complicate the issue, we also have the recent decision by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to reclassify housing associations. Whilst the house sales scheme is not specifically referred to by the ONS in its decision, in all probability, its existence or not will be a factor in deliberations on the reclassification reversal. As such, its suspension would support that outcome, which is an outcome that, I think, all parties in the Assembly support.

Critically, the continuation of the scheme in the face of a housing crisis created by a failure to build the levels of new-build social housing units required is the compelling reason to support the motion without the amendment. However, I appreciate that, for other parties, the issue comes down to ideology and the principle of and respect for the right to buy. I respectfully urge Members to look at the success of the house sales scheme as a vehicle to achieve that aspiration. In particular, I urge them to compare it with other homeowner-purchase schemes, such as the co-ownership scheme, which, unlike the house sales scheme, does not deplete an already severely restricted and desperately needed social housing stock.

If we look at, for example, 2013-14, we see that co-ownership assisted more than 1,200 households in acquiring their home. By comparison, between 2012-13 and the end of January 2016, which is a period of four or five years, 1,623 Housing Executive tenants availed themselves of the right to buy their property. My argument is that the evidence demonstrates that other schemes are better

enablers to realise the aspiration of buying your own home. Therefore, support for a suspension pending the outcome of a review with clear terms of reference and within a clear and specified time frame does not, I urge Members to note, amount to an abandonment of that principle.

I seek reassurances today from the Minister that the Committee for Communities will be involved in and consulted on the parameters of any review that comes forth from this debate.

A suspension of the house sales scheme pending a full review of its long-term impact on the provision of our social housing stock is just one of the many measures required to tackle the housing crisis that is devastating the lives of so many of our constituents. I do not want to sound like a broken record, but the game changer in tackling the crisis is to build more new social and affordable housing. We should have clear and ambitious targets, particularly for accommodation for older people and bungalows for disabled people, because that is where the housing need is most acute. If we do not do that, if we do not make land available, if we do not build more social houses —

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

**Ms Mallon:** — if we do not reform the common selection scheme in the private rented sector and if we do not understand that homelessness is much more than rooflessness, we will have failed.

**Mr Allen:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms Mallon:** Yes, go ahead.

**Mr Allen:** Does the Member agree that the availability of land is a key aspect in building new and affordable social housing? Indeed, when we met the housing associations, they voiced their concern about readily available land.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Ms Mallon:** The Member is right. We met a range of stakeholders in the housing sector, and it certainly was a concern of theirs. It is a prerequisite if we are to move forward. I understand, from tabling questions, that the Minister is undertaking a review of the public land available, and we look forward to its findings.

As I said, there is a range of issues that we need to look at and a range of interventions required if we are to tackle homelessness. If we do not do that, we are just tinkering around the edges and continuing to fail the many men and women and their children who come to our constituency offices looking for help.

**Mr McQuillan:** I oppose the motion and the amendment. The housing sales scheme has been part of the fabric of housing policy for nearly 40 years. Its purpose is twofold: first, it has been utilised as a means of generating income to build more social housing, through the price paid for the house and the savings made from the house maintenance budget; and, secondly, its central purpose is to assist those on low incomes to get on to the property ladder. The scheme offers long-term tenants a significant discount on their home — a home that they have been living in for some time. It offers tenants the freedom to buy their home at a knock-down price. Generally, that has been welcomed.

Evidence has shown that those unable to purchase their home through the scheme are likely to continue to rent the property. Suspending or scrapping the scheme

would, therefore, not provide additional homes for the social housing sector. Everyone is aware of the pressure on the social rented sector, given the number of people in statutory housing stress. Those individuals, perhaps, cannot afford to rent in the private rented sector due to the need for a deposit. However, there are agencies out there to help people, such as Smartmove Housing. The Executive are committed to providing affordable homes to our population, and, with the growth of independent housing associations, new homes have been built that, given the economic downturn and the reduction in our block grant, might not otherwise have been built. The Executive are also committed to the Co-ownership scheme, which supports people buying a home, and the Minister has secured an additional £100 million for it.

Another block to providing new and affordable homes is down to the availability of land. Land is in short supply in already developed urban settings that are suitable for new social housing. Land that is suitable also tends to be in demand, which pushes the prices up, making it less affordable. Members will be only too aware of the recent review of the scheme undertaken by the Department for Communities. It was completed only in the last number of weeks, and the Minister will, no doubt, review the conclusions and recommendations in due course. There is, therefore, little need to conduct another review, which the signatories to the motion call for. All government policy is subject to regular review, and the housing sales scheme is no different.

The Programme for Government sets out the aim to provide an additional 9,600 new homes by the end of the mandate. That is an ambitious but achievable target. Therefore, I welcome the commitment of the Minister and the Executive to delivering additional homes for those in the social rented sector, as well as the Minister's commitment to helping people buying homes through the Co-ownership scheme.

**Mr Humphrey:** I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member agree that, going back a number of years, tenants of a housing association property who were in a position to purchase the house were frustrated? Does he agree that hard work should always be rewarded and that, if people have the opportunity to buy their house and pass it on to their family, that is something that we should encourage?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr McQuillan:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I certainly agree with my colleague from North Belfast, who has made a very good point. When people were not able to buy their housing association house, there was uproar.

I support the house sales scheme and the right of long-term social housing tenants to buy their home. I am, of course, conscious of housing need, especially in my constituency, and I favour policies that lead to meeting that need.

**Ms Gildernew:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. Given that the focus so far on housing in general tends to be on urban areas, I will make particular reference to housing need in rural areas. At the moment, NISRA classifies all settlements below a population of 5,000 inhabitants as rural. On the basis of that definition, there are just under 600 settlements located in the rural hinterland, which accounts for approximately 75% of the

land mass of the North of Ireland. In 2011, 667,000 people or 37% of the population resided in rural areas.

The review of the outgoing rural homes and people policy in 2015 identified key statistics for rural areas. Between the censuses in 2001 and 2011, the rural population increased by 15% and the urban population by 7%. Weekly incomes are, on average, lower in rural areas, particularly in the west, where almost 24% of individuals who have low incomes reside. There has been a dramatic decrease in owner-occupancy in rural areas from 76% in 2006 to 67% in 2011 and an increase in the private rented sector in the same years from 9% to 13%.

In March 2016, approximately 13.5% of those on the waiting list for social housing and 11% of those who were registered as homeless wished to be housed in a rural area. The proportion of social housing stock in rural areas, which is about 7%, remains significantly lower than in urban areas, where it is around 18%. Unfitness is higher in rural areas, as is fuel poverty. Analysis of the current waiting list indicates that the main cause of homelessness in rural areas is unreasonable accommodation: a home that does not adequately meet the needs of the occupant. That scenario may be the result of a number of factors, and every case requires a different solution.

In rural areas in particular, where there is a lack of social housing — actually, a lack of available housing for any tenure, including bungalows for disability access — some customers have to make the decision to stay in inadequate or unfit accommodation rather than move to a location away from their family and support network. Therefore, a more flexible approach is required to meet housing need in rural areas.

In spite of all that, the Housing Executive, a major landlord in the North of Ireland, currently has only approximately 14,000 dwellings available to rent in rural areas. We are still not building enough homes, and that is even starker in rural areas. In response to Assembly questions this year, the Department identified that 1,655 people were in housing need in my constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone. However, while the figures do not correlate exactly, the housing need projection figures amounted to 72 homes in the Fermanagh and Omagh district and 538 homes in Mid Ulster — a total of 610 homes when our identified need was for under 2,000 people. Those figures cross three constituencies, so the need is far greater than the projected figures indicate.

While we are waiting to add to our social housing stock, we must in the meantime stop selling off the assets that we have. Young people find it increasingly difficult to get onto the housing ladder, and uncertainty in the job market means that, for many young families, a Housing Executive home with some security of tenure and more affordable rent than in the private rented sector is the best option available. Unfortunately, only the very lucky few will be in a position to do that.

We have to look at good examples elsewhere, as has been mentioned. I was a beneficiary of the right-to-buy scheme. I was born and raised in a Housing Executive house that my parents bought and raised my family in.

However, of me and my nine siblings, not one of us was able to access a social house in the area where we grew up, in our community, despite numerous attempts

to encourage the Housing Executive and housing associations to build new stock.

I have travelled extensively, and this is one of the few places I have been where owning your house seems to be the be-all and end-all. We need a greater stock of rented accommodation, and we need people to be able to access that.

**6.15 pm**

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

**Ms Gildernew:** Therefore, I ask the House to support the motion and suspend the house sales scheme.

**Mr Stalford:** My background has made me very appreciative of the value of good social housing. I was born in Annadale Flats in Ballynafeigh and reared at the bottom of the Ravenhill Road in Carrington Street in a Housing Executive property that my parents were fortunate enough to buy. They availed themselves of the right-to-buy scheme, and, just as I am the first person in my family to get to university, they were the first people in our family to own their home.

I believe in a property-owning democracy, because it is one in which everyone can participate in the economic life of the nation. People have the right and should have the security that comes from owning their own home. I think it was Kenny Guinn, the Governor of Nevada, who said:

*“There is something permanent, and extremely profound, in owning a home.”*

The right-to-buy scheme tapped into the profound yearning in the working-class community that I come from for people to own their home. Why did the people want to own their own home? Well, to have an asset increases their freedom, their security and their stability. It increases their wealth in the longer term — wealth is not a bad word. At the end of your life, it is an asset that you can pass on to your children to help make their life better and more comfortable. I believe strongly in the right-to-buy scheme. The genesis of —

**Mr Agnew:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Stalford:** Yes.

**Mr Agnew:** The Member talks in very strong words about the permanence and security of owning your home. At a time when we have just come through an economic crash and a number of repossessions, does he not agree that the bank owns your home until you have paid it off?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Stalford:** Your solution and the solution offered to us by big-state parties like the Green Party is that people should live their life as clients of the state. The state should provide your home. The state should provide and control every aspect of your life, and at the end of your life — after a lifetime of paying rent — what is there for your children to inherit but the sticks of furniture in your house?

Of course, people were hurt by the collapse of the housing market, but people can be relied on to make decisions for themselves. They do not need us to live their life for them. They do not need us to tell them how to spend their money. You are absolutely right that investing in property, like investing in anything else, brings risk. As I look around the

Chamber, I suspect there are very few people here who are not fortunate enough to own their home.

**Mr Humphrey:** I am grateful to the Member for giving way. My background is exactly the same as his, and I welcome and agree with everything he has said so far. Will the Member agree that it is important that the House does not disincentivise or dissuade people from working hard, buying a home and providing for their family, as others have said? Is there not a certain hypocrisy in some parties suggesting that people should not be in a position to buy their house when they themselves live in houses that they own?

**Mr Stalford:** "Class" is the word that has not been talked about in the debate. I always enjoy listening to middle-class politicians telling me that grammar schools are a bad thing. I always enjoy middle-class politicians telling me that working-class people should not avail themselves of the right to buy and should not have the opportunity to purchase their home. It is easy to say things like that when you possess the resources, whether through inherited wealth or other ways, to travel through life comfortably. People should be afforded the opportunity. When people purchase their home, it is a really empowering experience that brings stability and strength not only to their family but to the wider community.

I said at the start that I recognised the importance and value of social housing. I welcome the fact that the Government are committed to building more social homes than have ever been built before. It is important that we do that because the housing problems in Northern Ireland will not be solved by complete right to buy or complete state control; we will have to use various prongs in this battle. I welcome the fact that we will build more social homes and that money is being invested there. I do not think, however, that the solution to our very real housing problems can be achieved by us, as politicians at Stormont, saying to people, "You do not have the right to avail yourself of schemes and systems like right to buy that many of us availed ourselves of or many of our parents availed themselves of". It is for the same reason that I support grammar schools: I do not believe in climbing to the top of the ladder and then kicking it —

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

**Mr Stalford:** I do not believe in climbing to the top of the ladder and then kicking it away from the communities that I come from.

**Mr McCrossan:** I welcome the opportunity to participate in today's debate, and I thank Fra McCann for bringing this forward. It is a very important debate, and it is one that we could all talk on for a considerable period.

The DUP Member has missed the point of this. My colleague certainly did not say that this is about removing the opportunity to avail oneself of owning a home; it is about the reality that we are in. We are in a housing crisis. We are in a housing crisis. We are in a housing crisis. The Minister needs to grasp that very quickly. I note, from the statements that he has put out in recent months, his vision to build 9,000-plus new social houses across Northern Ireland. In my constituency and in many constituencies, particularly those represented by the Members who have spoken so passionately in the Chamber today, the reality hits hard. There is no availability of social housing.

In the last week, a mother with five children came to me. Due to financial difficulties, her house had been repossessed, and she has nowhere to go. She has a son at university in Liverpool who cannot come home for Christmas because she does not know where she and her other four children will be. When she presented to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, she was told that she had 120 points. Even if she had 150 points, she still would not be housed, because there is no available housing. Another mother, who is separated from her husband and has three children, two with learning disabilities, is homeless and has nowhere to go. She came to my office — she may have attended Sinn Féin's office in the same constituency — begging —

**Mr McQuillan:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McCrossan:** Yes, I will.

**Mr McQuillan:** Will the Member perhaps tell us how suspending the scheme would help his constituent?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr McCrossan:** We need to ensure that, if we are to sell off stock, we replenish it, reinvest and build. That has not happened for years. We have heard for years about the need to build houses. Thankfully, following his appointment, Minister Givan has, in recent times, finally grasped the nettle. The Government have finally woken up and realised that there is crisis and difficulty in our constituencies. When people cannot get housed, we are in severe difficulties with the confidence that people have in the House.

The figures are stark and have been repeated throughout. As an MLA in a rural constituency, I share the very real concerns articulated by Michelle Gildernew. I also listened to the MLAs from the cities, and it is the same there. The solution is to build houses. This is not about preventing people from owning their home; the SDLP has largely supported the positive concept that that has been for some years. I have family members who bought their social house and benefited hugely as a result of that. They have put their children through university and done many other things. When the supply is not there, however, we have to look after what we have. The House needs to note that very quickly indeed.

We have huge housing challenges ahead of us, but the motion before us is the right one, given the circumstances that we are presented with. We must suspend the scheme until we have houses built. At the minute, all that we are looking at is a figure of 9,000 houses, and we are saying, "Let's build houses. Let's build houses". Until they materialise, however, it is only a dream and something that is written on paper.

My constituency is probably the one out of all 18 constituencies that has had the fewest social houses built in the past number of years. Anyone who has listened to the debate will know that every party in the House feels strongly about the issue, which affects us all. It affects everyone throughout our communities. It is not about talking around the Chamber but about grasping the reality. Minister, there is a crisis, and we must suspend the scheme for now. I urge the House to support the motion until such times as the figure of 9,000 or 9,500 materialises as actual houses. I should say that I would like

to see it go much further than the figure that has been put out there.

**Mr Agnew:** I note that, as we debate the motion, the Simon Community, which, of course, provides services and accommodation to the homeless, is recruiting for 100 new jobs. As our social housing sector contracts, unfortunately, our homelessness sector grows. As a former employee of the Simon Community, I suppose that I welcome the good work that it does as an organisation, but I know that those who work for it ultimately do not want to see the charity having to grow. They want to see the problem of homelessness resolved.

I speak on the motion with that experience. I ask myself, quite genuinely, what impact the right-to-buy scheme has on the most vulnerable in our society. If you are looking for the most vulnerable, you do not need to look much further than the homeless. You can talk about aspiration in this society, but the people whom I worked with had an aspiration of a permanent roof over their head, whether owned or otherwise. It was for a secure place to live, and the house sales scheme was not going to help them in that objective. In fact, as we have seen the number of houses in our social sector decrease —

**Mr Stalford:** I appreciate the Member giving way. He says that the right-to-buy scheme denies the most vulnerable people a roof over their head. How can that be when the people who are buying under the scheme are those who occupy the house? Therefore, it is the roof over their head that they are purchasing.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Agnew:** I thank the Member for his intervention, but I do not think that I used the words that he said. I will tackle his point head-on: many people will have purchased their house under the house sales scheme who may have otherwise, were it not for the house sales scheme, bought from the existing homeowner sector. Ultimately, as a state — we are a party that likes a big state, as the Member put it — we are reducing our ability to accommodate the most vulnerable in our society. Over time, through the gradual privatisation of our social housing stock, we are reducing our ability to provide for the most vulnerable — the homeless.

I come to the issue of the 9,600 homes that we intend to build, announced by the Minister. I welcome that figure, but I welcome it in the context of the low estimation of 11,000 homeless, 22,000 in housing stress and almost 40,000 on the waiting list. If we look at recent sales, in the past couple of years, we have sold approximately 500 social houses through the house sales scheme. I do not believe that we can, on the one hand, subsidise the building of new homes while, on the other hand, we are subsidising the selling-off of our social housing stock.

### 6.30 pm

We need a sustainable solution to homelessness, and we cannot expect to find one if we build with one hand and sell with the other. Any review of the house sales scheme would find, when we look over the duration of the scheme, that, ultimately, we have sold more than we have built, thereby reducing our ability to provide for the most vulnerable in society.

I do not accept the point that this is somehow middle-class politicians telling working-class people that they do not have the right to buy. I could debate my working-class credentials with Mr Stalford all day if we so desired, but it is not about my identity nor his, my background nor his; it is about the reality of the situation, which is why not only do I propose and support the suspension of the house sales scheme, which I believe has been detrimental to our social housing provision, but it is why I am willing to stand up in this Chamber and say to my constituents that we should remove the rates cap, as, as I put it, my constituents in Kilcooley are subsidising my constituents in Cultra.

I will stand up and say that those who have more should pay more, and, in doing so, say that there should be more money in the pot to build new houses. It is not simply saying that we have to set against each other those in social housing who may wish to buy and those who can only hope for a social house; it is saying that, as a society, we should invest in social housing. As part of that, we should suspend the house sales scheme, but we should also look at the wealth in our society and look at the wealthiest and ask them to contribute more so that those who do not have more can get the very basics of life — food, shelter, warmth and security in their own home.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Mr Eamonn McCann, who has three minutes.

**Mr E McCann:** I have no idea why that stipulation excited some amusement among Members of the Alliance Party. It has been said by Mr Stalford, who, I see, is not present any more, and that is fair enough, that people who supported the suspension of the scheme were denying other working-class people the right to buy their own homes and, moreover, that the people who buy their own homes then live in their own homes. Therefore, there is no question of it having an effect on the stock of social housing.

If you look across the water and at experience anywhere, including here, you will discover that a considerable percentage of houses sold under right to buy schemes end up not in the hands of the people who were living in the house in the first place but in the hands of buy to rent landlords. That is increasingly the situation. I can tell you that, where I come from, it is not unusual for individuals to own three, four, five and six houses that they rent out and they make a fortune, and they buy them from the people who bought them. If you buy your own house, you buy it at less than market value, and then there is an opportunity in one or two years' time to sell it and make a profit. That is happening over and over again, and it is depleting not increasing the stock of social housing.

As we all know, housing is terrifically important in this society. More than 40 years ago, the shortage of housing, more than any other factor, caused a general crisis in this society, yet what are we doing after all that time? We are flogging off social housing, and, at the same time, we are strangling the Housing Executive, which was created by mass pressure as a result of the crisis that I just mentioned from about 40 years ago.

We need a lot more social housing; if we had sufficient social housing for everybody who needs it, this question would not need debated at all. Here, very briefly, in half a minute, is my plan for doing that. The Housing Executive should be brought back fully into the public sector and

allowed to borrow money on the market. At the moment, you can borrow for next to nothing at minimal, effectively zero, interest rates. The money borrowed should be used for a crash programme of building social housing. If you build social housing on a sufficient scale, not only are you solving the housing crisis but you are creating work for chippies, electricians, plumbers, plasterers, painters, glaziers —

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

**Mr E McCann:** — and all the rest of it. Stop this scheme. Do not just suspend it; abolish it.

**Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities):** I thank Mr McCann for tabling the motion and giving us an opportunity to discuss matters relating to housing. In the first six months during which I have held office, it is housing by far that has brought me most into the Assembly and for justifiable reasons. I have been able to get engaged on a range of issues, not least with Mr McCann, who brought me to Divis tower recently to meet tenants there. That was an experience in itself, and I saw the conditions that they are living in and heard the concerns that they have. I was able, with Mr Stalford, to go to the men's hostel in Utility Street in the Village area, and I have been to Stella Maris. I have also been to the launch of the new builds that we are doing in Ballymena, Bangor and Ballyclare, for example. Housing is a big part of this Department, and I recognise its importance to the community that we all serve.

In dealing with the house sales scheme, we must recognise that the way that we need to address our housing demands is much broader, rather than looking at one specific area in isolation from the whole gamut of debate that exists around how we will provide the housing that we need and the framework that we need to use to meet the challenges that exist in respect of borrowing money. It is not as simple as Mr Eamonn McCann's suggestion for the Housing Executive. If only it were as easy as that, but it is not when you have to deal with the real world. The fact that the motion looks at this in isolation is, I think, the reason why our party is not in a position to support it.

It is certainly an issue that, as Minister, I am looking at and will continue to consider because there are aspects of this, not least the scheme itself and the principle behind the scheme, that we can debate. Is the discount being offered justifiable based on current market values? Should the levels of discount be looked at more immediately? Some may argue that, at this time, it is too generous and some may argue that, for people on low incomes, the discount scheme enables them to be able to get access to their home. That is an area that may be under consideration.

I will now deal with the specifics around the motion. Members have highlighted the fact that the house sales scheme has been a part of the housing policy landscape for nearly 40 years. An important part of good policymaking is ensuring that we keep our policies under ongoing review with the aim of establishing whether they are still fit for purpose. The house sales scheme is no exception to that rule and, therefore, my officials have carried out a number of periodic reviews of the scheme, with the most recent review being concluded only within the last few weeks. I will be considering the findings of that review and the options for the way forward in the near future.

This most recent review was broader in scope than previous reviews as it included an examination as to what

extent the house sales scheme has met the wider policy objectives around increasing home ownership, supporting social mobility and delivering mixed tenure. The review also considered other key aspects of the scheme including its financial implications and its impact on our social housing stock over the medium to longer term.

As might be expected, my housing officials have collated and analysed a wide range of primary and secondary evidence during the review process. This has included information on the number and location of house sales over the past 37 years; academic research on the wider policy aims underpinning government support for home ownership; evidence on how the house sales scheme has impacted on the provision of social housing; and, where possible, detailed financial data, including how the house sales scheme impacts on overall cash flows of social landlords. The review concludes that the house sales scheme, which has facilitated the sale of over 120,000 houses to sitting tenants over nearly 40 years, has undoubtedly contributed to a reduction in our social rented stock, particularly in those areas of high social need. I know, Members, that that conclusion was not unexpected.

The issue of house sales is more complex than it first appears and is more complex than Members have outlined. It is simply not the case, as many claim, that over 120,000 more houses would be available to let to those on the social housing waiting list if the house sales scheme had not been introduced.

Indeed, the evidence strongly indicates that many sitting tenants would have remained in their social home as a renter because they would not have had the financial means or inclination to become homeowners without the house sales scheme.

The financial ramifications of the scheme are also less clear-cut than might perhaps be expected. There is often a significant deficit between the revenue achieved from a sale and the cost of building a new social home. That said, the sale of homes reduces the Executive's social housing maintenance bills, particularly when those sales are of older stock social homes. The house sales scheme is also a source of revenue to fund the maintenance of residual social housing stock, as well as to provide part-funding for new-build development.

Of course, finance is not the only barrier to replacing and enhancing our social housing stock. The lack of suitable land for housing development in areas of high demand for social housing, which, coincidentally, are also those areas of higher house sales, is another key barrier.

**Mr F McCann:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Givan:** I will indeed.

**Mr F McCann:** I understand what you are saying about the 120,000 houses that may have been under Housing Executive control, but would it be safe to say that if there are close to 9,000 houses a year that are available for relet, either to people who are homeless or others who are on the waiting list, and if you sold off over half your housing stock, that would seriously increase the number of houses available for relet? Selling off your stock impacts on the numbers of people who can be rehoused or considered for rehousing.

**Mr Givan:** I acknowledge the point the Member makes about selling off houses. It reduces the availability of

housing for meeting the social needs that exist. That is a point I accept. The solution to that, however, is something we might part company on when asking how we go about providing the houses we need whilst maintaining, or adapting and changing, the housing sales scheme. That is something I am looking at in how we go forward in this scheme. But taking that in isolation without addressing the broader issues on the need to build more homes, the issue is how you can unlock the potential that, I believe, exists in the Housing Executive to re-engage on this issue. Members know that, for many years, the Housing Executive has not been in a position to borrow money because of the Treasury rules it operates under. Is that an area we can look at to help us ultimately meet the end objective, which is to provide more social and affordable homes that can meet the demands of our population?

Let me just say it is important to highlight in the context of the motion that the era of high social housing sales is long over and, I suggest, is unlikely to return. Over the last financial year, only 387 Housing Executive and 30 housing association properties were sold to sitting tenants. The majority of today's social tenants have limited disposable income. That fact, coupled with the imposition of more stringent mortgage market regulation in the wake of the economic downturn, means that homeownership will remain out of reach for many social tenants for some time.

Therefore, the abolition or suspension of the house sales scheme would have a limited impact on increasing housing supply and reducing levels of housing stress, at least over the short- to medium-term future. That was, indeed, highlighted when Mr McQuillan put that very point to Mr McCrossan, who, I know, often uses opportunities in the House to grandstand. He asked, "What difference would that make to constituents coming into my office today?", and Mr McCrossan was not able to answer. That, indeed, is the valid point about suspending the scheme now. It would not address the short- to medium-term issues we are facing.

The ambitious programme of work, ongoing and planned, to deliver 9,600 additional social homes across Northern Ireland by the end of this Programme for Government period will ultimately take us much further forward in addressing the need to meet the demand that exists.

I know we have addressed a range of issues in previous motions on affordable housing. Nichola Mallon mentioned the ONS, which, indeed, is an emerging issue in how this scheme operates. Again, that is something that is being dealt with as we continue to navigate through that process.

**Mr Allen:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Givan:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Allen:** Minister, are you in a position to advise how much of the money raised from sales under the housing sales scheme has gone directly into social housing?

**6.45 pm**

**Mr Speaker:** I am not sure whether the Minister had decided to give way or had finished. Do you wish to respond, Minister?

**Mr Givan:** I had finished, but I will come back to the Member.

**Ms Armstrong:** It will come as no surprise that I urge the Chamber to support the amendment. Looking at the motion and the amendment, you see that the amendment flips the motion on its head. Doing the review first means that you can establish whether we should suspend the scheme. One of the things that I have to ask is this: what about the people who are currently in the process? If we suspend the scheme, we take their opportunity away from them. I speak personally and as a rural dweller, and I have listened to others talk about being in a rural area. I know one lady who bought her home after her children had left and her husband had died, because she was terrified that she, as a single woman living on her own in a rural area, would lose her home to a family. She thought that there was the potential that she would be asked to move out, so she bought her home. That is one of the benefits of the scheme.

I do not think that we should suspend the house sales scheme until a review has been completed. I heard what some on the DUP Benches said, and the Minister talked about reviews happening. If the reviews are happening, let us see the outcomes, Minister. That means that we should not suspend the scheme until we see those outcomes. It is perfectly reasonable to do that, and then you could support the motion — I am smiling.

The point of the review would be to assess whether a suspension of the scheme would be wise. It may not be wise. The scheme is in operation. It cannot simply be suspended. As I said, that would let down people in the scheme, and it would have a very negative impact on families who are in the process. It would take away their opportunities.

Jonathan Bell spoke about different bits and pieces and talked about a review, but we need to look at the long-term impact. What is the long-term impact? If there is the potential for another 9,600 houses to be built, and the homes that have already been sold are out of the system, what will the impact be? I think that everybody in the Chamber has said that we need new houses, that we need more houses and that we need more suitable houses. Believe me: some three-bedroom Housing Executive houses would not be fit to go on sale today. I see the damp; I see the damage; I see the maintenance needed. Sometimes, I feel for people who bought those houses, but they were built many, many years ago.

Andy Allen, I could not agree with you more: the scheme is not the problem. Our problem is that we do not have enough suitable housing. You are absolutely right about that. However, we need to review the house sales scheme because there is a bit of a problem with it.

Michelle Gildernew talked about rural areas. There are a number of derelict homes in the rural area of my Strangford constituency, which, if fixed and put back into circulation, would take away some of the problems that I see regularly when people come to me — people who have to rent from the private sector and then have to go for food bank vouchers at the end of the month because they cannot afford to eat. We need to have a review and look at the whole system. It is not just the houses that were sold off; it is the houses that are sitting derelict and wasted.

Christopher Stalford was correct when he talked about permanence and security. That is all that people want. My dad lives in a Housing Executive house. We moved into it when I was about a year and a half. I will not give

my age away, but he has been there for quite a number of decades. He will not be moving out any time soon. People live in homes, and they want that security and permanence.

I am not saying that the house sales scheme is perfect. I am saying that there is an issue with it, and we need to look at a review. We need to consider what the difficulties are. We need to grow our housing stock; we need to sort out the problem of empty and derelict homes; and we need extra housing to deal with the growing waiting lists. That needs to be suitable housing, including pensioners' houses and houses suitable for people with disabilities.

I do not want to have to continue having a feeling of powerlessness when a constituent comes to me in my Newtownards office for help in finding a house. All I can tell them is how long the waiting list is. It is a feeling that I am sure everyone in the Chamber has had, and we do not want that to continue. That is why we need to review and reform: to create a system that builds for every need in the Northern Irish community. We must give this great thought and consideration. We should have a review, not go for an immediate suspension. Doing so would harm people who have striven to buy their own home and who are taking benefit of the discount.

I ask the Chamber to support the amendment, and I ask the Minister to consider the timescales. Will he comment on the contents of the review and how that can go forward? That would give us something to tell people —

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

**Ms Armstrong:** — and give them hope for better housing.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I thank Fra McCann for proposing the motion. This is not the first housing motion that we have debated in the Chamber, and, hopefully, it will not be the last. Our position has been very clear: we cannot support the Alliance Party amendment. The Alliance Party is either not listening or does not understand. Fra McCann explained that the suspension would not be immediate and used examples from Wales and Scotland to try to give some succour and assurance. It is your right to table an amendment, but we will not support it.

People come at this issue differently, but there is agreement across the board that we need to look at the whole area of housing. I would use that support during other debates. If people are being genuine — I believe that they are — when they say that the right to a social home is fundamental to people's sense of who they are, how they look after themselves and their family and their sense of well-being and security, we need to take that into consideration when we look at aspects of debates in this place.

The house sales scheme is OK in and of itself. If you are doing everything else, it is grand, but the difficulty is that we have not been doing enough of everything else. Eamonn McCann raised the point that I was going to make, but I know that people who bought their houses in north Belfast went on to sell them to landlords who put tenants in. The new tenants are often the same people who sold the house; they are getting housing benefit to pay rent for the house that they bought. That is not saving the public purse any money.

Equally, I heard the Minister and Jonathan Bell talk about saving on maintenance costs as if there is a massive

maintenance budget and a huge maintenance programme. There is maintenance, some of which I can see in my constituency, and my constituents really appreciate it, but let us not kid ourselves that there are all these diggers and tradespeople out with hard hats and belts doing all this maintenance, because they are not. We are not doing enough of that work.

Michelle Gildernew made the point about rural communities. I have seen some of the houses in rural areas, and they are disgraceful. That is not something that any of us can be proud of. I am not saying that it is the Minister's fault — it is not — but it is not good. I sit in a very densely populated constituency, but you can go to a house in a rural area, particularly an older couple's house, and find that they are paying an absolute fortune to heat the place because it does not have great insulation. None of us wants that.

If there are all these white vans, send them into the country areas to get some of those houses fixed.

**Mr Allen:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I will, surely.

**Mr Allen:** The Sinn Féin motion calls for the suspension of the housing sales scheme until a review has been carried out into the long-term impact of the scheme on social housing. Was Sinn Féin not aware of the review that the Minister has been carrying out?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I was not aware of the review, and I do not think that you were either. I sense that others were also not aware of it. From being in a Department, I know that reviews happen all the time. It is good to come into a Department and look back at what had happened in order to go forward. I do not have an issue with that, but I will have an issue if we do not find out the outcome of the review because we sit on the Committee. We will all find out the outcome, and that is accepted. That is scrutiny. I was not aware that a review is ongoing, and I certainly did not know the terms of reference until the Minister mentioned them. Jonathan knew about them, but that is OK because he and the Minister are in the same party. I would expect that, and none of us can carp about it.

This has been a good debate, despite the fact that there is going to be a Division. People welcome the fact that almost 10,000 social homes will be built in this mandate. We need to look at that to try to bring more back in.

**Mr McCrossan:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Very quickly, Daniel.

**Mr McCrossan:** I will be very quick. I thank the Member for clarifying the 10,000 figure, but it will be about five years before we see that come through. What will the list be like then? Does the Member have concerns about that?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I do, and you just interrupted me at a good moment, because I think a few Members mentioned empty homes. If the empty homes strategy was robust enough and there was investment in it, you would have the availability for more people to have a home.

The Minister and others mentioned that we need to have suitable land for the development of social housing. I have asked many Departments, including some of my colleagues' Departments, about the availability of land for regeneration, including social housing. I have to say that

some of the answers I got back were complete waffle. What I see is that, when it comes to regeneration, if it was to build a 40-foot all-shiny, glassy thing in east Belfast, it would happen, but, if it is 40 houses in north Belfast, it might not. I have a problem with that. I have a big problem with that. No disrespect to anybody in east Belfast, but there was never an issue when it came to regeneration, when land was made available there, but when it comes to regeneration in some parts of your constituency — I am talking about regeneration generally — it did not happen, and it did not happen at a pace. Christopher is coyly acknowledging what I say, even though he probably does not agree.

**Mr Stalford:** Will the Member take a point?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Just a wee one.

**Mr Stalford:** Thank you. I agree with you about how it is unfair. Some people seem to think that Belfast consists of east Belfast and west Belfast. In that vein, can she have a word with the Finance Minister about getting me a rates relief area for Sandy Row and Donegall Road?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Unfortunately, the people of Sandy Row and Donegall Road are subsidising the people who live in BT9, and the Member knows that. I am glad he welcomes the Finance Minister's move on rates, even —

**Mr Stalford:** Business rates.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I know, but — do you know what? — I am on my feet, so I will talk about my own, and you can talk about yours.

We need to have a proper, mature discussion about the provision of social housing. Greater investment is needed.

I am delighted but not really surprised that the SDLP is supporting the motion and not the amendment. They too, in their constituencies, see the difficulties that their constituents face with homelessness, but they have also probably seen examples of social housing that was bought by tenants now getting sublet by private landlords, who are using public money. I do not think that anybody, including the Minister and his officials, could stand over that and are not going to.

I would like to see, as Fra said, a serious discussion after the review. Once that review is concluded and goes in front of the Committee, I would like to come back to this discussion. There are examples of what happened in Scotland, as Fra outlined. Indeed, I acknowledge the work of the research service for the debate; it has been very good. We will use the research on the outcome of the review that is under way and that the Minister is analysing to see what we do next. If there are not, as the Member and other Members said, the sales that there were in 2003, all the predictions are that that is likely to increase. If that is going to increase and we do not have a like-for-like project running in parallel, what are the alternatives? They are not great for the social housing stock unless we build at the rate at which we sell, and I am not arguing for even that.

It has been a good debate. Most of the debates we have had, particularly on housing, have been good. A lot of people watch the debates and read them afterwards. It is helpful that they are not as pointed or, at times, as offensive as they have been. At times — it is no surprise — we come to this and future debates from different ideological positions. That is OK — that is what politics

is about — but I am particularly pleased to see that there is overwhelming support for additional social housing provision. That is a good thing. I am disappointed that we will not get support for our motion, but that is politics.

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*Question put a second time and negatived.*

*Main Question put.*

*The Assembly divided:*

*Ayes 35; Noes 49.*

#### **AYES**

*Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms S Bradley, Mr Carroll, Ms Dillon, Mr Durkan, Ms Fearon, Ms Gildernew, Ms Hanna, Mr Hazzard, Mr Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr E McCann, Mr F McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McMullan, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Mullan, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Gildernew and Mr F McCann.*

#### **NOES**

*Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Ms Armstrong, Mrs Barton, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mr Clarke, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKee, Mr McQuillan, Mr Middleton, Lord Morrow, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Smith, Mr Stalford, Mr Weir.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr Robinson.*

*Main Question accordingly negatived.*

*Adjourned at 7.14 pm.*



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# Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 29 November 2016

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

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## Assembly Business

**Mr Attwood:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I refer you to the personal statement that you made to the House last week. The second paragraph stated that your involvement with Charter NI was:

*"no different than it would be with any organisation in my constituency". — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 121, p1, col 1].*

Do you have any intention to review that statement in the light of a report in the media today that details what appears to have happened earlier this year at the Policing Board? A panel of two people brought a proposal to the Policing Board whereby Charter NI would have received money to run a pilot scheme. It is not clear how Charter NI had knowledge of the work of the panel or how it was recommended for that pilot. In the light of what the Policing Board appears to have recorded, do you have any intention to reconsider the content of the second paragraph of your statement?

**Mr Speaker:** I am actively reviewing my constituency interests with the Speaker's Office, in line with the cautious approach that I outlined last week. I made the statement last week in recognition of the fact that I am now in a different role.

## Ministerial Statement

### **British-Irish Council: Summit**

**Mrs Foster (The First Minister):** In accordance with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the twenty-eighth summit meeting of the British-Irish Council, which took place in the Vale Resort in Wales on Friday 25 November 2016. The deputy First Minister, Minister Weir and I attended the summit, and they have agreed that I make this statement on their behalf.

The Welsh Government hosted the summit, and the heads of delegations were welcomed by the First Minister of Wales, the Rt Hon Carwyn Jones AM. The Irish Government delegation was led by the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD. The UK Government delegation was led by the Secretary of State for Wales, the Rt Hon Alun Cairns MP. The Scottish Government delegation was led by the Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP.

The Isle of Man Government delegation was led by the Chief Minister, the Hon Howard Quayle MHK. The Government of Jersey delegation was led by the Chief Minister, Senator Ian Gorst, and the Government of Guernsey delegation was led by the Chief Minister, Deputy Gavin St Pier. A full list of delegates who attended the summit is attached to the copy of the statement provided to Members.

This was the first meeting of the Council since it convened in Cardiff in July 2016 for an extraordinary summit to discuss the outcome of the UK's referendum on membership of the European Union. Ministers used the discussion to reflect on developments since that meeting. Ministers updated the Council on their activity with regard to the UK's exit from the European Union, particularly on relations between member Administrations and arrangements that have been put in place to facilitate and strengthen engagement. They further discussed some of the themes identified in July, including specific sectors such as the agriculture, agri-food and fisheries industries, economy and trade, free movement of goods and people, the common travel area and relations with the European Union. Ministers noted an update on implications for the Council's work sectors of the UK's exit from the European Union. They mandated officials to keep this under review and to report back to the Council.

In concluding its discussions, the Council reiterated its commitment to facilitating harmonious and mutually beneficial relationships among the people of these islands, as set out in the 1998 agreement. Ministers agreed that

the forthcoming developments underline the importance and value of the Council as a unique forum to share views, enhance cooperation and strengthen relationships.

Ministers with particular responsibility for early years policy met in advance of the summit meeting to consider a paper prepared by the Council's early years work sector. The discussion was subsequently taken forward by heads of Administration, who welcomed the progress made by member Administrations in taking forward the early years agenda since the 2012 summit. The Council agreed that early years play a critical role in creating strong foundations for children and families to thrive. It also recognised the importance of investment in early years to generate better value for money in the public sector by moving from curative to preventative models of service delivery and supporting social mobility.

Responding to the paper prepared by the work sector, Ministers had a detailed discussion about the key challenges and opportunities ahead. All Administrations affirmed the significant benefits gained from their collective participation in this work sector and endorsed proposals for future collaboration, particularly on the following priorities: the workforce; supporting families; parenting; and quality assurance and assessment of developmental progress.

The Council noted progress on a review of its activity, including analysis of emerging and established Programmes for Government across member Administrations. A number of areas and emerging topics, such as public health and raising attainment, are under review, and a further report will be provided to the summit in June 2017.

Ministers also welcomed the implementation by the existing work sectors of the task-and-finish approach adopted at the Glasgow summit and endorsed the forward work plans proposed by the environment, early years and transport work sectors. Work on the final stages of the review will now be progressed in advance of the next summit, which will be hosted by the Northern Ireland Executive.

The Council noted the BIC secretariat's mid-year report and welcomed the relaunch of the Council's website.

As the final item of business, the Council noted that the next BIC summit will be hosted by the Northern Ireland Executive in June 2017.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I note that Ministers took the opportunity to reflect on developments on the UK's exit from the European Union since the extraordinary summit in July. In the First Minister's assessment, what are the main developments?

**Mrs Foster:** We were very interested to hear, for example, from the Crown dependencies — the Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey — about how their negotiations have been going with the UK Government. Their access to the customs union comes, of course, under protocol 3. They reported that they were having very good discussions with Minister Robin Walker, who is responsible for the Crown dependencies, and hope that those good discussions continue.

At the meeting, the Council agreed that the main issues for the other Administrations were accessing the single market, having minimal disruption to the ongoing discussions, particularly with the UK Government, and

having no hard border between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Finally, it was noted that the British-Irish Council was a very valuable place for the eight Administrations to come together to discuss matters and hear how the other Administrations were tackling the issues in front of them. It was a very worthwhile engagement.

**Mr Stalford:** Will the First Minister provide the House with an assessment of the level of cooperation that exists between the Executive and the Government of the Republic of Ireland? Obviously, once we leave the European Union, cooperation to the mutual benefit of the people of Northern Ireland and the Republic should continue.

**Mrs Foster:** I thank the Member for his question. Indeed, this was a subject matter not just between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland but between the other member Administrations and the Republic of Ireland, recognising that it would be the only Administration of the eight that would be remaining in the European Union. There was a good discussion around that. The Member will be aware that the Scottish First Minister is in Dublin at the moment, obviously strengthening ties between Scotland and the Republic of Ireland.

It was telling that, of the four areas that were agreed, in terms of the common areas where all the Administrations could agree, the fact that no hard border between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom was one of those issues shows that everyone recognises that we have a very particular set of circumstances here. That has been recognised through the fact that the common travel area was in existence before our membership of the European Union, and that should remain after our exit from the European Union as well.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I thank the First Minister for her statement and her responses thus far. I want to ask her about the updates from the various Ministers. Did the British Government further update Ministers at the Council meeting on the position that they are adopting on matters such as the single European market and open borders etc?

**Mrs Foster:** As I have indicated, all the members, including the UK Government, signed up to those four areas: maximum, best possible access to the single market; with minimal disruption; no hard border; and the fact that the BIC was a valuable arena to have these discussions. They signed up to that as well and that was their position. Obviously, they referenced the fact that we are having ongoing discussions between the different devolved Administrations and the UK Government and, indeed, that those will continue next week at the Joint Ministerial Committee meeting on exiting the European Union. That is the second meeting of that group, and it will take place next week. The discussions and the bilaterals continue, looking at the analysis and gathering information, so that, when article 50 is triggered sometime early in quarter 1 of next year, we are ready and the position of Northern Ireland is well known to the UK Government.

**Mr McPhillips:** I thank the First Minister for her statement. What discussions has she had concerning a British agricultural policy (BAP)? Do the regions share the SDLP's concerns that article 50 could be triggered in May without contingency planning in place?

**Mrs Foster:** I do not think that article 50 is going to be triggered in May. I think that it will be triggered before that, probably around March. We had a good discussion around the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy and the need to have a framework at a United Kingdom level.

At the moment, the CAP and a lot of agricultural policies come directly from Europe to the devolved Administrations, and there is a need to have a more joined-up approach at the centre on UK agricultural policy. That was reflected in the discussion, as indeed was the fact that it will be important to have more flexibility than our fishermen have had to date under the common fisheries policy. I thought that there was a very good discussion around that. Of course, it is an ongoing discussion, and it will be taken further by our Agriculture Minister as she continues to engage in bilaterals with the UK Government.

**Mr Dickson:** Thank you, First Minister, for your statement, in which you say that arrangements:

*“have been put in place to facilitate and strengthen engagement.”*

Can you tell the House what those arrangements are and how you will be strengthening engagement? Do you agree with my assessment that the reality is that the British-Irish Council is not being used to its full potential and, indeed, that is indicative of the fact that your next meeting will not be until after article 50 is triggered?

**10.45 am**

**Mrs Foster:** In that last point, you referred to the next scheduled meeting. We did have an extraordinary meeting in July of this year, which Cardiff hosted, and then we were back in Wales again just last week. We may well decide to have a British-Irish Council meeting before July, and that was left open. It will probably mean that Northern Ireland will host two British-Irish Council meetings, which is absolutely fine by me. We will welcome all the Administrations to Northern Ireland, and I am very much looking forward to it.

There are two points: first, there are the workstreams, and there is a little conversation about those in this statement, but they have really come into their own. There was a very good discussion from our perspective, which Minister Weir was involved with, on early years and the recognition that the earlier there is an intervention with young children, the more we can benefit from that not just individually, obviously, or as a family but as a society.

It is generally recognised that, since the vote on 23 June, the British-Irish Council has been revitalised in how members relate to each other and how we are going to relate to each other in the future. It is a very useful east-west institution, and I foresee it will be very useful in the future.

**Mr Robinson:** I thank the First Minister for her statement. Will she give her assessment of the contribution Northern Ireland has been able to make on early years?

**Mrs Foster:** Yes, the early years discussion was led by Minister Weir, who was with us at the BIC, and there was a meeting before the full plenary session between the respective Ministers to speak about this. The Department of Education in Northern Ireland is actually to host the

early years work sector meeting on supporting families, and that will include multi-agency support for families, early intervention and prevention programmes, next year. It will be over to us to make sure we drive forward on the early years programme.

Of course, we have a good story to tell about early years. Not only Education but the Executive Office has developed programmes to intervene as early as we can. Certainly, through the Delivering Social Change (DSC) programme in the Executive Office, we have had a very good nurture programme, intervening early on to try and help young people to realise their potential further down the line. We used to talk about the fact that we needed to speak to children at school to alert them to the possibilities for them when they left school. Now, there is a recognition that we need to intervene before children even reach school. I welcome that, and it is something that we can add a lot of value to, and I very much look forward to hearing how that work sector progresses when Minister Weir takes the lead next year.

**Ms Seeley:** I thank the First Minister for her remarks. Will she elaborate on the challenges for early years that were identified during the discussions?

**Mrs Foster:** Of course, the main challenge, as with a lot of the programmes that we want to take forward, is about budget availability and the money to intervene. If we had any amount of money to do all these things, we could do a lot more, and that is recognised right across the Administrations.

Also, the Administrations are moving at a different pace in relation to early years. Some are doing a lot more than others, and it is good to learn what some of the Administrations are doing about early years. For example, we learned that, in Jersey, they have a 1,001-day programme, which they run from conception onwards. They actually have a programme to support the woman and, later on, her child for 1,001 days, and I thought that was a very innovative way to get involved with families and to help support them.

Yes, there is a good deal of learning, and that is one of the benefits of the British-Irish Council — not just learning from the larger Administrations, such as Scotland and Wales, but, sometimes, because of their size, the Crown dependencies can bring forward some very interesting programmes as well.

**Mr Logan:** I thank the First Minister for her statement. Was it made clear to the other BIC members what the key priorities are for Northern Ireland in the exit negotiations?

**Mrs Foster:** In the plenary discussion, which took up most of the British-Irish Council meeting, each of the Administrations had an opportunity to set out where their priorities lay. The deputy First Minister and I, of course, reflected on the letter of 10 August to our Prime Minister and then talked about continuing opportunities and challenges related to that. We absolutely set out what we see as our common interests but also some of the more unique challenges and opportunities that we have here in Northern Ireland, not least those related to the common travel area. There was a good and open discussion about those issues.

**Mr Beggs:** I thank the First Minister for her statement, in which she mentioned the free movement of goods

and people and the common travel area. Was there any discussion with the various members of the Council on the attitude that they are picking up from the other 27 members of the European Union to the issue of passport control at the future border with the European Union, which will be between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland, and possibly at the Larne to Cairnryan connection with the rest of the United Kingdom? Can she assure me that I will not have to show my passport to visit Scotland?

**Mrs Foster:** First, the UK Government have made it entirely clear, as indeed have I, that there will be no internal borders within the United Kingdom. That is a red line in my negotiations. Of course we had discussions about the common travel area, as I already said. The Welsh Government wanted to be a part of that discussion, because there is a lot of ferry movement between Wales and the Republic of Ireland.

On the attitude of the remaining member states, on the day that we were in Wales, we heard from the Maltese Prime Minister, who is taking over the presidency of the European Union next year. He was very clear that he felt that we needed to sort out the issue of the common travel area and the border at a very early stage, and we welcome that, because we think that it is a recognition of the particular circumstances in Northern Ireland. Once that is settled, we can move on to deal with the other issues. Therefore, as I said, there was a good, open discussion, and I thought that it was very useful.

**Mr Humphrey:** I thank the First Minister for the leadership that she has given on the issue. Will she outline to the House whether the opportunities that will be provided to the United Kingdom as a result of our exit from the European Union were discussed in Cardiff?

**Mrs Foster:** It will not surprise him to know that I spoke about the opportunities, not least those related to the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy. I think that our fishermen have a good future to look forward to. Some of the very inflexible rules that have been visited on our fishermen will be revisited by our Agriculture Minister and, indeed, by the Executive when powers are repatriated to us. Of course, we will also have trade opportunities. As the Member knows, the deputy First Minister and I are going to China at the weekend, and we look forward to having a very good and open discussion about our trading opportunities outside the European Union.

**Mr Attwood:** I agree with the First Minister's comments about nurturing and about the fact that, the more that we grow and escalate that intervention, the better that it will be. On early years and investing for the future, I note her comment about the 1,001-day strategy for Jersey. I note also the publication of a very ambitious programme for universal childcare by Katherine Zappone, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. Will the Minister indicate whether any of that learning will be applied to our PFG, in which the ambition for funding for affordable childcare is, to put it mildly, quite moderate?

**Mrs Foster:** The British-Irish Council, particularly in its workstreams, is very useful. We can hear from some of the smaller Administrations about how they are intervening to make a real difference to people's lives, in this case, our young people. I know that Minister Weir felt that his time spent with other members was very useful, and I am quite

sure that he will take that learning into the development of his strategies.

The Member knows that the structure of the Programme for Government is to have our 14 outcomes and indicators of how that is happening. We will use all our strategies — not just the Government's strategies but those of the third sector, the private sector and local government — in how we deliver those outcomes for our young people. In particular, he will know that we have a specific outcome for our young people. He will not be surprised to know that I do not agree with him about not investing in our young people, but I certainly agree with him about our learning from the British-Irish Council and how it can be instructive for us. None of us has all the wisdom — that is very true. Therefore, we need to learn from others.

**Dr Farry:** I want to ask the First Minister about the differences between the Scottish and Welsh Administrations and our Administration on some of the key issues and whether those were discussed. Notably, Scotland and Wales have adopted a position of wanting the UK to remain in the single market, whereas our First Minister is talking about the best possible market access. There is a difference there. Also, was the triggering of article 50 discussed and whether that will require LCMs in the respective jurisdictions?

**Mrs Foster:** The last matter was not discussed. As the Member will know, the Supreme Court is hearing legal arguments on those issues at the moment, so LCMs were not discussed.

It will be instructive for the Member to listen to what I say. When Carwyn Jones went to the press conference, he indicated the four main areas that we agreed on. I do not think that the Member is correct to say that Wales wants to be a member of the single market. That is certainly Scotland's position, but I listened very carefully to what Carwyn Jones had to say, and he talked about maximum access to the single market, not membership of it. I stand to be corrected on that, but I listened very carefully to what the Welsh First Minister said.

The four issues that were agreed across the eight Administrations were: first, that there be best possible access to the single market; secondly, minimal disruption to the member Administrations; thirdly, that there would be no hard border between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom; and, finally, that the British-Irish Council was a valuable place to have those discussions and to talk about ideas. Those were the four main issues that we agreed, so, as I say, the best possible access to the single market was the way in which it was framed for all the Administrations that were there.

**Mr Lyttle:** The First Minister cited welcome progress in early years since 2012, yet the most recent Employers for Childcare cost of childcare survey found that the average cost of a full-time childcare place in Northern Ireland is now £164 per week and is increasing at a rate that is higher than inflation. We had a significant underspend in the childcare budget for 2011-15, and we have been awaiting a childcare strategy from OFMDFM and now the Department of Education since 2012. What precisely are the Executive doing to remove that increasing pressure of the cost of childcare from working families in Northern Ireland?

**Mrs Foster:** The Member knows that this is a statement on the British-Irish Council, but I am happy to take his question on the Executive's position on early years. As he knows, in Northern Ireland, we continue to provide at least one year of funded preschool education to every child whose parents want it, and Sure Start provides targeted services for children aged zero to four and their families who live in the most disadvantaged areas. He will also know that, under the DSC intervention through the Executive Office, we had a very successful nurture programme, and we are looking at that again.

Certainly, the early intervention transformation programme, as it was known, which was funded by ourselves and The Atlantic Philanthropies, was a programme that I would like to see brought forward again because it had such an impact on young people. We will, of course, not see its full impact until they reach 16 to 18, but I firmly believe that that is something through which we can make a real difference in Northern Ireland. In the past, we have looked at helping young people when they are at school, but, for me, it is about helping them before they reach school. That is the very important point.

**11.00 am**

**Mr Agnew:** We have heard reassurances from the First Minister, before the referendum vote and since, that there will be no hard border between North and South, but, five months on from the EU referendum, what practical measures have been suggested to ensure that we will not have a hard border between North and South in a scenario where we have a so-called hard Brexit?

**Mrs Foster:** As the Member knows, it is not just about what I say in these circumstances; it is also about what the other Administrations that are directly impacted say. The Taoiseach has made it very clear what he wants to see happening in relation to the common travel area. Our own Prime Minister consistently makes it clear in the House of Commons that Northern Ireland has a very specific set of circumstances, because we are the only part of the United Kingdom that will have a land border. So if he does not believe me, that is fair enough — he does not believe me on a lot of things — but he should believe the other leaders in relation to this matter, because we will take a very strong case to the European Union. I think that the European Union, particularly having listened to what the Prime Minister of Malta had to say recently in relation to this matter, will listen very carefully because they know about Northern Ireland's situation and they know about the history and geography of this place. So I am very positive about this matter. Others in this House, unfortunately, continue to talk up the possibility of a hard border, but having listened to what other colleagues have to say in relation to this matter, I am confident that that will not be the case.

**Mr Allister:** I welcome the First Minister's indication that no internal UK borders is a red-line issue. Amidst all the nonsense that is being talked about special status for Northern Ireland, is it also a red-line issue for the First Minister that Northern Ireland's leaving of the EU must, and must be seen to be, as emphatic and as evident as that of the rest of the kingdom?

**Mrs Foster:** I am sure that he has pored over my conference speech many times, but I said during my —

**Mr Allister:** I hope that you have read mine.

**Mrs Foster:** Absolutely I did. I said that there were five principles in relation to the issue, and one of those issues is this: as a nation state, we voted to leave the European Union, and therefore, as a nation state, we will be leaving the European Union. That, to me, is very simple and is one of my five principles in relation to this matter. I hope that answers his question.

**Mrs Cameron:** I thank the First Minister for her statement to the House this morning. Will she give us an update on the BIC review that has been taking place?

**Mrs Foster:** The BIC review is looking to see what other work streams we have adopted since the Glasgow summit and the introduction of a task-and-finish approach. In other words, if a work stream has come to the end of its lifespan, we should finish it and move on to look for a new work stream. As a council, we have been identifying new work streams, and the review has been looking to see where we should go with that. Hopefully, by the time we have our summit here in Northern Ireland, whether that is in June 2017 or, indeed, before that, we will have some clarity in relation to those matters.

## Executive Committee Business

### **Insolvency (Monetary Limits) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016**

**Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy):** I beg to move

*That the draft Insolvency (Monetary Limits) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 be approved.*

I am seeking the Assembly's approval for the draft Insolvency (Monetary Limits) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016. The order amends two of the three monetary limits currently in place which allow an individual entry to the debt relief scheme. Debt relief schemes were established in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to provide those with very few assets, little surplus income and relatively small levels of debt with a simple process to obtain debt relief at a much lower cost than in bankruptcy. Strict eligibility criteria must be met for entry to the scheme.

Legislation has been made in England and Wales to increase the limits on the total debts and property that a debtor can have to be eligible for a debt relief order. The limit on total debt was increased from £15,000 to £20,000, and the limit on assets from £300 to £1,000.

The new limits, which came into force on 1 October 2015, take account of inflation and will give more of the most vulnerable people access to debt relief.

It is a sad fact that struggling with unresolvable debt can cause immense stress for families. These changes will increase access to the debt relief scheme for those who need it most. Historically, insolvency law in Northern Ireland has always been maintained in parity with Westminster legislation. In keeping with this policy, the amendments made by the order will increase the ceilings on eligibility for the debt relief scheme in Northern Ireland in line with those in England and Wales. A public consultation took place between September and November 2015. All respondents agreed that both limits could be increased, with two respondents stating that one or both increases should be higher. The order has been agreed with the Committee for the Economy. In conclusion, I believe that the order should be approved by the Assembly.

**Mr Aiken (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Economy):** I will speak as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Economy as, unfortunately, the Chairperson is unwell. I will not rehearse the content of the statutory rule, as the Minister has already laid out its purpose. Rather, I will focus on the Committee's scrutiny of it. Members considered the policy proposal for the rule at its meeting on 21 September 2016. The Committee was content for the proposal to proceed. The statutory rule was considered by the Committee at its meeting on 12 October 2016, and, again, members were content with it. Therefore, on behalf of the Committee, I support the motion to approve the order.

**Mr Hamilton:** I thank the Deputy Chair for his contribution on behalf of the Committee for the Economy. I thank the Committee for its scrutiny of the order, and I commend the motion to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That the draft Insolvency (Monetary Limits) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 be approved.*

## Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016

**Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy):** I beg to move

*That the Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 be affirmed.*

The order amends the current level of debt, known as the bankruptcy level, at which a creditor can petition the High Court to make an individual who owes them money bankrupt. Legislation has been made in England and Wales to increase the bankruptcy level from £750 to £5,000. This was done partly to take account of inflation and also because it was considered that the existing level gave a disproportionate enforcement option over modest levels of debt. The new level came into force in England and Wales on 1 October 2015. Historically, insolvency legislation in Northern Ireland has always been maintained in parity with Westminster legislation. Therefore, the provisions in the order will increase the bankruptcy level in line with that now applying in England and Wales.

A public consultation took place between September and November 2015. Two of the three respondents agreed that the bankruptcy level should be increased to £5,000. The third, Land and Property Services, raised concerns about the impact that an increase to £5,000 could have on rates recovery. After discussions between officials from this Department and the Department of Finance, I have decided to proceed with an increase to £5,000. This will be in keeping with the principle of maintaining parity with insolvency legislation in England and Wales. It will ensure that individuals in Northern Ireland with debts of up to £5,000 will not be at more risk of being made bankrupt than those in England and Wales. The order has been agreed with the Committee for the Economy, and I believe that it should have the support of the Assembly.

**Mr Aiken (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Economy):** I speak again as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Economy. As I said previously, the Chairperson is unwell. I will not rehearse the content of the statutory rule, as the Minister has already laid out its purpose. Rather, I will focus on the Committee's scrutiny of it. Members considered the policy proposal for the rule at its meeting on 21 September 2016. The Committee was content for the proposal to proceed. The statutory rule was considered by the Committee at its meeting on 12 October 2016, and, again, members were content with it. Therefore, on behalf of the Committee, I support the motion to affirm the order.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Minister for the Economy, Mr Hamilton, to wind up the debate.

**Mr Hamilton:** Thank you — such as it was. Once again, I thank the Deputy Chair for his contribution on behalf of the Committee. I thank the Committee for its scrutiny of the order, and I commend it to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That the Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 be affirmed.*

## Private Members' Business

### Medical School in the North-west

**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 to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

**Mr Durkan:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly notes the support of the Minister for the Economy and Minister of Health for the establishment of a medical school in the north-west; acknowledges the positive impact of a medical school on the delivery of medical and health services in the north-west and that it would be one element in the expansion of student numbers and courses at Ulster University at Magee; calls on the Executive to work with Ulster University, the General Medical Council, the Government of Ireland and other stakeholders for the establishment of a medical school in the north-west; and further calls for a Programme for Government commitment to establish this medical school early in this Assembly mandate.*

Members will have heard me raise the issue of the establishment of a medical school in the north-west before, and, indeed, it has been raised by others. For some longer-serving Members, the north-west medical school will have taken on almost mythical proportions as it has popped up, disappeared and resurfaced a number of times over many years. In proposing the motion, I call on the Executive to ensure that the medical school becomes a reality soon and does not disappear again.

I believe — well, I certainly hope — that I am pushing at an open door. The motion acknowledges the support for the proposals that I recently received from the Minister of Health and the Minister for the Economy respectively. However — please excuse my paranoia — we have been here before, hearing warm words but seeing no action. That is why it is imperative that the Assembly signals its support and the Executive signal their intent with a concrete commitment.

Ulster University is trying to get the project off the ground. The project will not only have a very positive impact on the delivery of health services in the North but be one element in the long overdue and much-needed expansion of Magee. While it is early days in the process — they are at the first of eight stages with the General Medical Council — Ulster University is showing real ambition to deliver this for Derry, and that is not something that anyone in the Assembly will have heard me say before. It wants to open the doors in September 2019, with the first graduates in 2023. These efforts require and, indeed, deserve the full support of the Assembly.

Why would the Executive not do everything in their power to make this happen? It ticks so many boxes. It is hard to think of an initiative or intervention from the Executive that would be guaranteed to ensure as many positive outcomes for as relatively small a stake.

The vision is the establishment of a graduate-entry medical school that will increase the number of skilled people here who are committed to careers in medicine and

healthcare, bolstering an existing workforce that is spread too thinly and worked too hard, particularly in rural areas. Every week, we hear of the struggle to attract people to and retain them in various posts and the inevitable knock-on effect that that is having on patient care, as waiting lists spiral out of control, regardless of how they are computed. Just this morning, we see another report on the A&E department at Altnagelvin and the difficulty that staff shortages are causing it and the patients who attend it.

This is in no way a criticism of our hard-working healthcare staff. They have been failed by poor workforce planning as much as patients have.

#### 11.15 am

Year after year, the Western Trust tops the chart when it comes to money spent on locums and agency staff due to fixed staff shortages. Locums are not low cost. Last year, the trust spent over £11 million on medical locums and is on course, I believe, to exceed even that again this year. This is money that, had we got our workforce planning right, could and would be spent on other services. It would be a welcome boost for someone waiting for a new hip, someone waiting for a mental health diagnosis, someone waiting for a gall bladder operation or a group providing vital services with no funding whatsoever. That figure relates to locums in just the acute sector. It does not include money that is spent trying to plug holes in the great ship of general practice, the captains of which tell us is about to sink.

Dramatically increased workload is one factor that has led to difficulty in recruiting and retaining GPs, and the demographic of those remaining means that urgent action is needed to ensure that numbers do not fall even further, or we will see even more practices collapse.

Evidence suggests that workers are more likely to be retained close to where they are trained. The creation of this school will end up saving our health trusts millions. It is not just going to benefit the Western Trust. Graduates from this medical school will be available to other trusts. There will be more people qualified to fill essential roles across our health service. I think that, currently, about 20% of newly qualified doctors hop on a plane and end up working elsewhere. The beauty of a graduate entry level school is that that is statistically a lot less likely to happen. People starting and qualifying here are likely to be a wee bit older, more likely to have commitments here and less likely to fly off to find themselves and work elsewhere.

It is envisaged that the school would have an enhanced or particular focus in the areas of primary care, general practice and chronic disease management. Those areas will become increasingly important if we are to finally see our healthcare system transformed into one that copes with current demand and is equipped much better for the future.

The new model for healthcare will require a much more interdisciplinary approach — closer working between doctors, allied health professionals (AHP) and nurses. So, ideally, training in the future should be delivered as such. Therefore, I question the logic of Ulster University, which is currently in the process of moving AHP courses like physiotherapy from its campus in Jordanstown to Coleraine. While there appears to be a genuine desire to get this medical school located and situated in Derry, it

would, surely, be a much more sensible decision to shift these courses to Magee.

It is essential that the school will have strong links with the community, even more so given Professor Bengoa's recommendations. Further scope for collaboration exists with the new radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin — itself a powerful symbol of what can be achieved when we look beyond Belfast for solutions to our problems.

The radiotherapy centre is also the product of North/South collaboration. Close working with the South can only add to what a new medical school has to offer. I believe that, just today, representatives from Ulster University are meeting counterparts from Galway to discuss potential opportunities for shared placements and teaching. Cooperation could also open up new opportunities in cross-border healthcare service provision, medical research and economic development.

I referred earlier to Ministers having previously stated their support for this project. Just last week, Derry City and Strabane District Council supported a motion from my party colleague Tina Gardiner on the issue.

There is also clear support from highly respected professional bodies. The BMA recognises the role that a medical school in the region, particularly one that specialises in GP training, will have in helping to address the chronic shortage of GPs in the area. Integral to that equation is the creation of more GP training places, and we welcome the Minister's announcement on that. The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) also indicated, when I asked them recently at the Health Committee, that this proposal is clearly a winner. Looking elsewhere, the establishment of new medical schools creates competition and drives up performance. That is very evident in Wales.

I am conscious that, as my party's health spokesperson, I have spent all this speech so far focussing on the undoubted health-related benefits of the proposal, and it would be remiss of me, as a Foyle MLA, to not touch on the huge economic benefits it would bring. It has long been accepted that the expansion of the university is key to the economic regeneration of the north-west. What needs to be accepted by the Executive is the need to do something about it. Supporting the motion and making this proposal happen will be a clear step in the right direction.

There is research that demonstrates that every £1 spent on a medical school generates £8.50 in the wider economy, and Derry is a city that is in desperate need of a boost like that. The infrastructure windfall from the autumn statement, albeit smaller than we had hoped for, could be used — well, certainly some of it —

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

**Mr Durkan:** — for the infrastructural work at Magee that is essential for its expansion.

**Mr Middleton:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. As a Member for Foyle and a constituent who lives in the Western Trust area, I am all too aware of the specific challenges that face our area, not only from a health perspective but from other perspectives as well.

Specifically on the health challenges, we know from our regular briefings with the Western Trust that there are significant budget challenges and difficulties in

recruiting and retaining staff in the area. In March, my colleague, the then Health Minister, Simon Hamilton, had an initial meeting with Professor Patrick Nixon from Ulster University, to discuss the proposal to establish a graduate entry medical school in the north-west. At that time, the Minister said that medical locum costs in the Western Trust had trebled in the past three financial years and were projected to be £12.5 million for 2015-16. As the previous contributor said, the medical locum costs for the incoming year are expected to reach £16 million, which is unsustainable. Those significant locum costs are a direct result of being unable to recruit staff and secure them in the trust. That is having a wider impact on the Western Trust through the deficit that is incurred. Of course, the trust is unable to spend the money that is being spent on locums in other priority areas.

A graduate entry medical school in the north-west would go some way to addressing those challenges. Research shows that the majority of people stay to train and work in the place where they study at university. That is what we want to try to help address the issues in the west. When medical staff and doctors are trained, we want them to stay, because that will help address the shortages.

Whilst the medical school will service a much wider area than my constituency, Londonderry is suitably placed, with the newly opened radiotherapy centre, the innovation work that is ongoing with C-TRIC and the outstanding medical courses that already exist in Ulster University at Magee. There are also very strong partnerships with Altnagelvin Area Hospital, and they bode well for any future medical school.

Through our work on the Health Committee, we have heard from various organisations that fully support the proposal. The General Medical Council (GMC), the BMA and the Royal College of General Practitioners have all voiced their support, and there is no doubt that this proposal will help to address the challenges arising from the shortfall in the number of GPs and other issues that face primary care.

The Economy Minister and the Health Minister have already outlined their support for the proposal and its benefits. We have heard from the SDLP and will no doubt hear the Ulster Unionists' view on the medical school. However, I was — no surprise — slightly disappointed this morning that the tone for the debate was set out in the media. The SDLP press office was extremely busy this morning in saying that it is proposing a new medical school for Magee university. It even created a new hashtag, #ConstructiveOpposition. I am sorry, but this is a case of johnny-come-lately rather than constructive opposition.

**Mr Eastwood:** Johnny-come-lately? I noticed Mr Middleton's Twitter account earlier. Does he not accept that this is an issue that was not decided in the last number of months or weeks? It is an issue that people in Derry have been arguing about and arguing for long before he or I was involved in elected politics.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Middleton:** I completely agree with the Member. We have not said that we proposed the idea. The idea came from the Ulster University. For you to suggest that it was the SDLP that proposed it is deeply unfair and quite sad in reality.

We will support the motion. We strongly believe in a graduate-entry medical school. I look forward to hearing from other Members, but the commitment that the Executive no doubt will give is that they are focused on delivery rather than on cheap political point-scoring and cheap headlines.

**Ms Archibald:** I am pleased to contribute to the debate on the motion, which I will be supporting.

Sinn Féin has been to the fore of consistently promoting the expansion of Ulster University at Magee, and the further and higher education offering in the north-west in general. It is a region with huge potential, which we are seeing through developments at Magee, the North West Regional College and the North West Regional Science Park.

A continued focus on development and investment is required to promote the genuine regional balance of our economy that we all want to see. Education and skills are a part of that, and delivering those locally is necessary. The medical school project would very much add to the offering in the north-west and begin to tackle some of the issues in our health service. I will be rehearsing some of what has already been said.

Week in and week out — in our constituency offices, in our engagements with the trust, in the media, and here through questions to the Minister — we hear about long waiting times, staff shortages and difficulties in recruiting staff to the health service. The Minister has outlined her commitment to the reconfiguration of the health service. That reconfiguration needs to be at all levels right from the start of the cycle, and that begins with training of staff.

As a representative of a constituency partly in the Western Trust, I am all too aware of how difficult it is to recruit staff and of the disproportionate cost of locums in the trust area, as Mr Durkan outlined. Spending on locums in the Western Trust doubled between 2011-12 and 2015-16.

There is evidence that medical students and trainees are more likely to stay in the hospitals in which they train. Having a medical school in Derry would therefore have the knock-on effect of encouraging staff to take up positions in the locality and with the surrounding trusts in the longer term. We do mean the longer term, because we are talking several years by the time that the project would be implemented and the first cohort of students would have gone through.

That is how the Minister's plan for reconfiguration of the health service must be viewed. It must be allowed to have an implementation phase. That will be a process to address issues that have developed over decades, and there are no overnight quick fixes. It is a big-picture view that we need to take.

The Minister's plans regarding specialised centres will also begin to redress the imbalance in recruitment ability to some trusts, and it is likely that certain specialisms will be based in different regional hospitals. Those training in specialisms are therefore likely to be based in those hospitals in the longer term. Hypothetically, that will have the knock-on effect of retaining staff in the appropriate specialisms in those hospitals.

If we look at the Western Trust as an example of where specialisms are already located, there are urology, radiotherapy and orthopaedics in Altnagelvin. In orthopaedics, in which there are specialisms within

specialisms, there is a need for targeted recruitment, and the training of students in the location may help alleviate that, alongside other measures. Likewise, there are also recognised issues for GPs, as has been mentioned, and the Minister has begun to tackle this by increasing GP training places for 2016-17. Having a medical school in the north-west would hopefully attract trainees to practices in that locality and we would then have a better spread of trainees across the North.

### 11.30 am

There has been huge investment in Altnagelvin over the past few years, and the new radiotherapy unit as a cross-border service is a major development. That investment makes Altnagelvin a centre of excellence and, therefore, an ideal teaching location. The cross-border nature of the new radiotherapy centre needs to be used as the model for future service delivery, and we should look to attract students from the entire west of the country, and further afield, to a medical school there.

As Mr Durkan said, the medical school has the support of professional bodies and there needs to be collaboration with those to move the project forward. There should be further exploration of the cross-border potential of this project and building on our structural infrastructure on an all-Ireland basis in general as we plan for the future. The health service across the island faces great challenges, and we are too small an island not to be looking at how we can collaborate most effectively to deliver for all our people.

**Mr Aiken:** I support the motion from our fellow Opposition party for the establishment of a graduate medical school in the west of the Province. We believe that building on Northern Ireland's reputation for teaching medical excellence, as identified by Queen's University's position in the top 30 medical schools in the United Kingdom, will be beneficial in providing greater training opportunities for medical students, who will bring in a much-needed boost in student revenues, as well as strength and depth in our hospitals west of the Bann.

It is also appropriate at this stage to ask the Department of Health and the Department for the Economy to conduct a detailed review of how the HSC, the universities and our excellent life sciences sector — it would be remiss of me not to mention South Antrim in this context — can be brought together to maximise the teaching, research and manufacturing opportunities for all of Northern Ireland: for students, for patients and for our companies. However — I must declare an interest here, as the ex-CEO of a university fundraising organisation — medical schools can be very expensive to set up, to establish their reputations and they need to be properly resourced.

As a party, we welcome the opportunity to improve the provision of university places in the north-west, and, speaking personally, I would be delighted to see Magee expanded. I would also like to see the A6 prioritised to establish communication links there, and for Londonderry to become a global centre of educational excellence. However, we also need the physical and educational infrastructure to make it work.

In supporting the motion, we look forward to having discussions on increasing the opportunity for all medical training, medical teaching, research and manufacturing in Northern Ireland. Maybe, by doing this, we can, at the

same time, do something about our shocking waiting lists across the health service.

**Dr Farry:** The Alliance Party supports the motion but not without some reservation. We will highlight some points that the proposers need to consider and some issues that they need to clarify.

In principle, we accept the need for a medical school, and it is in that context that we can support the motion. It is worth stressing that recent talk has been about a graduate-entry school, which is of a different nature from a situation where we are talking about undergraduates, with a particular focus on GP training and primary care. That is a particular pressure point in our health service that we are all very much aware of, and the solution lies in a number of interventions, including how we might shift some of the workload off GPs to other aspects of our health service. There are areas where GPs have taken on additional areas of responsibility almost by default, and there are unintended consequences. For example, free prescriptions are universally available, but that ends up with more prescribing being done, as opposed to people maybe talking with pharmacists. There is a host of other distortions in our health service passing burdens on to GPs.

Equally, we need to look at how attractive certain specialities are versus others in the health service and the number of places available. We welcome what the Minister has been saying about the need for more places, and it is in that context that we look to what we can do about expansion in the north-west.

I was pleased that Mr Aiken raised the issue of cost, because it is important that we have this debate in an air of realism and that people address the issue of cost. Hopefully, the Minister will give some indication of what her officials estimate the cost of this to be. We need to look at running costs, capital costs and the location. Are we talking about locating this on the current Magee campus, or are we looking to co-locate with Altnagelvin hospital or somewhere else in the wider city of Derry?

We also need to ask whether the proposers want to take this forward on a stand-alone basis, which may potentially be easier to fund, or whether it will be taken forward as part of the wider business case for the expansion of Magee. In that regard, I should stress that, in my final week as Minister for Employment and Learning, I received the final version of the business case — or what will hopefully be the final version of the business case. I am not entirely sure where the processing of that now lies in the Department for the Economy and the Department of Finance, never mind any formal decision-making by the Executive and decisions on funding.

The wider context is that we need to look to what is happening in higher education and the potential expansion of the sector. I can clearly state that I want to see the expansion of the university at Magee. I fully understand and appreciate the relevance to the city, the hurt that has been felt over 50 years because of decisions that were taken — quite in error, in my opinion — and the potential now for the transformation of the city for that investment. That is all taken as read.

We also have to appreciate that the expansion of Magee was not a formal commitment in the previous Programme for Government. People think it was: it was not. During the last mandate, we managed to expand Magee by several

hundred places — about 650, to be accurate — and we have commenced the construction of the new £10 million teaching block, but this remains a long way short of the 10,000 additional places that people are looking for in the One Plan and, more recently, the strategy group under the city council in partnership with the university.

We have to be realistic before we can talk about expanding our higher education sector. I appreciate that medical school funding may be an issue for the Department of Health in isolation of some of the wider issues, but we have to recognise that we currently have a £55 million deficit in higher education. Before we can talk about expansion, we need to fix the hole first and make sure that the foundations are solid. When we published the Big Conversation paper in March this year, we talked about not just addressing the funding shortfall but looking to expand the number of places available in Northern Ireland in line with the needs identified in the skills barometer. Obviously, Magee can capture some of that, but more and more capital investment will be required to make this a reality.

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

**Dr Farry:** The costs are significant. There is between £30 million and £40 million per year in running costs, and potentially several hundred million pounds of capital. It is important that Members are aware of that in terms of the full aspirations for expansion of the university in the north-west.

**Mr Clarke:** I rise to support the motion. I find it difficult following on from my colleague, who is from a constituency in the north-west. He covered the points reasonably well.

The motion uses the words “notes the support”. The SDLP, in its opening remarks, said that this issue has been about for a number of years. I want to put it on the record that I note that this was not down in an Opposition debate, because it probably would have been an embarrassment for the SDLP and its Opposition partners not bringing this forward when they held the portfolio for Health. I am happy to take an intervention if they want to clarify that that is why it was not tabled on an Opposition day.

That aside, it is right and just that the people in the north-west have the services there. As my colleague outlined, it is well known that, if people are educated in an area, they are more likely to stay. We are all too aware of the issues in Health, and that is not diminishing the difficulties that the Minister faces in the years ahead in addressing that. That is addressing a legacy issue, and it will not be done overnight. The will has been there. My colleague mentioned the Economy Minister and, indeed, previous comments from the current Health Minister about these places in the north-west. We all agree that that would go some way to supporting that. I have nothing more to say, other than that I welcome and support the motion.

**Ms Boyle:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. First, I take the opportunity to congratulate all those involved in the new £50 million radiotherapy centre in the Western Trust as it opens its doors to the public for the first phase of admissions. This unique cross-border centre of excellence, with a complement of over 200 staff across a range of specialisms and expertise, will provide much-needed cancer care to many people from across these islands. It is just one example of what can be achieved when we put our shoulder to the wheel, with both Governments on the island working collaboratively and people not using it as a party political football.

The proposal to establish a graduate entry medical school in the north-west is, as has been said, at a very early stage, but we need to build on existing support for the school to be built west of the Bann. The Magee campus at Ulster University and Altnagelvin Area Hospital are already leading the way as centres of excellence for medical research and education. We need to build on that.

We are very aware of how much the Western Health and Social Care Trust spends on medical locums to cover the north-west. It has the biggest spend on locums, partly given its geographical location and the cost of travel and accommodation, but we continue to be the biggest losers in this regard. There are difficulties in attracting and retaining GPs and consultants in the north-west; there is no denying that. There is a revised induction and refresher scheme for GPs not currently practising in the North of Ireland to return to practising here. I welcome that approach, which goes some way to addressing the gaps here. I am keen to hear from the Minister on how it is progressing.

The establishment of a medical school in Derry will attract many young students from here, across these islands and further afield. Training home-grown young people here on our doorstep can be justified by the statistics and data provided by the BMA. Dr Tom Black, at the Health Committee in October, stated that we have over 1,200 GPs, or 950 whole-time equivalents, delivering the service, which is many fewer GPs per head of population than we had in the 1950s. That, he said, was an “extraordinary assertion”, because the demand for GPs is rising as people live longer. We have a successful health service, but success creates more demand, and we feel that more in the Western Trust than in any other trust area. We need to bring forward incentives for GPs and others to live and work here.

I, too, listened to Mr Durkan on the radio earlier, when he stated that this would be a game-changer for the north-west. I agree, but he said it would be for the city. He has to think methodically: this goes beyond the city of Derry. It will work for the people of Coleraine, Limavady and, indeed, my area, Strabane.

Of course, this is not just about GPs. As mentioned earlier, we need more allied health professionals to work alongside our GPs, as not everyone going into a GP practice needs to see a GP. They need a physiotherapist, nurse, chiropodist or podiatrist. All of these people in primary care play an important role in reducing the pressures on GPs.

I welcome the work that has been done by our Minister to date. Significant challenges lie ahead for her and her Department in the transformation of services. The Minister is all too aware of the problems and challenges west of the Bann, and I know that she is committed to tackling them. As I said, proposals for the graduate entry medical school are at an early stage, but I urge the Minister and her Department to bring forward a business case as soon as possible. I support the motion.

**Mr T Buchanan:** I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. The concept of a medical school in the north-west based on the University of Ulster campus at Magee College, Londonderry has been in the melting pot for some considerable time. It is not something that the SDLP has dreamed up and put out today as its proposal. Over the past few mandates of the Assembly, the issue has been brought to the fore on numerous occasions —

**Mr Eastwood:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr T Buchanan:** — through questions for written answer, private Members' motions and, indeed, in the respective Committees, where the university has put forward its proposals. I give way.

11.45 am

**Mr Eastwood:** I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree with us that the issue has been around for a long time and needs to be resolved, or does he agree with his colleague Mr Middleton that this was a proposal by his party colleague — last March, I think that was it, Mr Middleton?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr T Buchanan:** Thank you. The proposal has been put forward by the University of Ulster and not by any individual or party. For the SDLP to come out this morning and say that it is its proposal is misleading to say the least. To reinforce what my colleague said, on 24 March this year, my colleague Simon Hamilton, the then Health Minister, kick-started the process again when he met the University of Ulster's vice chancellor, Professor Patrick Nixon, to discuss the proposals for establishing a graduate-entry medical school in the north-west, which, I have no doubt, has the support of all the people in the Chamber today.

Moving forward, however, the development of those proposals and making them a reality is essential for stabilising our health and social care services not only in the north-west but in the entire south-west quarter of Northern Ireland. The Western Health and Social Care Trust is under severe pressure due to its dependence on medical and dental locums to meet demand at an unsustainable cost of £12.9 million, and the development of the proposed new medical school would help to address this ongoing issue while reducing the cost of locums. Although the Western Health and Social Care Trust has faced many difficulties in seeking to recruit medical staff west of the Bann, it has been proven — this has been said today — that medical graduates are more likely to seek employment closest to where they are educated. The development of a medical school would provide the platform that would attract and retain skilled people in the medical profession, especially from the entire north-west and south-west quarter of Northern Ireland. This in turn is good not only for the university and the Western Health and Social Care Trust but for our economy, skills development and the overall health and well-being of our citizens.

Ulster University and the Western Trust have been recognised as centres of excellence, and we must continue to build on this success and turn the west of the Bann into a magnet for medical students, doctors and staff to study, work and live.

Across the entire Western Health and Social Care Trust area — with Altnagelvin and its new cancer centre, the new South West Acute Hospital in Enniskillen and the new local enhanced hospital in Omagh — we have the platform and structure of excellence in place to attract highly skilled professionals in the medical field to train and work in this area.

The new South West Acute Hospital is one of the most modern and finest hospitals in Northern Ireland and is the envy of many other areas, but it must be properly

staffed with sufficient medical professionals to allow it to deliver to its full potential for all its patients. The medical school will improve the recruitment and retention of medical professionals not only in the north-west but in the entire south-west quarter of Northern Ireland and the entire region, taking in the triangle model for the delivery of health by the Western Trust, which includes Altnagelvin, the South West Acute Hospital and the new hospital in Omagh. It is something that will deliver not only for the north-west, as we heard today, but for the entire south-west quarter of Northern Ireland, where the trust has the same difficulties in seeking to bring in medical professionals to work in the area.

We look forward to further discussions on making the university's proposals a reality in the area for the development of health professionals in the trust area and for the good of the people, the economy and health delivery in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area.

**Mrs Dobson:** I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the motion as the Ulster Unionist Party health spokesperson. It is an important issue. Educating sufficient numbers of doctors is essential in ensuring that enough are entering the profession locally. It is widely recognised that our health service workforce is not in a good or sustainable shape. In fact, there has been a total absence of workforce planning in Northern Ireland. That is now directly contributing to many of the pressures currently being experienced.

I am sure that many Members are acutely aware of the scale of vacancies across the local health and social care trusts. I have said this before, and I will say it again: a long-term vacant post, whether it is for a doctor, a nurse or an allied health professional, is about as much use as no post at all. The Department and successive Ministers have regularly gone to great efforts to boast of the number of nursing posts created, but they are loath to tell us that there are 920 posts currently vacant. Before we even consider today's issue of a new medical school in the north-west, the Department needs to be a bit more transparent in telling us what exactly the workforce needs are, including what demands there would be for recruitment from a large number of medical school graduates through, for example, Magee, if that were the case. I know from talking to my colleague Rosemary Barton MLA that there are chronic medical staff shortages in much of the Western Health and Social Care Trust. The pressures are particularly acute in general practice, with a frightening amount of County Fermanagh being on the brink of having no GP cover at all.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the particular situation in Portadown. Minister, you will be aware that we received further contact from a GP this morning. There is a very serious scenario unfolding there with a large number of doctors leaving in very quick order. That has left some of the practices looking over a precipice. I am aware that people are talking about managed dispersal. That is probably as impersonal and clinically cold in reality as it sounds. Minister, I would be happy to facilitate a meeting between you and local GPs in the town if you agree to meet them.

That is indicative of what happens when we do not properly workforce plan. Today's debate could possibly go some way towards fulfilling a need. However, increasing a number of medical school places, whether through a new school at Magee or anywhere else, would do

absolutely nothing to soothe the current pressures unless it is accompanied directly by an increase in the number of medical training places. That is the crux of the issue: it does not matter how many people we educate through the universities; it all comes down to how many fully qualified doctors a new school at Magee could help to deliver. Of course, with Altnagelvin, the school would have a perfectly reasonable training ground on its doorstep. However, I suggest to the two Departments and Ulster University that, in their early assessments of whether a school would be viable, they should be ambitious about how they could deliver those training places. For instance, could the South West Acute Hospital, which is a facility that has some problems with recruiting and retaining a sufficient number of doctors, link formally to ensure that doctors are more proactively being sent to train and, hopefully, settle in areas where real demand exists? That is just one option; I am sure that there are many more.

I wish the Minister well for her future engagement with Ulster University on this issue.

**Mr McCartney:** I support the motion. I think that, right across the Assembly this morning, everybody is in support of the motion, notwithstanding that there are some issues about who was the first to propose this. They say that success has many mothers and fathers; we might need an expansion of the maternity ward in Altnagelvin hospital to cater for everybody who is going to claim success.

That aside, it is fair to say that, over a long number of years, the expansion of the campus at Magee has been very much part of the politics of the north-west; indeed, Stephen Farry, in fairness, talked about it. We all know the need for the expansion not just in the numbers of courses and students but in ways that will add to the strength of the university and wider. Obviously, that is in conjunction with the development of the A5 and the A6 and all other aspects. For us, it is about trying to address decades of uneven development. I acknowledge the fact that even Steve Aiken acknowledged the need for the development of the A6.

For representatives for Foyle and the north-west it is good to see that people are starting to see this and support it, and, hopefully, we will see some movement forward. It has to be acknowledged that the Minister for the Economy and the Minister of Health, who is obviously a party colleague, have also expressed their support for the medical school. You can place the medical school in that wider context, but, as an idea in its own right, it has its strengths. Therefore, on that alone, Ulster University has approached this in the right manner. It sees this as a project that will have to go through the rigour of business cases etc. The approach that it has taken, in particular the appointment of a full-time senior person in the university — Professor Hugh McKenna — to take it forward, is a good signal of its intent. It will not leave any gaps. This is not just some sort of concept. It is, perhaps, easy to say that we need a medical school, but the university will ensure that it has a rigorous case that is well presented. As a party, we met and had the presentation from the university. Last Friday, at the Unity of Purpose meeting, Gary Middleton and Mark H Durkan also got a version of that presentation from Hugh McKenna. The intentions and the desire but also the solidity of the case are being well made.

The innovation around this is the idea that it will be a postgraduate-entry school. The university, in presenting

that, gave all the pluses around that and said clearly that one of the things, particularly at postgraduate entry in medical schools and in other courses, from experiences elsewhere, is the idea of what they call the 20:20 rule — people stay within 20 miles of where they were educated for 20 years. That is a big plus. If you add to that — people have already alluded to it — the fact that the Western Trust has a large bill for locums that is predicted to grow and with the focus and the emphasis being put on GPs, we can see how the business case will be improved by the fact that we will have postgraduate entry with a focus on general practice and filling that gap. That is how we should go forward with this.

Another emphasis that has to put on this is that it sends a signal with the right case well presented by the university. We have seen recently a change in the direction and the leadership of the university. The university, for the first time, is starting to realise, that, if it sends out the right signal when it, along with the rest of us, talks about the expansion of the university and the need and desire for a medical school, it must present it in such a way that the case will be made. Stephen Farry alluded to some of the problems in the past around this. There will be no gaps and no holes, and that is why it is important.

**Mr Speaker:** Will the Member conclude his remarks?

**Mr McCartney:** I welcome the tone of the motion and the widespread support, give or take who was the first to say it. I will say it: Sinn Féin was the first.

**Mr Mullan:** I welcome the opportunity to participate in today's debate. I will say at the outset that the focus of the debate should be on the best outcomes that we can achieve for our long-suffering constituents rather than on getting into party politics with disingenuous remarks towards other Members taking part in the debate.

#### 12.00 noon

It would be remiss of me, in the context of the debate, not to express my appreciation for the many health service staff who are doing a tremendous job in some of the most difficult and intolerable situations. It is no easy feat for them, and it is incumbent on the Assembly to do all that it can to alleviate the pressures that they are currently facing.

It is very concerning to read in 'The Irish News' today of a Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) report into Altnagelvin Hospital, which states that staff morale is low and that staff do not feel supported and valued. That cannot continue, nor can the current pressures. The Assembly really needs to act. Training more staff could go some way towards alleviating the pressures that staff are currently facing.

There have been many great developments in the Western Trust over recent years, such as the building of the South West Acute Hospital in Fermanagh, the new Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital in Omagh and the substantial redevelopment of the Gransha site in Derry. In recent days, as other Members said, the new radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin Hospital was opened. All those are positive developments and evidence of progress — progress that could and must be supported by the establishment of a dedicated medical school for the north-west. In that context, I welcome the Ulster University's proposal to establish a medical school in the north-west that would focus on graduates and GP training places.

However, to reduce vacancy rates in the trust area permanently, we need to set our sights higher, as there exists the possibility of training undergraduate medical students in future by utilising the Altnagelvin hospital and South West Acute Hospital sites. It is my belief that, if we are to accommodate future demand for services that are currently struggling not only in the Western Trust but throughout the North, we need to set our ambitions high.

The Western Trust has suffered for many years as a result of not being able to attract enough staff, whether doctors, nurses, midwives or others. That has resulted in significant gaps in the trust's current workforce. Many of our rural GP practices are facing extinction because of a chronic lack of available doctors and an ageing workforce, all of which has had and will continue to have an impact on patient care and outcomes in many communities. Waiting lists for GPs are growing, and we have already witnessed the gradual erosion of rural out-of-hours services in the west. The establishment of a dedicated medical school would go some way to alleviating those pressures and improving patient outcomes.

Those issues remain concerning, and I and the SDLP believe that much more medical staff recruitment can be gained if we have a stand-alone medical school for the north-west and indeed for the whole of the North. In looking at the potential for a new medical school, we need to look at costs. We are facing substantial pressures on the health service because of the failure of various reform initiatives, such as Transforming Your Care. In the last five years, the Western Trust has spent an unprecedented £54 million on locum and agency staff, not to mention current expenditure on bank staff. It is hugely concerning that only Belfast, which has a higher population density, has spent more on temporary staffing than the Western Trust. This question has to be asked: under the current financial arrangements, are trusts happier to employ staff on a temporary basis rather than to commit to full-time staff?

I will welcome the Minister's views on the issue and on whether she believes that the current financial arrangements and block grant funding for the health service are adding to the growing bills for temporary staff. I urge support for the motion.

**Ms Bradshaw:** I thank the SDLP for bringing forward the motion. As my colleague Stephen Farry said, we will not be opposing the motion, as we see no harm in investigating the potential for a medical school in the north-west. I put on record that we concur with what has been said here today about the crisis in the GP sector, not least in the west and north-west of the Province. However, we want to put on record some of our concerns about the proposal. It is, of course, very easy to present an idea like this to the Assembly, but once it has been costed and detailed sometimes the case ceases to be as clear-cut. It is, of course, one thing to support the establishment of a medical school in principle, but it is another to support it once the full business case has been explored.

It is unclear what precisely the proposal is. There is a reference in the motion to the expansion of Magee to include a postgraduate school for GPs. There is also a reference to a medical school ie a replication of what already exists at Queens, and that is quite a different thing. There is merit in the proposal for medical training at Magee, but what we want to hear from the parties proposing such motions is not just why the project is

on their wish list but exactly how it will be delivered and funded, for an overall medical school would not be feasible.

Of course, funding is not the only issue. There are 34 medical schools in the UK. That means that, on average, there should be precisely one in Northern Ireland, which is exactly what we have. We need to be clear that, even with the proposed rise in the number of GPs to be trained, there is not enough to justify a second general medical school in Northern Ireland. In fact, for a medical school in the north-west to be justified, places would have to be taken from the existing school at Queen's. Maybe representatives in the north-west would support that, but I wonder whether the MP for South Belfast, in which Queen's is situated, would be quite so delighted.

We also have to consider whether the proposal fits with the thrust of the ongoing transformation process to which, I understand, the proposers have pledged support. This process includes regionalisation and thus centralisation of specialised services, and many will see medical training as a specialised service. Thus splitting it would run directly contrary to what is proposed here. The idea is to place all the available expertise at a single accessible site. Are we already beginning to see some parties being tempted to put local interests first? I want to hear some clarity on this if that is not the case.

In fact, this strikes me as a much longer-term project than the proposers indicate. Interestingly, it is perhaps one with a cross-border dimension. Is there a long-term case for a medical school in the west of Ireland with GP training at Magee but other courses elsewhere? Perhaps such a course sharing expertise and facilities may be much more financially viable, and may, in fact, contribute to expansion at Magee. However, it is a complex project, requiring greater cross-border agreement on regulations and qualifications than is currently in place. However, we cannot deny that that would take some time.

I do not wish to suggest that such a proposal is not possible, and I hope that I have shown that we could and should look at alternative means of achieving it. I am by no means anti-north-west, having lived in Eglinton on the outskirts of Derry for many years, and I understand the difficulties, the prejudice and disadvantage that people in that area have felt for many years. However, we cannot pretend that this is likely in the short term. It is one thing to support something in principle; it is quite another to deliver on it when purse strings are already stretched by the need to invest in reform while funding services in urgent need, such as tackling waiting lists, which are also crying out for intervention. Let us see a detailed business case for a cross-border school as part of the overall transformation process with a focus on the best possible outcomes for both patient and medic.

**Mr E McCann:** There is no shortage of candidates to have been the first person ever to come up with this idea. It was not I who was the first person, for a starter, nor any party associated with me. The first time I ever heard the idea of a medical school at Magee mentioned was by somebody who is not a political associate or friend of mine, but it was by John Hume at least 25 years ago. There may have been somebody before 25 years ago that I am not aware of or others might have followed on, but John Hume of the SDLP was the first person who ever brought it up in my

presence, and that was a long time ago, but not as long as I have been on the road about the University issue.

I was 20 when the University for Derry campaign was founded. I was outside this Building, along with a wide range of people from Derry and the wider north-west at that time, looking for a university. Here we are once again; here we go again. I am not saying that we are back at the beginning. I unequivocally welcome the idea which has been pledged of a medical school or a postgraduate medical school at Magee. I want to put that on record, lest anybody say that I am being begrudging and not welcoming of it. I accept the good intentions of everybody.

On the university's own figures and on the figures that we are talking about here, there would be 500 extra places at Magee if this promised project goes forward. An extra 500 places is absolutely to be welcomed, but it is a long way short of the university of 10,000 students that we were repeatedly promised, both by this place and the university itself. If that is gone and the target has been abandoned — it is not hardly mentioned here as a target at all — let people stand up and tell us, "We can't deliver what we promised". At the moment, those pledges are still on the table for a 10,000-strong student body; we are far from that.

In the last five years, Magee has lost courses in arts, computers and engineering, and life and health sciences have been closed entirely. Most ominous of all, the International Conflict and Research Institute (Incore), which is acknowledged everywhere as a world leader in conflict resolution, has been unceremoniously shifted to Belfast by way of the Maze. It was moved out of Derry, the idea being that it would be relocated as a peace centre on the Maze site. When that did not work out, it was shifted to Belfast. It is as simple as this: we want it back. It should be in Magee. Where better for a conflict resolution institution than in Magee? Where better for an expanding centre of culture generally than in Derry at Magee?

I jotted down a few of the names that came to mind when we look at the cultural richness of Derry, which should surround any university. A university should not be isolated from the cultural life of the community. Derry is the home of Colmcille, Docwra, Amelia Earhart, Seamus Heaney, Seamus Deane, Jennifer Johnston, Gay McIntyre, Brian Friel, Josef Locke, John O'Neill, SOAK, Joanna Fagan, Dame Cecil Alexander, Dave Duggan, Felicity McCall, Abby Oliveira and the Turner-nominated Willie Doherty. Those are just the ones that came to my mind as I sat here.

**Mr Kennedy:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr E McCann:** Certainly. Go on, Danny.

**Mr Kennedy:** Will the Member accept that most of those illustrious people whom he has named are now dead?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr E McCann:** Well, actually, quite a number of them are not dead. How dare you bury them before their time, Mr Kennedy. I hope that that is not to do with the fact that they are associated with my home town, as it is easier to try to get rid of them. Gay McIntyre is not dead. Seamus Deane is not dead. John O'Neill is not dead. SOAK — Bridie Monds-Watson — is not dead. Joanna Fagan is not dead. Dave Duggan is not dead. Abby Oliveira is not dead. Willie Doherty, one of the most acknowledged sculptors on these islands, lives around the corner from me. Willie Doherty

is certainly not dead; in fact, he was not dead the night before last, I can tell you. There are all those people.

What I am saying really is that a university of 10,000 students would be very happy in Derry. If those people were to come in, at least 1,000 jobs — good jobs by our standards — would come to Derry as well. They would be very happy in Derry.

I am not being cynical, but once bitten, twice shy. I have been bitten over and over again and am deeply cynical. I recall the fact that we have recently closed the law school at Magee, which we had been promised for years, and which opened eight years ago. It has now gone. So I am wee bit cynical. I will believe it when we see it; I want to see it. I encourage everybody to keep working on it. If this does not work out, we will have to look elsewhere for an expanded third education institution in Derry, whether it is transatlantic, cross-border, social enterprise or whatever. If the University of Ulster does not deliver, that does not mean that the campaign is going to go away.

This, too, is a legacy issue. It is part of the legacy of sectarian discrimination against Derry under the old Stormont Parliament. It is a legacy issue that has to be remedied in the same way as all the others. Let us do it, and, as I say, if this pledge does not work out, the game is not over.

**Mr Speaker:** Minister, you have up to 15 minutes.

**Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health):** I start by welcoming the debate that we have had today. I thank Members for their contributions throughout the debate, particularly those on the positive impact made day and daily by health and social care staff in the course of their work. All Members realise that our healthcare system must change so that it can meet the challenges that we will face in the future. There is also a desire to engage creatively and positively in addressing those challenges. That is the correct approach. As I explained in 'Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together', which sets out my vision for the transformation of health and social care, we all have a responsibility to work together to ensure that we develop a system that delivers better health outcomes for people and which is sustainable into the future. Accordingly, I view the comments registered in the Chamber today and, indeed, the proposal for a medical school in the north-west, as positive.

**12.15 pm**

At the outset, I want again to pay tribute to the dedication and commitment of all our front-line staff, who play a vital role in the delivery of high-quality care to our population across all sectors and settings. I cannot stress enough how greatly I value and appreciate the work that our medical staff do in the face of increased demands and the unique contribution that they make to the lives of patients, clients, and families daily.

The underlying issue that the proposal for a medical school seeks to address is the need to ensure a sustainable supply of well-trained doctors to serve in primary care and secondary care, particularly in the north-west of this island. I share the concern expressed by Members about the challenge of medical recruitment to these services and wish to assure the Chamber of my commitment to resolve and address those issues.

I fully recognise the current challenges that we have in attracting junior doctors to fill all the medical training positions that we have available across the North. It is troubling that medical graduates from Queen's University are not taking up all the 267 foundation posts available. Furthermore, and increasingly, foundation doctors are not progressing into speciality training programmes. In 2015, for example, only 150 of our output of 250 foundation doctors entered speciality training. The reasons for that noticeable trend, which is by no means unique to here, are multifactorial and will require persistence if we are to address them. I consider that effective workforce engagement and planning are key enablers to securing the needed transformation of Health and Social Care (HSC).

My Department is working closely with the North's Medical and Dental Training Agency to ensure that all medical trainees across the HSC are valued and supported appropriately and that they are provided with up-to-date, high-quality medical training. I know that that is being reinforced by action by local medical management in the individual employing trusts. The key will be to make the HSC an employer of choice, and I am committed to ensuring that a workforce strategy to give substance to that objective is developed by May 2017. I also support the work of officials from my Department and the Health and Social Care Board, in close liaison with local GPs, to ensure that people living in south-east Fermanagh continue to have access to high-quality, sustainable and resilient GP services.

The motion raises the specific question of whether an additional medical school in the north-west could help to fill the current vacancies in junior doctor positions and the challenges of recruiting to GP practices in some of our deeper rural localities. I think that a medical school in the north-west has the potential to do that. It is noticeable, if not exceptional, for example, for healthcare systems across these islands, that about 80% of medical students graduating in the North go on to pursue a career in HSC here. That testifies to the value of the medical careers offered. However, it perhaps also demonstrates that there is a desire among many of our young people to serve the communities in which they have grown up and with which they have deep roots and empathy. A north-west medical school has the potential to tap into that.

That said, the next generation is likely to be the most mobile workforce yet, and the highly regarded doctors whom we train here will be much in demand, particularly across the English-speaking world. That requires us to engage purposively with our future medical graduates to ensure that we harness their skills for the benefit of the HSC in the future. Notwithstanding the real potential that a north-west medical college presents, the proposal is at an early stage and will take time to develop.

The strategic outline case submitted by the University of Ulster is a first and early attempt to assess the financial implications for my Department. The proposal explains some, but by no means all, of the investment that a completely new school would require. Initial predictions of capital costs for the Department for the Economy are in the region of £20 million, and the annual revenue pressure for my Department is placed at around £17 million. However, that assessment needs to be reviewed rigorously. Much further work will be required to understand the extent of the future medical workforce need and the likely costs,

including additional costs, that would be incurred in any corresponding expansion of postgraduate training, particularly at foundation level. My officials will work with the University of Ulster to take forward that analysis and make sure that we complete all that work.

Of course, consideration will also have to be given to the challenges associated with establishing a new medical school and placing it on a sustainable footing. We must not shy away from those challenges. The recruitment of suitably trained clinical academic staff will be challenging. The regulatory and accountability challenges of setting up training programmes, which, under the proposal, will stretch across two professional regulatory regimes, should also be recognised and will take time to work through.

I believe, however, that we can overcome such challenges. A lot of potential could be realised for the people of the north-west, and I am committed to working with the university and the Department for the Economy and other Departments to taking it forward.

Mr Speaker —

**Ms Lockhart:** I thank the Minister for giving way. I welcome her very positive remarks about the north-west, but I encourage her today to take note of the issues that are unfolding in the Portadown area. I know that I may be stretching this, but I really feel that it is imperative that you as Minister recognise the great need there and that that is addressed within the overall health reform.

**Mrs O'Neill:** I thank the Member for her intervention. You may be stretching it, but all politics is local. You and Jo-Anne Dobson have raised the issue, and I assure you that I am acutely aware of the issues that are unfolding in Portadown and have asked for an update this morning on all that is being done. There are locums in place, but we need to get to a stage at which we have a sustainable health service there and people feel confident in it. I assure you that we are doing everything that we can.

I hope that it is evident from my comments that I see considerable potential in a north-west medical school. I would like the issue to be explored further, and, as I outlined, a number of issues need to be considered in the time ahead as a way of advancing the proposals further.

Central to the consideration of this important issue is my transformation agenda. Last month, I launched my vision for the transformation of health and social care. We are about to embark on an ambitious transformation journey that will radically change the way in which we plan and deliver health and social care. As I have said, under the transformation process, I am committed to investing in the HSC workforce. Our staff are the greatest asset, and I recognise that they are under pressure. Over the last number of months, I have witnessed the outstanding work of all the staff, not least our medical staff and the positive impact that they have on people's lives. The compassion and dedication of our staff continues to astound me. I am, therefore, committed to developing a workforce strategy early in 2017 and a range of other immediate actions to start to address some critical workforce challenges.

There will be a new approach to learning and team working. I want all those working in Health and Social Care to feel able to effect change and improvement in care rather than concentrating power at the top. We need greater collective clinical and professional leadership

throughout the HSC, supported by skilled and able managers. That is why I have also asked my officials to develop a system-wide HSC leadership strategy to be produced by next summer. Resources will be invested to support staff and leaders to develop the necessary skills and behaviours that will be crucial as we move forward.

I anticipate that the transformation process will lead to a revision of the structure of services across the North and the development of regional programmes of care, which will deliver better outcomes for individuals. These are significant factors that we will need to consider carefully when assessing future medical workforce needs, the associated medical education requirements and how best we will deliver them.

In conclusion, I welcome the concept of a north-west medical school. I very much welcome this opportunity to focus attention on our undergraduate medical provision. I am committed to exploring the feasibility of the proposal and ensuring that we train the right number of future doctors to meet the needs of a transformed health and social care system that delivers better outcomes for all our population.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Mr Colum Eastwood to wind up the debate on the motion. The Member will have up to 10 minutes.

**Mr Eastwood:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will try not to wind it up too much.

I am very grateful for the support from around the Chamber for our motion, which states that we note:

*“the support of the Minister for the Economy and the Minister of Health”.*

This was not about political point-scoring; this was about putting a very important issue on the agenda. I will say again that I very much welcome the Minister's support today. This is a hugely important issue, and we do not want to play political football — whatever you want to call it — with it. It is unfortunate that a couple of Members decided to drag this down. One minute, the Opposition are being too negative, and then we come up with a very positive motion, and one of the people who called us too negative named his own Minister and singled him out for praise, but that is not good enough either. I am not sure what we have to do, but we will continue to raise the issues that are important to our constituents.

Mr Middleton was at a meeting — unfortunately, I could not make it, but my colleague Mr Durkan was there — last week when the University of Ulster said that it was delighted at the fact that the motion was coming before the House. I think that people are happy that we are addressing these issues. I do not want to get into the issue of who said what first, but Mr McCann is right. It was John Hume who first proposed this. Regardless of all that, that was 25 years ago, and we are still here without a medical school and with a chronic underfunding of our university sector, particularly Magee university.

Mr Durkan well outlined the case for a medical school at Magee. It is absolutely clear that it is not sustainable for the Western Trust to continue to fund locums at the value at which we are doing it. I think that, this year, the amount that the Western Trust will spend on locums will be up to £16 million. It is a fairly simple argument to make, in my

view, that we could save an enormous amount of money whilst helping the economy by investing in a graduate medical school at Magee. Mr McCartney made this point, and it is a point that I have made many times.

If someone goes to a university, it is very likely that they will settle down and stay within 20 miles of that university. In fact, 80% of people who leave Derry or Belfast and go to Manchester or Liverpool end up living within 20 miles of that area. Obviously, we can all understand how that works. People settle down, get a job and stay there. We are losing that to our economy. We are losing over 30% of our young people who are going to university at age 18. They head away out of Northern Ireland, and we are losing that to our economy, to our society and to our families. I do not think that that is a way that we should order our society.

Many parts of our economy need to be turned around, particularly in places in my constituency, and, if we are serious about doing that, we cannot rely on just one fiscal lever. If we think that corporation tax is going to solve all our problems and that continuing to disinvest in our university sector is going to solve all our problems, we are barking up the wrong tree.

I have figures in front of me from the health service in the South. In the Twenty-six Counties, a shortage of GPs of between 493 and 1,380 is predicted. Why can we not address that shortage by training people in Derry? Many people across the Chamber have said that we have a GP shortage here. We know that. We have a huge GP shortage right across this island. This is a fantastic opportunity, and, as Mr Durkan said, the university is already working with people in Galway and in Limerick to try to make this a cross-border entity. Why not meet the need that we have right across this island for GPs? I think that Derry would be the ideal place to do that.

We cannot have a discussion about any kind of investment at Magee without recognising, as Mr McCann has, that this has been a 50-year struggle. We have not been very successful at meeting the promise that was asked for by the people who marched to this place over 50 years ago. That was over 50 years ago, Mr Speaker. This is not about us complaining about something that happened 50 years ago. This is about us being outraged that it has not been resolved.

I note that some people might say that this is about local interest. It is about local interest, but there was nobody in south Belfast jumping up and down when Queen's got places that it did not even ask for. Nobody talked about local interest then. It is about local interest, but, every single day, I will fight for the local interest that has been denied to people in my constituency and people west of the Bann, and others in the Chamber will do the same. It has been a disgrace that we still do not have a decent road to Derry, a decent road from Dublin to Derry or a decent university at the right size, 10,000 places, for Derry. It is a disgrace that that still has not happened, and we welcome any support that we can get around the Chamber for that.

We will not be distracted by people telling us that this is about a little local interest; this is much, much bigger than that. It is about righting an historic wrong that should have been righted many years ago. We will do anything that we can to support Ulster University and the work that Professor McKenna is doing to bring forward this proposal.

Let me be clear. Mr McCann asked about the commitment to 10,000 places. We are still committed to it, and I hope

that other people are as well. This medical school would be a fantastic addition, if we could get it through, but that is all it is. We are not giving up on the campaign to finally and once and for all fund a decent-sized university at Magee in Derry. People in Derry will not accept anything less.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly notes the support of the Minister for the Economy and Minister of Health for the establishment of a medical school in the north-west; acknowledges the positive impact of a medical school on the delivery of medical and health services in the north-west and that it would be one element in the expansion of student numbers and courses at Ulster University at Magee; calls on the Executive to work with Ulster University, the General Medical Council, the Government of Ireland and other stakeholders for the establishment of a medical school in the north-west; and further calls for a Programme for Government commitment to establish this medical school early in this Assembly mandate.*

12.30 pm

## People Diagnosed with HIV

**Mr Speaker:** The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for this debate. As two amendments have been selected and are published on the Marshalled List, an additional 15 minutes have been added to the total time. 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. Before we begin, the House should note that the amendments are mutually exclusive, so, if amendment No 1 is made, the Question will not be put on amendment No 2.

**Mr Middleton:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly notes the increasing number of people diagnosed with HIV in Northern Ireland, year on year; is concerned at the levels of stigma experienced by people living with HIV; acknowledges the need for a new campaign to promote awareness and prevention, specifically tailored to Northern Ireland; commends the work of Positive Life, Northern Ireland's only dedicated charity working to support people diagnosed with HIV; and calls on the Minister of Health to support this organisation in the development of a centre of excellence at its new headquarters.*

I propose the motion, which stands also in the names of Paula Bradley and Trevor Clarke, on behalf of the DUP. We believe that it is an important and timely motion that will go some way, I hope, to raise further awareness, reduce the stigma and recognise the very positive work that is ongoing in the area of HIV. It is also fitting that we do so today, which is World AIDS Day 2016, and that we wear the red ribbon which, in itself, is a powerful symbol to challenge the stigma around AIDS and HIV.

World AIDS Day can be a difficult and emotional time, when people reflect on the damage that the virus has caused and the lives that have been lost as a result. However, it is also an appropriate time to recognise the progress that has been made and, more importantly, focus on the work that is still to be done in preventing the spread of the virus, improving the treatment and health of people infected by it and eradicating the stigma and prejudice that are still too often associated with HIV.

In October of this year, research revealed that there were now over 900 people living with HIV in Northern Ireland. That is an increase of 15% on the 2015 figure. The 103 cases of HIV diagnosed last year is the highest number to be recorded in a single year. Not only is that a worrying trend, it highlights the need for more to be done to address the condition and ensure that there is early diagnosis and treatment of those affected. It is estimated that there are hundreds of others who do not know that they have HIV.

Sadly, there is still a stigma attached to HIV that affects the people living with it. A recent survey indicated that, of those living with HIV in Northern Ireland, 61% felt ashamed of their diagnosis, compared with 49% elsewhere in the UK. That same survey revealed that 68% of people in Northern Ireland diagnosed with HIV had a negative self-image, compared with 56% elsewhere in the UK. It is difficult enough for those suffering with the condition to seek diagnosis and treatment, and it is unacceptable that

that is made even more difficult by a lack of understanding around the condition and its effects. To challenge some of the stigma, it is important that we recognise that, of the people currently living with HIV, just over 40% of those cases involved heterosexual contact.

Stigma increases the likelihood of late diagnosis. Late diagnosis can have serious implications and can result in increased risk of other conditions, such as tuberculosis, pneumonia and some cancers. It also limits treatment options and affects the overall prognosis. Given that treatments can now mean that a person who is diagnosed early with HIV can reasonably expect to live a long and healthy life, it is hugely important that people who may be at risk test early. Crucial to that is the need for people who work in our health service to be able to recognise the risk factors and symptoms of early HIV infection. It is essential that those on the front line — our GPs and nurses — be given the necessary support and advice not only to deal with those who have been diagnosed with HIV but to prevent HIV. The fact that, as I mentioned, hundreds of others who have HIV are unaware that they have the virus is deeply worrying. More information on prevention, early diagnosis and treatment would help alleviate the fear, destigmatise the testing and, I hope, promote a more confident approach to those who present for testing.

Through the motion, we commend the work of Positive Life and the role that it plays in supporting those with HIV, advocating on their behalf, working to destigmatise HIV and ensuring that those affected are treated with respect and dignity and live a healthy life. As a member of the all-party group on sexual health, I have seen at first hand how Positive Life interacts and engages with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that their issues are heard and how it works collectively with those in the sexual health field. We must do all that we can to support it in its work to promote awareness and prevention. There is a clear need for a new campaign to promote such awareness through outreach, counselling, harm reduction and education. We need to challenge the old perception and the old stigmas and ensure that people living in Northern Ireland understand what it means to live with HIV here. We encourage the Minister to support Positive Life and the work that it does and to assist it in the development of a centre of excellence at its new headquarters.

It is also fair that we recognise the work of the Public Health Agency (PHA) and the information that it provides on sexual health issues, including HIV, and the work and awareness training that it carries out throughout our trusts.

We need all the many health and social care organisations and volunteer sector organisations to continue the great work that they do. However, we need to work more closely together, encouraging greater collaboration and ensuring that the Department gives a clear strategic direction in this important area. I commend the motion to the House.

**Mr Speaker:** Mr Eamonn McCann is not in the Chamber to move amendment No 1. I therefore call Paula Bradshaw to move amendment No 2.

**Ms Bradshaw:** I beg to move amendment No 2:

*Leave out all after the third "HIV;" and insert*

*"calls on the Minister of Health to support this prevention work by bringing forward proposals to ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland has access to vital*

*pre-exposure prophylaxis medication on the same basis as the rest of the United Kingdom; and further calls on the Minister to support Positive Life in the development of a centre of excellence at its new headquarters."*

I thank the DUP for bringing this important motion to the Chamber. We clearly welcome the motion. I visited Positive Life's new centre in my constituency during the summer and heard in detail about its range of services, programmes and campaigns. I am delighted to see the organisation get the credit and exposure that it deserves today.

We were very cautious about the amendment that was to be proposed by People Before Profit. That is partly because it merely reflects the motion and, in effect, restricts its scope — we must not move away from the fact that HIV can affect anyone, not just people in the LGBT sector — but mainly because it does not include in the equation the vital issue of the pre-exposure prophylaxis medication, commonly known as PrEP. I therefore ask the proposer of the first amendment to consider allowing it to fall to allow the issue to be advanced in order to demonstrate that the Chamber is not just about words but action.

Last year, 103 people were diagnosed with HIV in Northern Ireland. That is 103 people and their families who did not know how their lives — their relationships, friendships, employment prospects and life chances — were to be affected.

We can reduce that number. One way of doing that is through medication designed for people who do not have HIV but who are at a very high risk of getting it. That medication is called pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), a daily pill that has a very high efficacy in preventing infection.

We need to be realistic. People who have contact in certain circumstances with people who are HIV positive, not least those who are in relationships with them, are at risk. I strongly support the belt and braces mantra of Brook — a voluntary health and well-being association — that PrEP should not be seen as a replacement for the need for condoms to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and, obviously, crisis pregnancies.

I will give a bit of background on, and UK context to, PrEP. It was established in the courts in August this year that NHS England has the power to commission PrEP and that it would cost about £15 million a year. In Northern Ireland terms, that means that the cost would be about £500,000. The average lifetime cost of treating someone with HIV is set at around £300,000, so even if people do not like the thought of this in moral terms, I ask them to look at it in economic terms and the cost to the public purse.

Supporting our amendment does not mean that PrEP will become available immediately. Work has to be carried out into pilot projects in England to assess how it can be commissioned most effectively and most appropriately. That, essentially, takes away any risk that might incline people to be cautious at this juncture, as there will be time to see how it could be implemented in the overall transformation of health and social care services in Northern Ireland.

I will make two points on how the amendment ties in neatly with that reform. First, PrEP is a classic case of prevention in action and is exactly in line with the Bengoa report and the Minister's road map. We cannot claim to be moving towards prevention being a fundamental part of our health service if we do not stand proactively at the forefront of issues in support of preventative medication such as this.

Secondly, the Minister could be proactive. Indeed, she may even be able to fulfil one of her innovation projects over the next few years by offering to get involved with NHS England's assessment process. I do not know how viable that would be at this stage, but if we wish to take that idea forward I cannot see NHS England not agreeing to it.

With regard to the motion, which we have left intact in our amendment, I re-emphasise that the rise in the number of people being diagnosed might indicate that more people are coming forward. Whatever it indicates, it shows that more people would benefit from a prevention programme that includes appropriate medication. That is a point that our amendment reinforces.

I also warmly welcome the emphasis on the need to remove the stigma, an issue mentioned by my colleague on the DUP Benches. Perhaps we are still victims of the advertising campaign of the 1980s, which had such a significant impact but which no longer reflects the reality of the condition. An awareness campaign, recognising that the stigma can be quite marked in Northern Ireland, would be very helpful.

The amendment serves to reinforce the motion and ties in with the themes highlighted by Professor Bengoa, and I hope that the Assembly gives it its full support.

**Ms Seeley:** I welcome the motion, which we will, of course, support.

World Aids Day takes place this week, so the motion is timely and will, no doubt, be welcomed by those impacted by the disease and organisations such as Positive Life and the Rainbow Project. The number of people living with HIV has reached its highest ever level: almost 1,000 people in the North know that they are living with HIV. However, what is most concerning is the high number of people who are unaware that they have HIV. We need to tackle the stigma and misunderstanding that surround HIV, such as the belief that HIV is a virus that solely impacts on gay and bisexual men, which, of course, is not true.

Those suffering often do not share the fact that they are living with a life-changing condition that has an ability to impact on their mental well-being and overall quality of life, but we must also increase awareness of the causes, symptoms and living with HIV. That is an obvious area for cross-border cooperation because HIV, as with many issues, does not recognise borders and impacts on men and women North and South equally.

#### 12.45 pm

In response to a question for written answer regarding departmental actions in tackling the stigma, the Minister of Health informed me of a recent workshop to consider key sexual health issues; HIV awareness training in health and social care trusts; and the funding of a number of voluntary organisations that raise awareness and provide information and support to those living with or affected by HIV. All this is positive, and evidence that the Minister is committed to tackling the stigma and supporting those living with HIV. However, as with many issues, this issue spans other Departments. I recently submitted a question to the Minister of Education to ask what provision was made for the teaching of sexual health in schools. Education in schools around sexual health, sexually transmitted infections and the prevention of HIV is key. Through education and increased awareness, we must

encourage people to look after their sexual health — in particular, young people.

In the North last year, 9,600 people were diagnosed with STIs — further evidence that we need to educate to ensure that all of us, including young people, make positive choices about our own sexual health. Sexual health information should not depend on the ethos of the school or opinion of individual teachers.

We need to further encourage testing. Whilst I welcome the introduction of home HIV testing kits, they undoubtedly require improvement to ensure ease of use. I recently met Positive Life. I commend its work in not only supporting those living with HIV but increasing awareness and shining a light on the fact that so many people are totally unaware that they have HIV. I also commend the sterling work of the Rainbow Project.

As a society, we must respond to this and develop services and information to meet the needs of those living with or affected by HIV, as well as those living unaware. Finally, to those suffering from HIV but too afraid to speak out: talk to someone. Support services are available, and people are willing to listen and help.

**Mrs Dobson:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion. I appreciate and agree with the call in the motion:

*"for a new campaign to promote awareness and prevention",*

of HIV. Indeed, a renewed and refreshed campaign has been long lacking.

In supporting that, it is important to look at the work already undertaken, led by the Public Health Agency (PHA), and what can be learned from that. The RQIA has, since 2013, been calling for the development of a regional clinic network to drive improvements in outcomes for patients and service users. No one is denying the need for a clear strategic direction to be set for sexual health services and agreed standards for service delivery. I hope that this motion brings closer that ambition called for in 2013.

In April 2012, the Health Committee received a briefing from the PHA on the sexual health promotion strategy and action plan for 2008-2013. I understand that the strategy was subsequently extended until the end of December last year. The strategy's fifth key priority area was HIV and STI prevention, and I understand that involved important work with high-risk subgroups.

As the motion states, cracking the stigma around seeking help is one of the major challenges, if not the major challenge, for any strategy. I pay tribute to those working in the trusts to deliver HIV awareness training, which contributes greatly to addressing that stigma. Bearing in mind, however, that one of the key objectives of the strategy was to reduce the incidence of STIs, including HIV, in the 10 years since 2004, we have seen a 47% increase in new HIV diagnoses. That is on the back of an overall reduction of 20% across the United Kingdom. That said, the prevalence of HIV diagnoses in Northern Ireland remains lower than the other regions of the UK.

I want to take a few moments to focus on the RQIA's October 2013 review of specialist sexual health services in Northern Ireland.

The report made 16 recommendations in total. It concluded:

*“Recent indicators for sexual health in Northern Ireland show concerning rises in sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV.”*

Amongst its recommendations were the development of standards for services; the development of a managed clinical network; improvements in what they termed, “fragmented” commissioning arrangements; and workforce planning to address staffing levels that were:

*“impacting on the ability to provide more locally accessible and integrated services.”*

These are all issues that warrant consideration in looking to future services to prevent the continued rise in the number of people diagnosed with HIV in Northern Ireland.

In conclusion, I appreciate that the Minister acknowledges that the PHA, along with stakeholders, undertook a major sexual health workshop last month and that she will consider the outcome of and proposals from it. However, I hope that, in response to today’s motion, she will acknowledge the clear need for a renewed and refreshed sexual health promotion strategy that takes on board the recommendations made by the RQIA in 2013 and recognises the need to address the concerning rises in diagnoses in recent years in Northern Ireland. It would also be helpful for us to receive a timeline within which such a refresh and renewal could take place.

**Mr Clarke:** I support the motion. As already noted by one of the Members who spoke today, Thursday is World AIDS Day. I should put on record that we tabled the motion as close to Thursday as possible in order to give the topic the most impact. When I came here in 2007, I would have dismissed the possibility that I would speak about HIV today, because I was one of those who did not understand the stigma attached to it.

I am not trying to get a rise out of Mr McCann when I say this, but I feel that his amendment, had he moved it, would have been unhelpful to people who, like me, were ignorant of the fact that this disease can affect heterosexuals. I have to put on record my thanks to Jacquie Richardson from Positive Life. Meeting her for the first time was a turning point for me, having been ignorant of the fact that the disease also affects heterosexual people. For that reason, I have no difficulty supporting what the motion calls for. The work that Positive Life did in changing my opinion — not only my opinion but that of many others — helped to remove the stigma.

Mr McCann’s amendment would have added to the stigma. Maybe those who are bisexual or gay do have a statistically higher risk, but his amendment brought that into the equation and amplified it. I think that we should talk about all who suffer with this condition; not just those who have the highest risk. For that reason, I support the work that Positive Life does, and I support the call for a centre of excellence. The work that the organisation does helps to dispel the myths. My colleague referred to the 61% of people who feel ashamed — nobody should feel ashamed because they have this condition. They need the support of us and others to try to overcome that so that they can live as long and normal a life as possible.

I do not want to stir things, but there was an interesting TV programme on last week about the end days of Freddie Mercury and his battle with the disease. When it came on, I thought, “I am not going to watch this”, because the stigma of what the disease is about was starting to come back, but I watched it to its conclusion. I know that Freddie Mercury died relatively recently, but one of the things that struck me — this came across in what Paula said about drugs — was how what can be done to help people who suffer with HIV has moved on. We should be giving people hope that things can be done to extend their life. Not one of us in the Chamber today knows how many days we have. Not one of us knows what illness we might have as we stand here today. We should look to the future and try to live as long and as healthy a life as possible. For me, whether it be through drugs or other support, we should support people with HIV, give them a better quality of life and remove that stigma because, as I say, no one should be ashamed because they have this condition. Many of us could have life-limiting diseases of other sorts, and we will not feel ashamed about that. We will want to live our life to the fullest. The work that Positive Life has done will make it easier for people who have the condition to live a fuller life, and they will know that they have support mechanisms in that organisation. I support the motion.

**Mr Milne:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on this very important motion. While noting the concerns expressed by those who tabled the motion about the level of stigma experienced by people living with HIV, I put on record my support for any new campaign that promotes awareness and prevention and, more importantly, that is tailored to our local needs. I also commend the good work being carried out in this field by organisations such as Positive Life and Rainbow.

It is important that we place on record our support to show that we care for people living with HIV. Making all efforts towards the development and improvement of the service to help people living with HIV is part of this. How we organise our health service matters, including how we better resource HIV prevention. We also need to support those people in our community who are living with HIV on quality-of-life issues, including social protection and positive mental health.

We must not understate the importance of testing for HIV to ensure an early diagnosis. As stated by the Public Health Agency, people respond better to treatment when they are diagnosed at an early stage of disease. The agency also stated that knowing your HIV status is the key to effective treatment and the prevention of onward transmission. HIV stigma is a key obstacle to HIV treatment, prevention and support. Sixty-eight per cent of respondents from the North of Ireland who contributed to the 2015 HIV stigma index stated that they had a negative self-image, so it is most important that we create an effective public awareness campaign in an effort to tackle the misconceptions around HIV. I support the motion.

**Mr Speaker:** Members, the Business Committee has agreed to meet at 1.00 pm. 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.

*The debate stood suspended.*

*The sitting was suspended at 12.57 pm.*

2.00 pm

*On resuming (Madam Principal Deputy Speaker [Ms Ruane] in the Chair) —*

## Oral Answers to Questions

### The Executive Office

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Tosnoimid le ceisteanna liostáilte. We will start with listed questions. Question 7 has been withdrawn.

#### Together: Building a United Community

1. **Mr Beggs** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the assessment made of the knowledge, skills and strengths in local communities before developing action plans through Together: Building a United Community. (AQO 774/16-21)

**Mrs Foster (The First Minister):** Together: Building a United Community is an Executive strategy that places responsibilities on all Departments. The development of the summer camp programme and the United Youth programme adopted a co-design approach with key stakeholders and young people. Local engagement with residents, community groups and stakeholders has informed the development of strategic frameworks for each Urban Village area. Young people are receiving training and mentoring to deliver the cross-community youth sports programme. This approach of local community engagement is at the heart of Together: Building a United Community. We will continue to work with communities to identify local needs, address local issues and deliver positive outcomes for all.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I call Gordon Lyons. Gabh mo leithscéal. Excuse me. I call Roy Beggs for a supplementary.

**Mr Beggs:** I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she acknowledge that having a wide range of bodies for Together: Building a United Community — the social investment fund (SIF), the small pockets of deprivation programme (SPOD), neighbourhood renewal funding, the Housing Executive and councils — means there is a danger of overlapping and duplicating services? Yet there are areas in my constituency, such as Craigy Hill and Antiville, where there is very weak community support and they seem to have missed out. What are the First Minister and deputy First Minister doing to ensure that areas are not missing out on support and that where there is a need it is addressed?

**Mrs Foster:** I thank the Member for his supplementary question. Many of these schemes are open to applications, and if the applications are put in, they are then assessed. In East Antrim under T:BUC, there have been many good interventions. There have been summer camps at Larne. The Education Authority (EA) has run a Larne rural youth project and engaged with Monkstown Boxing Club under the summer camp programme. Money has been distributed through the district council good relations programme, which will have an impact on East Antrim as well. The Community Relations Council (CRC) through T:BUC has been able to allocate over £10,000 to projects in East Antrim, including the Cairncastle Ulster-

Scots cultural group and the Carrickfergus historical re-enactments group. Indeed, there are many other organisations that have been able to avail themselves of CRC's core funding. In many cases, it is about an application process. Applications are then looked at to make sure they meet the required methodology and the governance needed to pay out the money. If he has any particular groups in mind that have not been successful in their applications, we are happy to work with him to see whether there is any way we can build capacity in that area, but it is done mostly by application.

**Mr Lyons:** I thank the First Minister for her answer and for all the good work that is being done through the T:BUC programme. She will be aware that the social investment fund is delivering for people in East Antrim through the building to employment through education programme. Does she agree with me that that is an excellent use of resources? It helps people who are in work or out of work to improve their employability through —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I think the Member has asked his question.

**Mr Lyons:** — free courses. Does she not agree that that is a fantastic use of the social investment fund?

**Mrs Foster:** Indeed. There are four SIF projects that benefit East Antrim: the community transport project; the mental health project; the fuel poverty project, which had to be re-scoped to make sure it did not overlap with projects already in place; and the building to employment through education project, which he just mentioned. That project has an investment of £3.2 million. It has two elements focused on increasing employment through education. It is a very good example of the work SIF is doing on the ground through early intervention and making sure people have the appropriate skills, education and employability so that they can then move into the world of work.

Some of the employability schemes that are happening across Northern Ireland have really made an impact and will continue to do so.

**Mr Lynch:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the First Minister for her answer. Will she provide an overview of the Executive Office funding programmes?

**Mrs Foster:** As I said, we have the T:BUC programmes. Under that, of course, there are seven headlines — it is really a framework, with seven different frames under that. We have the following: the shared and integrated education programme; the United Youth programme; Urban Villages, of which there are five; the shared neighbourhood programme; the interface programme, which is trying to remove barriers and walls, and we have been able to move from 59 down to 50; the cross-community youth sports programme; and, of course, the summer camps, which I have spoken about as well.

Under T:BUC, those seven headline programmes are working very well. Some of them will come to a natural end, and we will then be able to see the outworkings of them through the evaluations.

**Mr Dickson:** I thank the First Minister for her answers so far. How can she provide assurance to the communities that she engages with that that engagement extends beyond the client base of her party, the DUP, and Sinn Féin

given the recent issues around Charter and other issues that have raised concern in the community at this time?

**Mrs Foster:** I am not quite sure what “other” things he is talking about. Perhaps he can be more specific in a follow-up. In terms of the SIF programme, all organisations that receive public money are subject to robust checks to ascertain their capability to manage the funding and to make sure that they do it in an appropriate fashion. That is still the case. It is organisations, not individuals, that are subject to checks. The Department would not be aware of which individuals in an organisation would be working on any project. It is the organisations that we are concerned with. If he is talking about Charter NI, which is quite a segue from East Antrim, I have to say, that organisation has been in existence with a very robust board for 10 years and we have no difficulty in working with it.

## National Holocaust Memorial Day

2. **Mr Dunne** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on any plans they have to mark National Holocaust Memorial Day. (AQO 775/16-21)

**Mrs Foster:** I am pleased to say that arrangements for the Northern Ireland commemoration to mark National Holocaust Memorial Day 2017 are well-advanced. The Executive Office has allocated a budget and staffing resources to assist in the organisation of the local commemoration. An advisory group, made up of representatives of those affected by the Holocaust and subsequent genocides, has been established and has already met on three occasions since September to plan the event.

It has been agreed that the Northern Ireland commemoration will take place in the Market Place Theatre in Armagh at 7.00 pm on Thursday 26 January 2017 in order to avoid a clash with the Jewish sabbath on Friday 27 January. We are honoured that Mrs Mindu Hornick, an Auschwitz survivor, has agreed to be the keynote speaker at our commemoration, and it is expected that formal invitations to the event will be issued in the next few weeks and that all MLAs will be invited.

**Mr Dunne:** I thank the First Minister for her answer. What engagement has she had with the local Jewish community and, in particular, Walter Kammerling and his connections to north Down?

**Mrs Foster:** I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I have, very recently, visited the local Jewish community in north Belfast at their synagogue. I have to say that it was a very pleasant evening. We shared a meal, and I heard some of their concerns at the moment, which, of course, reflected some of the disgraceful attacks that have been happening, not least the anti-Semitic symbols that have been sprayed on houses and the synagogue and, indeed, the attack on the Jewish graves in Belfast City Cemetery on 26 August. I wanted to go to the Jewish community in Northern Ireland and stand in solidarity with them against these absolutely outrageous attacks on them as an ethnic minority and as a religious community here.

Walter Kammerling is a very significant person for you in north Down. He is now 93 years of age, having escaped Nazi persecution when he left Vienna in 1938 at the tender age of 15. He made his way via Kindertransport to Millisle in County Down, where, of course, the Belfast Jewish

community had leased a farm. Walter ended up there for three years.

He was one of approximately 300 children who passed through that farm. He has recently been involved in making a film about his experiences in north Down. We very much look forward to seeing that film and looking at the past and the significant role that was played by north Down at that time. I am sure that the Member, as a representative of North Down, is very proud of the way in which the area welcomed people.

**Mrs Palmer:** I thank the Minister for her response thus far. Last month, Rabbi David Singer indicated that he believed that there had been an increase in anti-Semitism in Northern Ireland. The Minister touched on that. How do the Executive intend to collect data during this mandate to monitor the levels of anti-Semitism in our society?

**Mrs Foster:** I thank the Member. Of course, we monitor hate crimes in general, but we do not have a specific monitor for anti-Semitic hate crime. That is something that we need to consider, particularly given its rise. It is a very sad indication, when there is only a very small community of Jewish people living here, that people seek to attack them, their religion and their consecrated graves. It is something that we need to consider. I will give thought to it.

**Mr McGuigan:** Following on from the last response on monitoring hate crime, I ask the First Minister for an update on the current Executive response to hate crime.

**Mrs Foster:** As I indicated, recorded hate crime has not risen as it has, unfortunately, in England and Wales recently, but it is an incomplete metric of how much hate crime is occurring. For example, an increase in confidence to report hate crime and awareness of how to report it will lead to an increase in reported crime even though there has not been an increase; there has just been increased awareness or an increased confidence in reporting. We need to look at hate crime statistics to see whether we can monitor them more effectively. I hope that the racial equality subgroup that we have set up, which has met twice already and is due to meet again in December, will assist us in our deliberations on these issues.

**Mr McNulty:** I thank the First Minister for her answers thus far. Will she outline whether there are plans to extend Holocaust Memorial Day services to include more primary-school children?

**Mrs Foster:** I do not have that detail in front of me. I know that we very much want to educate young people about the horrors of what happened in the past, particularly in relation to the Jewish community. When it comes out, the Walter Kammerling film will be a very appropriate way to engage with young people, given that he travelled here when he was a young person and was very warmly welcomed to Northern Ireland.

I will certainly pass on those comments to officials involved in planning National Holocaust Memorial Day. As I said, they have identified Armagh as the place to host it next year. I very much hope to be in Armagh to mark that very important anniversary.

## EU: Action Plan for Leaving

3. **Mr McGlone** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the memo, published on

15 November 2016 by The Times newspaper, that reveals a lack of an action plan for leaving the European Union. (AQO 776/16-21)

**Mrs Foster:** We now know that the memo published in 'The Times' was not an official UK Government document; it was produced by Deloitte. Even they have confirmed that it was not commissioned by the Cabinet Office and was prepared without access to Number 10 or input from any other Department. Clearly, it did not reveal anything of the UK Government's position.

That having been said, it should not be a surprise to anyone that the UK Government have not yet finalised their plans for leaving the European Union; indeed, if they had, I would be concerned, given that they are in detailed discussions with us to help to shape the plan. They are still at the information-gathering and analysis stage, which is a huge task covering many areas of government. We are currently feeding our assessment of the issues into the process through the Joint Ministerial Committee and extensive bilateral engagement between officials. We would neither expect nor want the UK Government to adopt a position until they had considered all the issues and implications, including those for Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister has made it clear that we will be fully involved and represented in the development of a UK approach. We will continue to take every opportunity to reiterate our agreed priorities and to emphasise the unique nature of our situation.

## 2.15 pm

**Mr McGlone:** Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire chomh maith. I thank the Minister for her answer and for shedding some light on that. Unfortunately, it appears that any journalist with a good camera can get an insight into what the Brexit stance of the UK Government is at the moment. Does the Minister support, like the deputy First Minister, the tabling of a legislative consent motion in the Assembly on the triggering of article 50?

**Mrs Foster:** No, I do not, because I believe that it is a matter for the Westminster Parliament. There are issues now in front of the Supreme Court. Those matters will have to be heard. We as an Executive are not officially party to that, but all the issues that were heard in the Belfast court are now before the Supreme Court. We are an interested party, and our Attorney General will be there as well, so we will have a full understanding of the Supreme Court decision when it comes.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Does the First Minister think that it is practical to adopt a policy of having cake and eating cake?

**Mrs Foster:** If the question is whether we should have ambition for Northern Ireland outside the European Union, the answer is "Yes, we should". That is exactly what we are doing. We want to ensure that we have maximum access to the single market, as we agreed at the British-Irish Council with all our colleagues from the devolved Administrations. We want to make sure that the border between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom is not a hard one, as we agreed with all our colleagues. There is growing consensus, not just in the United Kingdom and Ireland but in Europe, in the understanding of the situation of Northern Ireland and its history and geography. If the question is about ambition, we should definitely lead the way and have ambition for this place.

**Mr M Bradley:** Is the Minister satisfied with the level of engagement with the UK Government on Brexit?

**Mrs Foster:** Yes, I am, because the Prime Minister has come here. Together, we have gone to the Joint Ministerial Committee plenary session. We were then at the European exit meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee. The deputy First Minister and I are in China next week, so ministerial colleagues will go to the next Joint Ministerial Committee meeting. The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union has made it clear that, if, at any time, we have any issues that we want to raise with him, we should contact him directly and raise them. I do not think that you can be more open than that.

**Ms Dillon:** Minister, if what you outline is the case, is it not fair for the Ministers to share that information with their Committees?

**Mrs Foster:** As I said in my substantive answer, we are still at the analysis and information-gathering stage. No positions have been taken on what the UK negotiation position will be, because the Government are still trying to understand all the different positions across the United Kingdom. As the Prime Minister very clearly said, we should not engage in a running commentary. People in this place should know that, when one enters into negotiations, positions sometimes have to change and there have to be trade-offs in order to achieve an end agreement. I am sure that this will be no different.

**Dr Farry:** In the light of the deep concerns expressed by many businesses across the UK and the agriculture sector, particularly in Northern Ireland, the warnings from the financial markets and the looming Budget deficit, will the First Minister explain her remark to her party conference that this is the greatest opportunity for Northern Ireland for decades?

**Mrs Foster:** Yet again, I reiterate the position on ambition. Other people might want to talk down what has happened; I see it as a tremendous opportunity for Northern Ireland. It is a chance to be innovative and flexible and for Northern Ireland to be an open and welcoming regional part of the United Kingdom. It is a chance to go across the world and look for new trade deals. It is a chance to give our fishermen more flexibility, and, my goodness, would they not welcome more flexibility after what they have had to put up with from the European Union?

This is an opportunity to be welcomed. There will be short-term challenges, and I have never shied away from that. In the medium to longer term, however, we will be in a much stronger and better place.

## EU: UK Decision to Leave

4. **Ms Hanna** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. (AQO 777/16-21)

**Ms Hanna:** My question has been slightly lost in translation since its submission.

**Mrs Foster:** I am sorry. It is no secret that the deputy First Minister and I were on different sides of the argument leading up to the referendum. However, we are both committed to getting the best possible outcome for the people of Northern Ireland and are working together to achieve that. We are actively engaged with the UK

Government to ensure that the issues of particular significance for us are fully understood. The Prime Minister has assured us that we will be involved and represented in the negotiations on the terms of our future relationship with the European Union, and we intend to be.

We are also working closely with the Irish Government to identify and scope issues of mutual interest and exert influence. We had a very positive meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) on 18 November, when we agreed to continue and intensify engagement through the NSMC sectoral meetings and between senior officials. Our joint objectives are set out in the letter that we sent to the Prime Minister in August and we are working to achieve those objectives.

**Ms Hanna:** I thank the First Minister for her answer. She referred to the growing understanding in Europe of our unique circumstances. Is she not worried, at any level, that London will look after the south-east and that she and the deputy First Minister need to seriously agree a detailed strategy and start fighting for Northern Ireland's access to the EU single market?

**Mrs Foster:** I am not quite sure which part of my previous answer the Member missed about maximum access to the single market. That is not just the position of the deputy First Minister and myself; it is the position of all the British-Irish Council delegates who met together last Friday. It was one of the four issues that we put out after that meeting, so it is difficult to see where the lady is coming from.

**Ms Lockhart:** I thank the First Minister for her answers thus far. Does she agree that the most important relationship is not with the EU but with the United Kingdom?

**Mrs Foster:** Absolutely. It is, of course, the most important relationship for Northern Ireland, particularly when you look at where the sales of our goods go. Sixty-seven per cent of the goods manufactured in Northern Ireland go to the UK market, including our own domestic market. That is something that, frankly, is missed by a lot of people when they talk about access to the European market. They should be concentrating on how we can increase the amount of goods that we send into the UK market. To go back to Mr Farry's point about agriculture, there is a great opportunity for us to provide more of our agri-products into the United Kingdom because there will be some displacement from European Union products. There are opportunities and we should take them. Instead of dwelling on the past, we should accept that the vote has been taken and move on to the future.

**Ms Gildernew:** What work is taking place to outline the impact of Brexit on border communities such as those that are scattered right across my constituency? I can see no positive impact at all.

**Mrs Foster:** Well, I can see plenty of positives. The Member must not be engaging with the same communities that I am engaging with because they seem to be benefiting greatly at the moment from what happened on 23 June, particularly in Enniskillen. However, we are engaging in relation to the common travel area with the Taoiseach and with our own Prime Minister. Every one of us wants to see the common travel area sustained and maintained to make sure that there is ease of access, not just in relation to Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland but between Wales and the Republic of Ireland. We must also not forget that the Crown dependencies are

part of the common travel area and we need to be able to satisfy them.

**Mr Smith:** Yesterday, Sinn Féin launched a document called 'Towards a United Ireland'. In a covering letter from Gerry Adams, which we all received, he said that the prospect of Northern Ireland:

*"being dragged out of the European Union ... has put the issue of Irish re-unification ... back onto the ... agenda."*

How can the public have any faith in the Executive's ability to represent Northern Ireland's best interests on this issue when one half of it is so blatantly pursuing —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I think the Member has asked —

**Mr Smith:** — its own party political issues?

**Mrs Foster:** We have made it clear that the Executive Office will do all that is right for the best interests of the people whom we represent at the negotiations. I cannot speak for the president of Sinn Féin, and I will never pretend to speak for the president of Sinn Féin.

If he wants to put out a document along those lines, so be it for him, because the reality is — and of course some people cannot accept this — that the vote on 23 June had absolutely nothing to do with a vote on the reunification of Ireland. The two are completely separate. In June, people were asked if they wanted the United Kingdom as a nation state to remain within the European Union or leave the European Union. They gave their decision on that matter, and it has absolutely nothing to do with a return to an all-Ireland state.

## Victims Services

5. **Mr Boylan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the design of the new victims service delivery model. (AQO 778/16-21)

**Mrs Foster:** Madam Principal Deputy Speaker, with your permission I will ask junior Minister Ross to answer this question.

**Mr Ross (Junior Minister, The Executive Office):** Our Department, in conjunction with the Victims and Survivors Service, the Commission for Victims and Survivors and key stakeholders, has been taking forward a collaborative design programme of work to develop a comprehensive and high-quality service which meets the needs of all victims and survivors. The outworkings of the collaborative design programme have clearly outlined the need for a new service delivery model which can address the longer-term sustainability of programmes and eligibility concerns to help provide better outcomes for victims and survivors. We aim to have this new model operational from April 2017 onwards.

**Mr Boylan:** I thank the junior Minister for his answer. Can he give an overview of the collective design approach that has informed this new delivery model?

**Mr Ross:** The design programme team has been set up, and it comprises personnel from the Executive Office, the Victims and Survivors Service and the Commission for Victims and Survivors to ensure the development of an improved service delivery model capable of meeting the needs of victims and survivors. During the process, there was extensive engagement. A series of workshops

were held to identify the key priorities moving forward. The areas identified included: improving the monitoring and evaluation for victims groups, giving greater flexibility for individuals, the piloting of new ways of working, personalised budgets, caseworkers and a better assessment of needs. Hopefully, all this work has put us in a better position for us to move forward into next year.

**Mr Logan:** Last week the Executive announced over £30 million of new funding streams for victims. Can the junior Minister outline what these are and when the applications open?

**Mr Ross:** Yes, last week we were delighted to be able to announce new funding streams worth over £30 million. There were two identified. The first is the victims support programme which is worth £18.7 million, and the second is a Peace IV shared spaces and services programme worth €17.6 million. Both are designed to not only build capacity within groups who are supporting and representing victims, but also improve the health and well-being of victims and survivors right across Northern Ireland.

The application process for both funding streams opened last week on 24 November, and I encourage as many people as possible to come forward and apply for that funding because, as we have said, it is a significant amount of money available and it demonstrates the Executive's commitment to the victims and survivors sector.

**Mr Butler:** A year on from Fresh Start, what progress has been made on delivering a world-class trauma centre?

**Mr Ross:** I missed the last part of that.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member repeat the question?

**Mr Butler:** A year on from Fresh Start, what progress has been made on delivering a world-class trauma centre?

**Mr Ross:** Thank you for repeating the question. Significant progress has been made. Department of Health officials continue to lead on the establishment of a mental trauma service for Northern Ireland, which was announced by the Minister for Health in September 2015. It will meet the psychological needs of victims and survivors, and it is not a purely medical model either; it will be an integrated approach. The partnership agreement is being developed to define referral protocols between statutory, voluntary and community sectors as we speak. Considerable progress has been made, and coupled with the other programmes and services offered by the Executive and the arm's-length bodies, we are helping people right across Northern Ireland deal with the many complex issues facing victims and survivors.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I call Chris Lyttle for a very brief supplementary.

**Mr Lyttle:** Can the junior Minister update us on the creation of the post of victim advocate to assist victims and survivors to navigate the wide range of justice information and service provision available to them?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** And a very quick answer from the junior Minister.

**Mr Ross:** We continue, through the work of the Executive Office, to help victims and signpost them to the right place for assistance. We are also helping to build capacity within groups, and hopefully we will be in a better position

in January to outline how we intend to continue to move forward in this area.

**2.30 pm**

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Sin deireadh leis na ceisteanna liostaithe. That ends the period for listed questions. We will now move on to topical questions.

## Papal Visit: August 2018

**Mr McNulty:** The First Minister will be aware that a papal visit to Ireland in August 2018 was confirmed yesterday. I welcome the First Minister's statement that she will meet the Holy Father. I hope that she can show that she understands how important the visit will be for a lot of people.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member please come to his question?

T1. **Mr McNulty** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an assurance that the Executive will be supportive of the Pope's visit, vocally and practically, and that every effort will be made to work with local government to ensure that our towns and cities are looking their very best, just as for every other big event that has been held here. (AQT 556/16-21)

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I think that the Member has asked his question.

**Mrs Foster:** And many others besides.

I do, of course, understand the significance of a papal visit, should it happen. I notice that the Vatican has said that it does not confirm a visit until six months before it takes place. There has been a lot of excitement among some people, but we will have to wait to see whether it occurs. If it does occur, and if he, as head of state, comes as a guest of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, of course I, as head of the Northern Ireland Executive, along with the deputy First Minister, will meet him.

**Mr McNulty:** Will the First Minister guarantee that moneys and funds will be available to local government to ensure that our towns and cities look their very best for the visit of our Holy Father?

**Mrs Foster:** We had better get a visit confirmed before we start planning to spend money. I am sure that, if the Finance Minister were here, he would bear this out: we have a very difficult Budget coming towards us in the next while, and we need to look at what our priorities will be over the next couple of years. Of course, if such a visit is to go ahead and is planned, we will make sure that Northern Ireland looks its best, as we try to do for all the visitors who come to Northern Ireland.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Iarraim ar Trevor Lunn. I call Trevor Lunn.

**Mr Lunn:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Thank you very much, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker.

## Pension: Victims of the Troubles

T2. **Mr Lunn** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the First Minister supports the urgent provision of a pension for the people who were seriously injured during the Troubles. (AQT 557/16-21)

**Mrs Foster:** Yes, I do. The Democratic Unionist Party has a very clear view on a pension for people who were seriously injured, and we must ensure that they are facilitated. We very firmly believe, however, that that should be available only to the innocent victims, and therein lies part of the difficulty. As the Member will well know, the definition of a victim, as it stands, includes those injured when committing some of the most heinous crimes, and I will certainly not stand over giving money or a pension to someone who was the author of his own misfortune.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Before calling the Member for a supplementary, I congratulate him on his beautiful Irish.

**Mr Lunn:** I will not repeat it. *[Laughter.]* I thank the First Minister for the points she made and the answer she gave. Some of us met WAVE's injured campaign group today. On their behalf, I wish to ask if and when the Executive Office will introduce seriously injured pension legislation for consideration by the House, given, as we all know, the length of time that people have been waiting?

**Mrs Foster:** I wholeheartedly endorse WAVE's campaign. I am sure that the Member recognises that we should take forward WAVE's campaign for a special pension for those who suffered injuries through no fault of their own during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. As he will know, I await the readiness of others to look at the definition of a victim. Members of my party have tried in the past to have that discussion, but, unfortunately, we have not been able to change the definition. However, we live in hope that it can be changed so that people can get what is duly theirs.

### BBC Sports Personality of the Year Shortlist

T3. **Mr M Bradley** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for the First Minister's thoughts on the exclusion of Northern Ireland sporting stars from the BBC Sports Personality of the Year shortlist. (AQT 558/16-21)

**Mrs Foster:** Well, how shall I put it? She is not amused. I think that it is absolutely scandalous that someone of Carl Frampton's ability, who is a double world champion, should be excluded from the Sports Personality of the Year.

**A Member:** And Jonathan Rea.

**Mrs Foster:** I hear from my colleague that another man should have been thought of — Jonathan Rea — who is also a double world champion. What about Bethany Firth? What about Michael McGovern, that man from Fermanagh, who did sterling work for the Northern Ireland team during the Euros?

**Some Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mrs Foster:** There is a huge hole in relation to the Sports Personality of the Year. Despite the fact that the nominations have been increased from 12 to 16, they have managed to leave out some very special sporting stars from Northern Ireland.

**Mr M Bradley:** The First Minister mentioned the wealth of sporting talent in the Province, and we are contributors to the service as licence payers. Are there any plans to challenge the BBC?

**Mrs Foster:** I understand from my colleague the Minister for Communities, who has just joined me, that he will raise

that directly with the BBC's head of sport, Barbara Slater. When you look at the judging panel, you see that there is a problem. They are obviously not aware of other sports, and we really need to bring it to their attention. The Member is right: we are all licence fee payers, and that should be considered. As I said, the Minister for Communities intends to raise the matter directly with the BBC.

### C S Lewis Square

T4. **Mr Douglas** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, after thanking the First Minister for attending the launch of C S Lewis Square last week, whether the First Minister agrees that that is the sort of successful initiative that the Executive and the Assembly should be supporting. (AQT 559/16-21)

**Mrs Foster:** I congratulate east Belfast on a wonderful open space to commemorate one of its most famous sons. It is a tremendous example of partnership working between the community, the Connswater greenway, Belfast City Council, the Big Lottery Fund and, of course, the Department for Communities in the Executive. It is a tremendous way in which we can regenerate urban spaces in a very meaningful way. I have to say to the Member that I was really taken by the number of children who were there and who looked on with great awe and admiration at the huge statues that have been put in place at C S Lewis Square. I hope that they all get as much enjoyment from the works of C S Lewis as my generation did.

**Mr Douglas:** I thank the First Minister for her answers thus far. Last Sunday, a few days after the opening, there were six C S Lewis tours with 30 people on each one — they were bunged out. Does she believe that tourism is a big driver for those types of initiatives? I also want to thank the Northern Ireland Tourist Board — Tourism Northern Ireland.

**Mrs Foster:** Yes, it is Tourism Northern Ireland, which does tremendous work in marketing those initiatives, as does Tourism Ireland. The wonderful thing about tourism is that it can be a job creation initiative and an economic driver for the whole of Northern Ireland. When you get a local story or hook, you are able to tell the world about your local environment, and I have seen some marvellous examples of that.

The deputy First Minister and I were at Seamus Heaney's HomePlace recently, which is another tremendous example of how you can use culture and someone's birthplace as a way to bring tourists and those who are looking to expand their minds to Bellaghy. A tremendous initiative has gone on there as well. Two great giants — Seamus Heaney and C S Lewis — and it is about time that we started to recognise what they have done for this place.

### China Visit

T5. **Mr Dunne** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their planned visit to China. (AQT 560/16-21)

**Mrs Foster:** The deputy First Minister and I will leave for China very early on Sunday. We have a full programme from Monday morning, when we will meet the Northern Ireland Bureau in China; indeed, we will open our bureau there.

That will be a very important staging post for us out in the Far East. We are hoping to meet Madam Liu Yandong, who was here in Northern Ireland some years ago when she met the then First Minister and deputy First Minister and, indeed, all the Executive and took in some of our tourism opportunities.

We are going to meet Bombardier, which has a facility out in China — in Shenyang — and we will meet other very important dignitaries in Shenyang and look at various investment opportunities for here in Northern Ireland. We will return to Northern Ireland on Friday of next week.

**Mr Dunne:** I thank the Minister for her answer. Following our successful year of food and drink and given the quality of products available, what opportunities exist for further exports of our quality products into new markets like China?

**Mrs Foster:** We will look for opportunities not least for our agri-sector and, in particular, our pork sector out in China. We will no doubt eat some of the fare from China — the things we do for Ulster — and we will bring them the message that Northern Ireland is very much open for business and wants to do business with China. The agri-food sector will be very much a strong part of what we will talk about when we go to China.

### Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme

T6. **Ms Dillon** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the vulnerable persons' relocation scheme. (AQT 561/16-21)

**Mrs Foster:** We have had a very successful integration of the refugees who have come to Northern Ireland. The junior Minister will keep me right, but I think I am right in saying we have had five groups of families, mostly, coming to reside here in Northern Ireland. They have been spread out across Northern Ireland. I have to say that a great deal of praise and commendation should go to the officials right across the piece who have worked very hard to make sure that those who come to Northern Ireland for a new life are given all the support they require.

**Ms Dillon:** What more does the Minister believe can be done to help reassure our migrant and foreign national communities that they are welcome in our communities?

**Mrs Foster:** We have been taking a ministerial lead on these matters through our junior Ministers and, indeed, through ourselves as well. This time last year — I think it was probably later in December — the deputy First Minister and I, as Finance Minister, visited our very first group of refugees that had come to Northern Ireland. We can do that, therefore, by very positive leadership. We set up our racial equality subgroup, and the refugee integration strategy is being drafted at the moment. We hope it will be out for preconsultation very soon with a number of very important stakeholders. So, that is going on as well.

### Rugby World Cup 2023

T7. **Mr Frew** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the bid for the Rugby World Cup. (AQT 562/16-21)

**Mrs Foster:** Two weeks ago, the Rugby World Cup bid was officially launched between us and the Irish Government. Our main competitors appear to be France and the Republic of South Africa. We are quietly hopeful,

if not confident, that we can attain the Rugby World Cup for 2023. We say that not only because we have been doing some lobbying and some very hard work behind the scenes, but because we have not had the Rugby World Cup and the other two jurisdictions have already hosted it in their own countries.

**Mr Frew:** Will the First Minister take this opportunity, as I will, to congratulate Rory Best on his 100 caps for Irish rugby and to acknowledge the great achievement that is for the man himself and the great personality that he is?

**Mrs Foster:** I am very pleased that you have mentioned that because Rory is, of course, one of our greatest sporting ambassadors. We are incredibly proud of what he achieved on Saturday evening, not just because he got a win but because it was his 100th cap. He can take from this place, I hope, the support of the whole House for what he has achieved wearing the green shirt.

2.45 pm

## Justice

### Reoffending Strategy

1. **Mr McNulty** asked the Minister of Justice whether she has any plans to bring forward a strategy to prevent reoffending. (AQO 788/16-21)

**Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice):** Reducing reoffending is central to the work of my Department. A wide range of organisations, including the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the Youth Justice Agency and the Probation Board, work collaboratively to provide rehabilitative programmes, supervision and support that focus on addressing the factors that lead to offending behaviour.

In 2013, my Department published the 'Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending'. The framework recognised the need for strong partnership working across government and with the statutory, voluntary and community sector, both to prevent people from becoming involved in crime and to reduce reoffending. We will continue to build on the core principles set out in the strategic framework through my Department's contributions to the draft Programme for Government 2016-2021, which contains a performance indicator focusing on reducing reoffending.

The associated delivery plan is currently out for public consultation, and consideration will be given to how best we can take forward the respective actions therein. The Programme for Government will be the main vehicle through which my Department will work to deliver strategic actions aimed at preventing reoffending. Consequently, I do not have any current plans to bring forward a separate strategy, although I will keep this under review.

**Mr McNulty:** I thank the Minister for her answer thus far. As the Minister will know, the Welsh Government have a strategy to prevent reoffending, which involves police, agencies and government, addressing priority offenders groups —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Can the Member come to a question?

**Mr McNulty:** — reducing reoffending across health, education, substance misuse, debt-related crime —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Can the Member please come to a question?

**Mr McNulty:** Is this integrated approach and a dedicated strategy not needed in the North?

**Ms Sugden:** I thank the Member for his supplementary. The answer that I gave him to the original question outlines that that collaborative approach is one that we are taking in Northern Ireland. Indeed, we need to have a collaborative approach when it comes to reducing reoffending and, if we can, enable offenders, once they come out of custody, to go back into a safer community, not just for themselves but for the entire community. That collaborative working is at the heart of my Justice Department's work and, indeed, at the heart of the Programme for Government.

**Mr Beattie:** I thank the Minister for her answers so far. I will expand on the issue of crime. As you know, the Northern Ireland crime survey is showing a decrease in crime, yet the PSNI crime statistics are showing an increase in crime. Can you give us a view on that and where resources would go to?

**Ms Sugden:** The Member raises a very interesting point on the measurement of crime. Indeed, is that an appropriate measurement for how we tackle some of the issues that we are facing in the criminal justice system? As the Member will be familiar with, one of my key priorities is around domestic violence. Arguably, if that crime is reducing, it suggests that that is because of decreased reporting, so we would like to see an increase in reporting, which suggests an increase in crime. Therefore, we have to take a number of factors into account when we look at crime statistics and see how we can best tackle these issues based on those numbers.

**Mr Douglas:** Will the Minister join me in welcoming the appointment of Cheryl Lamont as chief executive of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, which is the type of organisation that we need to continue to support to prevent reoffending?

**Ms Sugden:** I join the Member entirely in that. I was delighted to hear of Cheryl's appointment. Indeed, I wrote to her very soon after hearing of that outcome. I have worked with Cheryl in her role acting up as chief executive since I became Minister, and I have been deeply impressed by her approach to probation in Northern Ireland. The work that the Probation Board does should not be underestimated, both with people while they are in custody and following custody when people come out into the community. It is an organisation that we need to support. There are two strands of rehabilitation. One is preparing the individual, and the other is preparing the environment into which they come out. We need to ensure that the proper provisions are in place so that they can be in the most stable environment so that they are unlikely to offend again.

**Mr Sheehan:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a cuid freagraí. I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. Will she give a commitment to bring forward proposals for achievable outcomes and much-needed support for reoffenders before, during and after they leave prison?

**Ms Sugden:** I thank the Member for his question. In a response to a previous question from the Member, I

outlined my keenness to look at offending at the point of offenders coming into the criminal justice system, before going into custody, during their time in custody and when they come out of it. Ultimately, our aim is to ensure a safer community and we do that in the hope that no one will reoffend. There are a number of approaches that we can take. We have already outlined the work of the Probation Board and how it can help.

However, we have to take a wider approach than that. Indeed, it has to be a cross-departmental approach. It is not just about reducing the opportunities to commit a particular crime; it is about providing the right social housing, for example, and ensuring that the right benefits are in place so that, when offenders come out of custody, they will not have opportunities to commit crime. There are a number of approaches to this, but I entirely agree that our support in rehabilitation has to be at the point of the criminal justice system. I had a conversation with the Lord Chief Justice on that very aspect. It has to be while offenders are in custody, so that we can build them up and, hopefully, ensure that they will not reoffend. Afterwards, in the community, we must ensure that former offenders are supported and that communities are kept safe.

## Orange Institution: Hate Crimes

2. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any additional measures her Department has taken to address hate crimes against properties owned by the Orange Institution. (AQO 789/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** I want to say at the outset that I find any attack on any symbolic building unacceptable. I am aware that there have been a number of attacks on symbolic premises across Northern Ireland, some of which have been investigated as hate crimes by the PSNI. The operational response to such attacks is a matter for the Chief Constable. I understand that the PSNI has a control strategy to deal with such attacks, and that entails PSNI patrols continuing to pay attention to symbolic buildings and local crime-prevention officers providing security advice.

In response to the recent attacks on Orange halls, the PSNI have refreshed and recirculated their control strategy to all districts. From the perspective of my Department, the underlying societal issues that can culminate in any hate crimes, including attacks on Orange halls, cannot be dealt with by the criminal justice system alone. They require an Executive-wide response if they are to be tackled effectively.

The Executive Office leads on tackling hate and intolerance in society more widely through the Executive's Together: Building a United Community strategy. My Department supports that work through the delivery of the Executive's community safety strategy, which contains a commitment to tackle all forms of hate through prevention, awareness and education.

I recently met with junior Ministers Fearon and Ross to discuss how my Department could further support the work they are taking forward to tackle hate crime. Engagement between our Departments continues. For example, in the Member's constituency, the North Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership recently launched the No Hate Here initiative, which aims to engage the community in standing up to hate crime and to provide safe places for victims of it.

**Mr Humphrey:** I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Orange halls were the first community halls. They are used by hundreds of community organisations every week, and thousands of people attend them. I understand from the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland that 32 halls have been attacked this year. The detection rate is deplorable, if not non-existent —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member come to his question please?

**Mr Humphrey:** What more can be done, and will the Minister commit to meet with me and a Grand Lodge of Ireland delegation to discuss the issue of these appalling and ongoing attacks on the Orange community across Northern Ireland?

**Ms Sugden:** I am more than happy to meet the Member and representatives of the Orange lodge. I am pleased that the Member has a focus on this particular area. During the previous Question Time, we talked about attacks on Jewish targets. Perhaps we could arrange a day when we can meet representatives of a number of communities in north Belfast. I am more than happy to do so.

**Mr McPhillips:** Let me begin by condemning all hate-filled attacks, whether on Orange halls, GAA or other sporting bodies, places of worship or other places. Given that eight hate-motivated incidents are reported to the police daily, does the Minister support a single equality Act as a mechanism to put in law better protection for all our citizens, including ethnic minorities?

**Ms Sugden:** I thank the Member for his question. I condemn any form of hate attack in any part of our society and from any background. I very much support the principle of equality. In terms of what we can do within the Assembly, I demonstrated that yesterday with the provision that I made in the Policing and Crime Bill. I deplore any type of such behaviour that happens in our society.

Again, there has to be an Executive-wide approach. I am pleased to say that the Executive Office, under the leadership of the junior Ministers, is having a particular focus on hate crime, and I am quite happy to support it in doing so. I think that the Assembly, to a large extent, needs to support those messages also.

Yes, of course it is the approach that we should be taking, and it is heartening to see that we are making steps forward.

**Ms Gildernew:** Does the Minister agree that a multifaceted approach is required to bring about an end to hate-crime attacks on property owned by all sections of the community and that mutual respect for all cultural traditions is central to that?

**Ms Sugden:** Yes, entirely. We all need to accept the fact that we are different. If anything, that enriches our society. It is something that we should celebrate with one another and respect. It has to be a multifaceted approach. As I said, it cannot be just in my Department that we look at this, which is when it gets to the unfortunate end point of these types of offences and crimes. Yes, we very much need to start celebrating the diversity that exists in Northern Ireland, and I am happy to play my part in doing that.

**Mr Beggs:** First, I declare an interest as an officer in my local lodge and of Larne district. Between 2011 and 2016, there have been 132 attacks on Orange halls. Does the Minister accept that, if there had been 132 attacks on

synagogues, GAA halls, mosques, chapels or the buildings of other denominations, there would have been a much stronger, cross-departmental response to address the causes of the sectarian hate attacks? Will she ensure —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I think that the Member has asked his question.

**Mr Beggs:** Will she ensure that there is greater recognition for what these are —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member has asked his question.

**Mr Beggs:** — which are sectarian hate-crime attacks?

**Ms Sugden:** Any type of attack, whether it is on an Orange hall or a GAA property, is entirely deplorable. I think that the approach taken in this area has been consistent from all Members I, for one, do not underplay the fact that these attacks are happening to Orange halls and that we should take a very serious approach to how we tackle them.

Operationally, the response sits with the PSNI. I have had conversations with George about all sorts of hate crimes across Northern Ireland. Yes, every type of attack needs to be deplored, and I certainly would not single one out. It is not acceptable, and that is the message that I put out to the House. We should be completely against anything like this.

**Mr Lunn:** The statistic that Mr Beggs just gave us is absolutely deplorable, but it does not take away from the fact that many institutions are being attacked in this country, and many foreign nationals and EU citizens —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member come to his question?

**Mr Lunn:** I am getting there. Can the Minister give an absolute assurance that she will deal with each incident equally, no matter what the institution is or who the person is, and that all institutions and people will receive whatever measure of protection is available to her?

**Ms Sugden:** Yes, there is no question about that. I am happy to treat all such attacks equally. Every incident, regardless of its nature, is deplorable, as the Member outlined. Therefore, yes, of course — unquestionably.

**Mr Allister:** Does the Minister agree that deterrent sentences are essential to stamp out this sectarian hate crime? Is not the Department's commitment undermined by the fact that, although there have been 132 attacks, the Minister is not interested enough to know how many prosecutions there have been? As Mr Beggs said, if the —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I think that the Member has asked his question.

**Mr Allister:** — subject of attack had been of a different colour, I think that the Minister would have made it her business. Is that not correct?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member has asked his question.

**Ms Sugden:** The Member is entirely incorrect. As he will know as well as anybody else, prosecution is a matter for the Public Prosecution Service. I am fully aware that the Member for North Antrim has asked a number of questions about Orange halls. I can give my absolute assurance to the House that I take these matters seriously, regardless of whether it is an Orange hall, GAA building or any other type of building in our community. As another Member

outlined, these buildings are used by communities from various backgrounds. We should be supporting our community and voluntary sector. I completely dismiss claims that my approach would be any different were it another type of building. I am not even sure where the Member is getting that suggestion from, but I can put on record that that is not the case.

## Stalking

3. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on legislation on stalking. (AQO 790/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** Stalking and its impact on victims are matters of great concern. Such behaviour has no place in Northern Ireland, and I am clear that any such incidents should be subject to the full rigour of the law.

### 3.00 pm

As I announced on 12 September, my Department is reviewing the law in this area with a view to introducing legislation with specific stalking offences. My officials briefed the Justice Committee last week on our initial work. The Justice Committee has indicated that it will carry out a review to consider the potential benefits of specific stalking legislation and has committed to producing a report by April 2017 to support legislative change. My Department is working closely with the Committee on the issue to ensure that legislation can follow swiftly from the conclusion of this shared approach.

**Mr McQuillan:** I thank the Minister for her answer. I am sure that you agree, Minister, that stalking is one of the worst types of harassment and that the sooner we bring forward legislation to stamp it out and get the people who are carrying it out before the courts the better.

**Ms Sugden:** I agree with the Member's comments on stalking. I have met victims of stalking, facilitated by Members of his party, and in my constituency people have come forward to say how stalking is devastating their lives. I am not convinced that the current legislation is strong enough in this area, and I am mindful to look at that, pending the outcome of the Justice Committee's review. I am pleased to say that the Justice Committee is taking a really proactive approach, and I look forward to seeing its report early next year.

**Mr Mullan:** Will the Minister confirm whether she intends to publish a legislative programme for this mandate? If so, when? In addition to legislation on coercive behaviour, what are your legislative intentions?

**Ms Sugden:** I am still developing my legislative programme. I am keen to have focused pieces of legislation in this mandate. I hope to bring forward three pieces of legislation this year, including the piece of legislation on coercive control that includes the domestic abuse offence that I committed in the House to bring to the stature books within a year. We are also looking at committal reform in terms of the parliamentary action plan. The name of the third piece of legislation escapes me, but I will come back to the Member on that.

**Ms Boyle:** Under the law for harassment, how many people have been convicted for either harassment or stalking offences?

**Ms Sugden:** I thank the Member for her question. I do not have the details to hand, but I am happy to write to the Member with them. I can talk generally about people who have come to me with comments on the harassment law. I am not sure that it is fit for purpose, particularly in relation to stalking. Stalking has taken on a very modern guise, particularly with social media, and that is an area that we need to look at. The Member sits on the Justice Committee, and I am keen to see the outcome of its report to see how we can best tailor a Northern Ireland-specific piece of legislation on stalking.

**Mrs Overend:** I thank the Minister for outlining that her review should be complete by April of next year. Is she aware of a cross-departmental gapping and mapping exercise on Internet safety that was headed by OFMDFM during the last mandate that might feed into her review on stalking? Will the Minister make a point of accessing that study?

**Ms Sugden:** I am not aware of the previous mandate's work, but any work that has been done would be useful in any study on stalking legislation. I have asked my departmental officials to look to jurisdictions further afield than the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland to see whether there are any other innovative approaches that we can take to legislation in this area. The Member makes a good point, and, as I said in my answer to Ms Boyle, we need to look at how the Internet plays a role in stalking, particularly through social media. The issue is something that we are all too familiar with, and we need to look at ways to address it. That will be difficult, particularly with the online aspect and how that crosses jurisdictions, but it is something that my Department will look at as part of a review, and I am sure that the Justice Committee will also look at it as part of its review.

**Ms Bailey:** From her work on stalking legislation, does the Minister feel that the harassment laws are fit for purpose or are they due to be reviewed and updated?

**Ms Sugden:** In developing any piece of legislation, we need to look at the current legislation to see whether it is fit for purpose. On the offence of stalking, you are referenced to current harassment legislation. As I have said to other Members, I am not sure that the current harassment laws are fit for purpose in that area.

I imagine that we will move towards specific stalking legislation, but there is a lot of work to be done alongside the Justice Committee, as I said.

## Domestic Violence: Foyle

4. **Mr Middleton** asked the Minister of Justice what support her Department is providing for victims of domestic violence in Foyle. (AQO 791/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** My Department provides £1.8 million in funding to Victim Support Northern Ireland to ensure that all victims have the support they need within the criminal justice system. On 5 July 2016, I officially opened the Victim Support NI Foyle hub, which seeks to ensure that victims and witnesses of crime, including domestic violence, have access to support services as they engage with the criminal justice system. More specifically, as part of the Derry/Londonderry special court listing arrangements, my Department has been working with statutory and voluntary partners to improve referral arrangements and support services for domestic

violence victims. The referral process from PSNI through Victim Support NI has been reviewed, and work is ongoing to improve the timeliness of data transfer for domestic violence and abuse cases in the Foyle area. The protocol between Victim Support NI and Women's Aid is being revised to ensure that victims are advised of their respective services and can avail themselves of these or be referred, as necessary. PSNI, Men's Action Network and the Men's Advisory Project will also be covered in the revised agreement.

The intended installation of a second remote link at the NSPCC's Londonderry office provides the opportunity to use the link specifically for domestic violence victims and witnesses on special domestic violence listing days. Officers in the local policing team in Derry City and Strabane have been provided with enhanced training around dealing with domestic abuse incidents. The Derry City and Strabane district command unit was the pilot district in the PSNI to obtain body-worn video cameras for use by front-line officers following a £1.5 million investment by the PSNI. The cameras have proven invaluable in the investigation of domestic-related incidents, where many victims have historically been reluctant to provide a statement.

**Mr Middleton:** I thank the Minister for her detailed response. The Minister mentioned the special court sittings. Can the Minister give her assessment of how successful she feels that scheme is and whether she plans to extend it across the Province?

**Ms Sugden:** I thank the Member for his question. I have been very impressed by the court listing arrangements around domestic violence in the Derry court system. We will enhance those arrangements around a perpetrator scheme to see how we can make better use of this focus, hopefully with a mind to rolling it out across Northern Ireland.

**Mrs Palmer:** Can I ask the Minister to give a time frame for introducing legislation that mirrors Clare's Law in England to address the disclosure of domestic violence and sexual offences?

**Ms Sugden:** As part of the work that we are doing around domestic violence, we are looking at a disclosure scheme as well as a domestic abuse offence. The domestic abuse disclosure scheme, from my understanding, does not require specific legislation; it requires special arrangements. I do not have a time line for when we intend to introduce that. Work is ongoing, but I am happy to update the House when we intend to introduce that.

**Mr McCartney:** Agus mo bhúochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for her answers, in particular in response to Gary Middleton, when you said you were impressed about what is called the Derry model. Will you pledge your support for the Women's Aid One Safe Place project if you are contacted by the Minister for Communities or the Department of Finance?

**Ms Sugden:** I thank the Member for his question. Whilst in Derry, I visited the One Safe Place that had been proposed by Foyle Women's Aid. I was very impressed by that. I can confirm to the Member that my Department is working with Women's Aid in Foyle to see how it can better progress the business case with a mind to, hopefully, funding the project.

**Ms Armstrong:** Minister, I know you have already mentioned the specialist domestic violence listings in

Londonderry court, but can you give any idea on when progress for similar listings in other courts will take place?

**Ms Sugden:** At this stage, we are looking at enhanced arrangements around a perpetrator programme. The Minister of Health and I visited Women's Aid in Lisburn, and one of the areas we talked about was the need to look at perpetrators in tackling domestic violence. The nature of this abuse is domestic, and, very often, victims are reluctant to come forward because, for example, they do not want to get their partner, the father of their child, into trouble. We are looking at a perpetrator programme that could, perhaps, provide another opportunity to address this type of offence, before we roll it out across Northern Ireland.

The theme of problem-solving in justice will thread through my entire work programme in the Department of Justice. It is, I think, a good, common-sense approach to how we deal with this, and it ensures the best service for the people whom we serve.

### PSNI: Suspension of Training

5. **Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any discussions she has had with the Chief Constable on addressing the shortfall of 300 officers in the PSNI as a result of the suspension of training at the Northern Ireland Police College. (AQO 792/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** I have regular meetings with the Chief Constable and discuss a broad range of issues. I have not, however, had any discussions with him on this specific issue. I have been advised that work is progressing well to implement the recommendations of the review of the police training college with a view to commencing student officer intakes in January 2017. A number of recommendations have already been implemented, such as the cessation of punitive methods, marching to and from classes and the removal of the compulsory residential requirement of the training. The dedicated implementation team is continuing its work to address the remaining recommendations. The PSNI is due to provide an update on progress in this respect to the Policing Board later this week.

I am aware that the PSNI has, as a provisional measure, taken steps to notify potential candidates of its intention to recommence student intakes to the policing college in January 2017. This is, however, subject to approval by the Policing Board. While I cannot comment definitively on the resumption of student intakes, I fully recognise that the Policing Board is seeking assurance that the necessary arrangements are in place before indicating its support for the recommencement. I am confident that the PSNI and the Policing Board are working together with a view to full implementation of the recommendations as soon as possible.

**Mrs Barton:** Will the Minister give a commitment that the shortfall in trained and operational officers will not be used as a reason for further budget cuts to be imposed on the PSNI?

**Ms Sugden:** All of us in the Executive are keen to protect our budgets, but we have to be mindful of the current climate of cuts. The protection of the PSNI from a 2% cut is helping to ensure that front-line policing can be protected as far as possible. I am currently content that the PSNI has sufficient resourcing to meet the demands placed on it.

**Mr Kearney:** I wanted to ask the Minister about the discontinuation of the punitive and militaristic training of PSNI recruits at Garnerville, but she has adequately answered the question already.

**Ms S Bradley:** Will the Minister confirm that she supports the Patten threshold of 7,500 full-time police officers? Has she committed to putting that at the centre of any budgetary priorities going forward? Within what timescale would she hope to achieve it?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I ask Members to note that they have one question.

**Ms Sugden:** We need to be very mindful of how appropriate the Patten report on police reform was in Northern Ireland 15 years ago. A lot of the arrangements in Patten are still applicable today, and, indeed, in my answer to Ms Barton, I said that the 2% ring-fence around the police ensures that they have sufficient numbers to meet operational needs.

### Prison Staff: Assaults

6. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Justice how many assaults have been committed against on-duty prison staff since 2012. (AQO 793/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** In 2013, there were 94 assaults on prison officers on duty in prison establishments in Northern Ireland; in 2014, there were 105 assaults recorded; in 2015, there were 100 assaults recorded, and, to the end of October this year, there have been 58 assaults on staff. From an operational perspective, the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) has found that the greatest contributing factor to assaults is crowding.

The use of accommodation is kept under regular review, and the prison population is dynamically managed in this respect. Additionally, the Prison Service is evaluating the effectiveness of body-worn cameras for prison staff to prevent violence and assist in the management of disruptive prisoners. I had asked the Prison Service to explore the feasibility of deploying the cameras more widely to deter violent or disruptive prisoners, and they have recently been deployed in the care and supervision unit to record interactions with particular prisoners held there.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I call Alex Easton for a very quick supplementary.

**Mr Easton:** OK. I thank the Minister for her answer. I am sure that she will agree with me that any attacks on prison officers are totally unacceptable. What facility or support is on offer to prison officers who have been assaulted?

3.15 pm

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** And an even quicker answer from the Minister.

**Ms Sugden:** Any attack on any front-line member of staff, particularly in the Prison Service, which falls within my remit, is entirely deplorable. I am keen to ensure that there are support services in place, and, alongside the pay review for the Prison Service, I recently announced that I would extend the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust (PRRT) to serving and retired prison officers. That will be a significant support in helping them to deal with the difficulties of their job.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Thanks to everyone for being so brief.

Sin deireadh leis na ceisteanna liostaithe. That ends the period for listed questions. We will now move on to topical questions.

### Prison Officers: Industrial Action

T1. **Mr Aiken** asked the Minister of Justice what provisions have been made to prepare for industrial action by prison officers. (AQT 566/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** We have had close conversations with the Prison Officers' Association on the recent pay review. Unfortunately, the POA has not accepted the increase that we negotiated on its behalf, but we continue negotiations. If we should, regrettably, move towards industrial action, I am content that we have the appropriate contingency arrangements in place to mitigate any significant service problem in the prisons. However, as I said, negotiations continue, and I am pleased that Mr Aiken's colleagues have facilitated some of the conversations on that. I appreciate that, but we are still working towards a more positive outcome.

**Mr Aiken:** I thank the Minister for her comments so far. Do you think that the Department and the Prison Service management board have been disingenuous by saying that the Northern Ireland Prison Service has been offered a 2.6% pay rise, when 1.6% of that figure is in relation to risk allowance?

**Ms Sugden:** I was keen to stress to the Finance Minister the inclusion of the supplementary risk allowance for prison officers because it reflects their very challenging job. However, we were constrained by the public-sector pay policy, of which we need to be mindful. I am pleased to say that I negotiated for prison officers what is probably the best award in the public sector. I appreciate that it is not what the Prison Officers' Association wanted for its members, but I continue to be very mindful of how we can best support them and am content that we got the best deal for them.

### Prisoners: Costs

T2. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the average cost of housing a prisoner in a prison in Northern Ireland and to state how that compares with the equivalent cost in the rest of the United Kingdom. (AQT 567/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** If the Principal Deputy Speaker will indulge me, I will respond to Mr Wells with a prepared response.

While the costs are not directly comparable, the average annual cost of keeping an offender in prison in Northern Ireland was £57,643. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) figure in England and Wales was £35,182, and the cost for the Scottish Prison Service was £34,399 in the same year. The Northern Ireland Prison Service cost per prisoner place is higher than that in the rest of the UK as the same services must be provided in a relatively small prison population and, therefore, economies of scale lead to higher costs in Northern Ireland.

**Mr Wells:** Those figures are quite shocking because they indicate that it costs 40% more to house a prisoner in Northern Ireland than in Scotland, where economies of scale must also prevail.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Can the Member come his question, please?

**Mr Wells:** Will the Minister outline what plans she has to bring that figure down to the UK average?

**Ms Sugden:** I do not believe that the costs are directly comparable. Northern Ireland is quite different, given the challenges that we face: the extra costs relating to paramilitary prisoners. When we get outline business cases in place for the prison estate, we will start to see more savings and safer prisons in terms of sight lines and the other areas outlined in those outline business cases. Work is ongoing, and, hopefully, we can bring that figure down, but I do not believe that it is a fair comparison with other parts of the United Kingdom.

### Prison Officers: DOJ Support

T3. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of Justice what work her Department is doing to support the prison officers who have been at the coalface of many of the harrowing deaths in custody, given that there has been much in the media recently about the unfortunate death from suicide of many prisoners. (AQT 568/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** Any death in custody is an absolute tragedy, and I extend my sympathies to the families affected by the two most recent deaths in Maghaberry prison; indeed, the impact is also on prison staff, and we need to be mindful of that. The appropriate supports that are in place have been offered to those prison officers. As mentioned in an earlier answer, I am really mindful of the challenges that prison officers, particularly those in Northern Ireland, face in their role, which is why I was keen to find a way we could better support them. I am pleased to say we have extended the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust to serving and retired prison officers. It provides a fantastic service, and, if you get the opportunity to visit, you should go. It provides a range of services in mental and physical health. I really look forward to seeing how it can better facilitate prison officers, both retired and in service.

**Mr Clarke:** I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she believe the media are balanced in their reporting when these deaths take place? Does it take into consideration the difficulties the prison officers face, the conditions they work in and the mental health of the prison officers themselves —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I think the Member has asked his question.

**Mr Clarke:** — given those conditions?

**Ms Sugden:** I am not sure there is balanced reporting of any story that has come out of my prisons. A number of reports in the press have been wildly exaggerated or, to some extent, untrue. I do not think we appropriately estimate the challenges that prison officers face. Northern Ireland is a challenging environment because of our specific issues. I am keen to stress that we need to support prison officers, and that, in turn will lead to better support and care for the prisoners in their custody. The message is that we need to have a balance, and I will try to find ways to do that for prisoners and prison officers.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Question 4 has been withdrawn.

### Court Services: Access

T5. **Ms Gildernew** asked the Minister of Justice what consideration has been given to rethinking how and when court buildings, staff and facilities are being used to improve the service and to ensure the sustainability of local court and justice services. (AQT 570/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** One aspect of the justice system, as a public service, that we need to be mindful of is access to justice. The Member will be aware that I announced a review of courts across Northern Ireland. Part of the thinking in that is how we can better utilise courthouses. As mentioned in an earlier answer, one of the threads of delivery I intend to take through my programme of work in the Justice Department is problem-solving justice. We are piloting an addiction court in Northern Ireland, and we will look at other areas — perhaps at mental health. We have talked about the domestic violence court arrangement, and perhaps we can look at court services through that. I regularly meet the Lord Chief Justice, and he is keen to see how we can better utilise the courts around Northern Ireland. Ultimately, at the heart of this has to be access to justice, so, ultimately, I would like to see fewer cases going to court, which is why I think a problem-solving justice approach is the right one to take.

**Ms Gildernew:** I welcome the Minister's answer. I agree with her that this is about access to justice, and I welcomed her announcement earlier this year about keeping local access to justice.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I ask the Member to come to her question.

**Ms Gildernew:** Will the Minister give serious consideration to restoring Coroners' Courts, industrial courts and family proceeding courts etc to local courthouses instead of centralising those functions?

**Ms Sugden:** My justice review will take a wide look at how we service access to justice throughout Northern Ireland and within communities. The Member made a particular reference to family courts. Essentially, if there is, perhaps, mediation so that a case does not necessarily go to court, which we all know can be traumatic for families, that will form part of a wider review of courts and the buildings they are held in. We need to take a realistic look at how we provide court services in a modern 2017.

### White Ribbon Campaign

T6. **Mrs Cameron** asked the Minister of Justice to outline her role in this year's White Ribbon Campaign. (AQT 571/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** I thank the Member for her question; indeed, we are hosting an event in the Long Gallery this evening that I encourage every Member to attend.

The Minister of Health and I were at a Women's Aid refuge centre in Lisburn this morning, and one of the key messages — I see a lot of gentlemen in the Chamber, so I will make the point — was that we really need to take ownership of the domestic abuse and violence happening in our society. It is not a case of paying lip service to it. Domestic violence is a deplorable act of abuse against individual citizens, and it has such wider implications for wider society. We find that people who come into the criminal justice system, for example, have had some

incidence of trauma, and, in a lot of cases, that trauma tends to be from domestic violence. If we can tackle domestic violence, we can go a long way towards tackling wider societal problems including mental health issues, addiction issues, the three areas together that seem to be the quite serious implications of domestic violence.

We are currently in the 16 days of action, so, if there is anything that Members can do, whether through social media, having conversations or raising the debate, we need to talk more about the scourge that happens in society and that does not discriminate. If you think that it is not happening in your area, I can assure you that it is. That is the message that we need to get out as much as possible.

**Mrs Cameron:** I thank the Minister for that very thorough answer. She will be well aware that the pledge for the White Ribbon Campaign is to never commit, condone or stay silent about domestic violence against women. Does the Minister agree that it is for each of us here and in wider society to make it socially completely and utterly unacceptable for anyone to commit domestic violence?

**Ms Sugden:** Yes; domestic violence and domestic abuse. Members are aware of my commitment to bring forward legislation within a year around a coercive control and domestic violence offence and add it to the statute book. Again, I reiterate the message that every person in the Chamber today has the responsibility to ensure that they do not let this happen. We often hear about who is and who is not to blame. This is a case where, if we do not do something about it, then, to an extent, we are guilty too. I encourage every Member, when they leave the Chamber today, to do some act within the 16 days of action to raise the issue of domestic violence in the communities. It is incredible when you think of the lives you might save in doing so. I appeal for that.

### Policing Board: Lobbying Guidance

T7. **Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Justice whether members of the Policing Board have been given any guidance on lobbying for funding for arm's-length bodies. (AQT 572/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** I am not aware of what the Member is alluding to. The Policing Board is independent of my Department. I do have an interest in the area, but I am not aware of the comments that the Member is alluding to.

**Mr McKee:** Thank you, Minister. Does the Minister agree that good governance and transparency in all who hold positions of authority on boards is paramount to the trust that the people of Northern Ireland have in them?

**Ms Sugden:** Yes, entirely. Good governance is the essence of good public service. I entirely agree with those comments.

### Prisons: Drugs

T8. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Justice what action is being taken to address the prevalence of drugs in our prisons. (AQT 573/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** I thank the Member for his question. Drugs, particularly psychoactive substances, are an issue in our prisons. It is difficult to mitigate drugs coming in and out of our prisons. Another area of concern is the prescribed drugs that are coming into prisons and being

taken illicitly. We keep a regular review of drugs coming in and out of prison, and there is a sense of the effects that drugs have in prison. It is difficult. It is disproportionate in prisons as well. However, it is something that we are focusing on, and it is something that, generally, we need to focus more widely on in society. It contributes to a lot of localised crime. Some of the work we are doing through the paramilitary panel report suggests that drugs are quite prevalent in communities and are being pushed through those means.

If there is anything that Members can suggest, I am happy to hear it. Again, there has to be a Northern Ireland Executive-wide approach to this and, indeed, a Northern Ireland Assembly approach.

**Mr Anderson:** I thank the Minister for her answer. The recently published report on the announced visit to HMP Maghaberry in September 2016 noted that no significant progress had been made in addressing the concerns on the abuse of drugs raised in May 2015 and restated in January 2016.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Can the Member come to his question please?

**Mr Anderson:** Minister, do you agree that the drugs issue is too serious a matter not to be dealt with? What do you propose to do to eradicate the scourge of drugs in our prisons?

**Ms Sugden:** Of course, I agree that it is too serious an issue not to be dealt with, and it is something that I have a keen focus on. I take a lot of reference from that report. Again, as I said, it is concentrated in prisons, which tend to be a reflection of wider society. It is not just about what we can do in prisons; it is also what we need to do in wider society. I have had conversations with the First Minister and the deputy First Minister around this area, and it is something that we need to address more widely. I have a keen focus on it.

3.30 pm

## Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Question 1 has been withdrawn.

### Languages Policy

2. **Mr McMullan** asked the Assembly Commission for an update on the development of a languages policy. (AQO 803/16-21)

**Mr Dickson:** Mr McMullan, thank you for your question. The Assembly Commission's 'Good Relations Action Plan 2016-2021' was agreed by the Commission in October. It includes an action to agree a languages policy in 2017. That action was carried forward into the 'Good Relations Action Plan 2016-2021' from the previous action plan, which covered the period 2012-16. In November 2012, following consultation with political parties, the Commission considered a draft languages policy and associated guidance. However, the Commission was unable to reach political consensus on the matter in the last mandate.

At its September meeting, the Commission requested that a paper on the languages policy be presented to it in January 2017. Secretariat officials are currently preparing that paper. Once the Commission has had the opportunity to consider the matter and agree a way forward on languages, the detail will be developed. The development process will include consultation with relevant stakeholders, including Members, political parties and staff.

**Mr McMullan:** I thank the Member for his answer. What is the Commission doing to fulfil its obligations under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages?

**Mr Dickson:** I thank the Member for his supplementary question. The Commission is aware of the provisions of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and is represented on the interdepartmental charter implementation group. The Commission will consider any guidance that arises from that group.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Naomi Long is not in her place.

### Parliament Buildings: Internet

4. **Mr T Buchanan** asked the Assembly Commission to outline the steps that have been taken to improve Internet speeds in Parliament Buildings during periods of peak use. (AQO 805/16-21)

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Member for his question. I hope that he does not press me on the technical details. In 2011, the Assembly Commission procured and installed its own dedicated Internet connection to provide better and more consistent access to the Internet for all Parliament Buildings users. The service was originally provisioned at 20 megabits per second. Due to increasing demand, it was increased to 40 megabits per second in February 2013. In September 2014, a further additional line was installed to provide resilience. At that time, the line speed was increased to 80 megabits per second overall. Since 2011, the service provided has been upgraded three times.

Since the new connection in 2014, the Assembly has benefited from significant additional bandwidth. Information Systems (IS) Office staff proactively monitor the status of the Internet connection. At present, the Assembly Commission and the IS Office are not aware of any major problems with the Internet in the Building, although there are surges in use at various times; there can be about 900 different users on the Internet at one time in the Building, which might cause momentary or transitional difficulties. However, as far as the Commission and the IS Office are aware, there is no major reason for concern.

**Mr T Buchanan:** I thank the Member for his answer. I appreciate what he said, but I think that Members are finding that, at lunchtime, speeds are still very slow. Maybe that could be addressed.

**Mr Attwood:** As I indicated in my initial reply, during peak hours and on sitting days, especially around lunchtime, when people are about the Building more, there can be in excess of 900 devices, ranging from traditional PCs to smartphones and other devices, accessing the Wi-Fi. That surge may lead to a reduction in speed. The Commission will keep that under review. The current contract allows for an increase of a further 20 megabits per second.

If the Commission, informed by Members, determines that there is a need to go in that direction, I am sure that it will not be found wanting.

**Mr Chambers:** Will the commissioner provide an update on the engagement with mobile phone networks on improving phone signals in much of Parliament Buildings?

**Mr Attwood:** In my lifetime on the Commission, which has not been very long, the matter has not been flagged up at Commission level. It may have been flagged up to management. If so, I will get a response to the Member. If it has not been flagged up to management or the Commission, I am sure that both of us will look at it.

**Ms Dillon:** Will the Member update us on what the cost would be to the Assembly to increase the connection capacity?

**Mr Attwood:** I will get back to the Member on what the cost might be. As I indicated in a supplementary answer, there is a provision in the current contract for further upgrade by 20 megabits to 100 megabits. I am sure that the cost is part of the contract, but I will get back to the Member on the precise amount.

**Ms Armstrong:** Given the fact that we have businesses that have in excess of 1,000 or 1,500 devices being used on the Internet with superfast broadband, what does the Commission consider to be the impact of low Internet connectivity speeds on sitting days on the ability of Members to research for debates?

**Mr Attwood:** I am sure that all members of the Commission will hear what the Member is saying. As I said, there has not been much evidence brought to the Commission that there is a big problem. Yes, we recognise that there are surges in use and that that might slow down connectivity, but, as far as I am aware and as far as I am informed by management in the Building, we are not aware that there is a major concern. However, the fact that four Members have asked questions this afternoon on the matter yet there were no supplementaries asked to the first question, Members must be flagging up the issue to the Commission, and I think that the Commission should look at it.

### School Visits: Newry and Armagh

5. **Mr Irwin** asked the Assembly Commission to outline the number of visits to Parliament Buildings by schools in Newry and Armagh in the last 12 months. (AQO 806/16-21)

**Mr Dickson:** I thank Mr Irwin for his question. Between 29 November 2015 and 28 November 2016, the Assembly Education Service provided programmes to 17 schools from the Newry and Armagh constituency. There were a total of 661 participants in the programmes. The Education Service delivered programmes to 15,316 young people during the period. The programmes were delivered in Parliament Buildings and in schools.

**Mr Irwin:** What is the promotional aspect involved in encouraging schools to make educational visits to the Assembly?

**Mr Dickson:** The Education Service has a great deal of contact with schools right across Northern Ireland. At the beginning of every school year, it sends out letters to all schools explaining the programme and the resources available. Booking information is also available on the

Education Service's website, and it tweets daily, uses social media and takes part in programmes. There is also a new subscription service available on the Assembly website that will allow teachers more direct contact.

**Mr Kennedy:** What additional measures could be taken to attract even more uptake to the excellent education service that is available in Parliament Buildings. Can he give a breakdown of the Newry and Armagh figures for primary and post-primary school visits?

**Mr Dickson:** As I said previously, there is good contact made between all schools in Northern Ireland and the Education Service. I genuinely believe that schools are fully aware of the programme that is available, but until they avail themselves of it, they will not understand the broad extent of the work that is done.

There are 72 primary schools and 18 post-primary schools in the Newry and Armagh constituency. Of the schools that were visited during this period, three were primary schools, with 95 participants, and 14 were post-primary schools, with 566 participants. I encourage all Members to encourage schools, as and when they visit them, to participate in the Assembly's education programmes.

## Gender Action Plan

6. **Mr Kelly** asked the Assembly Commission for an update on the current Gender Action Plan. (AQO 807/16-21)

**Mr Wells:** The gender action plan 2016-18 was approved by the Assembly Commission in March 2016 following staff consultation. It sets out actions and measures to promote gender equality in the Assembly secretariat and is broken down into three themes: leadership and development; communication and engagement; and life balance, health and well-being. A gender action plan implementation group, which comprises staff from across the secretariat, has been established to oversee the implementation of the plan. The group reports to the Commission every six months on progress against targets.

An update was presented to the Commission at its November meeting, highlighting progress made since March 2016. This included an update on the Commission's participation in Business in the Community's gender project, which includes areas such as equality, organisational policy and personnel issues and participation by Assembly Commission staff in the Women in Public Life programme. Further actions will be rolled out over the lifetime of the plan. It is worth noting that — I am sure that the honourable Member for North Belfast is aware of this — two out of the five senior posts in the Assembly secretariat are held by women, including, of course, our chief executive. There were no females at this level of leadership one year ago.

**Mr Kelly:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as a fhreagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Member for his answers up to now. He gave a pretty comprehensive answer, but I suppose that the question that most people ask, because it is obvious that the gender balance is not a good one, is this: what are the targets, or are there any targets, in the action plan and how will they be monitored?

**Mr Wells:** The ultimate aim of the plan is to ensure that we have gender balance in the Assembly. The fact that two such important senior posts have recently been taken, on merit, by women indicates that we are moving in the

right direction. Some of the problems regarding gender in the Assembly are skewed by the fact that most ushers and security staff are male. That, undoubtedly, will skew the overall balance between males and females in the Assembly. However, at many levels in this Building, women are coming forward for senior positions and the balance is a good one. We have decided against any form of quotas. We considered it, but when it comes to recruitment it is unlawful to reserve a quota of jobs for members of a particular under-represented or disadvantaged group. Therefore, we cannot define or have quotas for those positions on the basis of sex, religion, community background, race or sexual orientation.

**Ms Bailey:** On the back of that response — thank you for it — and given that quotas in the Patten report worked very well for the Police Service, could we not reconsider the implementation of gender quotas for the Assembly?

**Mr Wells:** The Assembly is nowhere near the position that the Royal Ulster Constabulary was in at the time that quotas were implemented when it became the PSNI. It has always been the case that a very large proportion of our staff, albeit still a minority, have been female. Quite frankly, I think that many of the female members of staff in this Building would like to think that they had been appointed entirely on merit rather than because of quotas. Equally, if they are promoted, they would like to think that it came about entirely on merit, as it does. I keep emphasising the point that our most senior member of staff and one of our top four staff are females. That is a very welcome trend, but it has come about entirely because of the ability of the applicants rather than any fixed quotas or set targets.

**Mr Kelly:** On a point of order, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** There are no points of order during Question Time.

**Ms Armstrong:** What consideration has the plan given to extra sitting days rather than later sittings when business is heavy, given the impact that it has on those of us with childcare issues?

**Mr Wells:** I have only been a member of the Commission since May 2016, but I have not heard that issue being raised. There are Committee days as well as sitting days, which also place a burden on staff. I am certain that the Business Committee, which is the body that makes decisions on when we meet and at what time, would take that issue on board.

That is new to me as a Commission Member and I do not think it actually falls within the remit of the gender action plan, but it is an issue worth considering.

3.45 pm

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I call Jonathan Bell.

**Mr Bell:** Question No 8.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Is it No 7 you are asking, Jonathan?

**Mr Bell:** No 7, apologies.

## Private Members' Bills

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Question Nos 7 and 14 are grouped and will be answered by Alex Maskey.

7. **Mr Bell** asked the Assembly Commission to outline the steps it has taken to ensure that sufficient secretariat staff are available to address the increased number of private Members' Bills. (AQO 808/16-21)

14. **Mr Logan** asked the Assembly Commission how many proposals for private Members' Bills have been tabled since May 2016. (AQO 815/16-21)

**Mr Maskey:** With your permission, I will answer question Nos 7 and 14 together, and I thank Members Bell and Logan for their questions. Since May 2016, 21 proposals for private Members' Bills (PMBs) have been tabled. The Bill Office is currently developing 19 of these under the private Member's Bill support service.

An additional senior assistant clerk was added to the Bill Office complement prior to the commencement of the new Assembly mandate in response to the increasing demand for support for private Members' Bills. However, due to the record number of proposals for PMBs received this mandate, a business case has now been put forward for additional staff resource for this important strand of parliamentary work. The Assembly Commission has agreed to make an additional provision of £155,000 in its 2017-18 budget to respond to pressures on the Bill Office and Business Office, including the additional demand for support for PMBs. This amount has already been included in the Commission's budget plans for the next financial year.

**Mr Bell:** Apologies; I was listed to ask topical question No 8. I thank the Commission member for the answer. What workforce planning has been undertaken by the Commission, what were their predictions for the number of private Members' Bills and what did they assess the staff capacity required to fulfil those?

**Mr Maskey:** I thank the Member for the supplementary question. By way of background information, on 19 September 2016, following receipt by the Bill Office of 19 proposals for PMBs in the first few weeks of the new mandate, the Speaker wrote to the Committee on Procedures advising that he saw the increase in PMBs as a very positive sign and that it would be prudent for the Assembly's current procedures relating to PMBs to be reviewed. He also indicated that the Bill Office would be unable to support any more PMBs beyond the 19 proposals which had been tabled at the time.

The Committee on Procedures, as the Member may be aware, has recently agreed the terms of reference for the review, and these include: consider the current procedures and systems governing private Members' Bills in the Assembly; assess the available support and resources for the development of private Members' Bills in the Assembly; and research the procedures governing private Members' Bills and the support and resource available in other jurisdictions. From the response, you can see that the terms of reference do include the need identified by the Speaker for a complete review and overhaul of the need to support PMBs in the time ahead.

**Mr Logan:** Will the Commission consider moving resources from areas within the Assembly which may be over-resourced to try to deal with private Members' Bills?

**Mr Maskey:** I thank the Member for his supplementary question. There is a review under way, and the terms of reference have been agreed by the Committee on Procedures. The Assembly Commission does not want to

prejudge or prejudice any of the outcomes or outworkings of the discussions being held by the Committee on Procedures. The Commission is looking forward to a report from the Committee on Procedures and from the Assembly, and then we will take that matter forward.

## Recruitment

8. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Assembly Commission for an update on its policy for the recruitment of people with disabilities. (AQO 809/16-21)

**Mr Wells:** The Assembly Commission operates a guaranteed interview scheme for internal and external recruitment competitions which offers a guaranteed interview to applicants with a disability. The scheme covers applicants with disabilities or those with long-term impairments or health conditions that are expected to last at least 12 months. This means that they may not meet all of the shortlisting criteria, but they will get an interview. In these circumstances, if the applicant can demonstrate that he or she has a long-term illness, that statement will ensure an interview.

The application form includes a section on disability, and an applicant can indicate whether they wish to apply under the scheme and the basis on which they qualify.

I should stress that the guaranteed interview scheme can apply only if the shortlisting criteria are met. It cannot guarantee an interview if an applicant does not meet the essential criteria for the post.

The Assembly Commission is also mindful that some groups of applicants, including those with disabilities, may have differing educational experiences, so, where appropriate, the essential criteria for a post will include two options: one will relate to specific qualifications; and the alternative will be a minimum period of experience in the area of work relevant to the post being advertised. Applicants with a disability can also indicate whether they feel that they require any reasonable adjustments to enable participation in the selection process.

The Member may also be interested to note that the Commission conducts an annual audit of disability for secretariat staff. If a member of staff declares a disability —

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

**Mr Wells:** — during their employment, the Commission will review that and make reasonable adjustments.

**Mr Sheehan:** Mo bhuíochas leis an Chomhalta as a fhreagra ansin. I thank the Member for his answer. Has the Assembly Commission engaged with any external experts, including disability rights groups?

**Mr Wells:** As far as I am aware, we have not done so, but what I can report is that 9% of staff — 29 members — currently employed by the Assembly have declared a disability. I think that that indicates that we are taking this seriously.

Let me go back to my previous answer because I may well have misled the Member. The guaranteed interview applies only if you meet the selection criteria. I may have indicated that there is a special dispensation; there is not.

I think that the Assembly is clearly trying to facilitate those with a genuine disability to get to the table, as it were, for

an interview. We will make all reasonable adjustments for someone who is successful in securing employment. The Assembly is making headway. There is more to be done, but I certainly think that the fact that such a large number of our staff have a registered disability indicates that we are taking this very seriously.

### Social Media Policy

9. **Mr Clarke** asked the Assembly Commission, given the recent ruling by an employment tribunal in relation to a case regarding a civil servant's comments on social media, whether it plans to review the recent dismissal of secretariat staff following breaches of the Assembly's social media policy. (AQO 810/16-21)

**Mr Attwood:** The Assembly Commission is certainly aware of the decision in the recent case of McCrossan v the Department for Social Development. As the Member will be aware, and as I am sure Members will wish to respect, it is good and established practice that the Commission does not comment on personnel and human resource matters, so, given the question, it is not appropriate to discuss the particular facts of the cases raised. However, I can say to the Member that the Commission does not consider that the facts in the McCrossan case, which revolved around the use of social media, are comparable with the facts in the cases of the Assembly staff to which the Member refers. Consequently, it does not propose to review the cases.

**Mr Clarke:** I thank the Member for that answer. In case there is any confusion, the case that I am referring to is that of the doorkeepers who used social media, so I think that the two cases are very similar. For that reason, I ask again that the Commission look at the case, because many of us believe that it might border on religious discrimination.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I think that the Member has asked his question.

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Member for the supplementary. What is the same in both cases is that they revolve around staff and social media. What is different is the social media policy of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and its application to staff; and the social media policy of the Commission and its application to staff. You cannot compare apples and oranges. There was a different policy in place in respect of the case involving DSD, and the tribunal came to a certain judgement in that regard. We have a different policy, and, therefore, whatever happened in the other case does not necessarily, or at all, have reference back to the decision made by management and the Commission. Therefore, no precedent has been set by the tribunal case in as much as it does not apply to the practice of the Assembly and the decisions made in those cases. I am sorry that I cannot be more helpful, but that, I think, is the proper procedural and legal position.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Nelson McCausland is not in his place.

### Assembly Staff Pay Awards

11. **Mr McNulty** asked the Assembly Commission for an update on the negotiations with the trade unions representing Assembly staff on annual pay awards. (AQO 812/16-21)

**Mr Wells:** Annual pay awards are negotiated with NIPSA, which is the Assembly Commission's recognised trade union. The negotiations are managed through a pay subgroup of the employee relations group, which is a joint industrial relations forum that has been established by the Commission in conjunction with NIPSA.

The pay claim for 2016 comprises a number of parts, including a claim for a consolidated percentage increase on all pay points, the reduction of pay points across all grades of staff and enhanced leave entitlements. Negotiations on the 2016 pay award are at an advanced stage, and the details of the award were considered at the Commission's meetings of 15 and 24 November. As part of that consideration, the Commission took into account a submission on secretariat pay rises from a political party that is represented on the Commission.

**Mr McNulty:** I thank the Member for his answers thus far. Will he confirm which party made that submission, what proposals it outlined and whether the Commission has agreed to any of the proposals?

**Mr Wells:** The submission was made on behalf of the SDLP by Mr Alex Attwood MLA, who outlined what had occurred in other devolved institutions, particularly Scotland and Wales. At the Commission meeting, Mr Attwood very eloquently put forward his view that we should follow a similar pattern to the other institutions.

What I would say is that we should remember that, in the wider sphere — in health, education, agriculture etc — we are generally imposing a 1% pay rise. Whilst the Assembly is a totally different entity — the Assembly Commission is not a branch of the Civil Service — the rest of our community will obviously be watching to see what we do with pay rises for our staff. If we stepped out of line and paid our staff a higher increase, people would make the obvious accusation and say, "Oh yes, they are quite happy to look after their own staff, but what about us?" That is the difficulty we face: it would set a precedent for the rest of Northern Ireland.

That is where the negotiations are at the moment. Without betraying any confidence of the Commission, Mr Attwood took a different view — he is perfectly entitled to do so — and that was fed into the overall decision-making process, which has not yet concluded. Those are the constraints that we are acting under.

### IFRP Determination 2016: Members' Staff

12. **Mr Lunn** asked the Assembly Commission, following the Independent Financial Review Panel's 2016 determination, to outline the actions it is taking in relation to the conditions of employment of Members' constituency staff. (AQO 813/16-21)

**Mr Attwood:** I want to make it very clear to Members that the Commission is not detached, in any shape or form, from the concerns of Members arising from the independent review and the multiple consequences on our staff, current and previous, and all the other outworkings of the 2016 determination.

The Assembly established the Independent Financial Review Panel under the relevant legislation. The panel can also establish the criteria that must be met by each Member to recover the costs of employing support staff. This includes the criteria introduced in the 2016

determination that all support staff employed by Members must be engaged on a standard contract of employment.

The independence of the panel was established in the 2011 Act. The Act states explicitly that the panel is not subject to the direction or control of the Commission or the Assembly. In that regard, the panel enjoyed a very high threshold of independence, and we all live with the consequences of its recommendations.

The panel's tenure ended in July 2016, and the Commission is considering the most appropriate model for the future delivery of financial support to Members. All parties have been asked to contribute to what that might look like by, I believe, the end of January. I encourage all parties to make their contributions to what they believe the future review panel should look like.

**Mr Lunn:** I thank Mr Attwood for his comprehensive reply. Does he agree that the situation with the employment of constituency staff is grossly unfair, flies in the face of employment law and would not be tolerated in any other forum? Is he really satisfied that the Assembly Commission has no role to play in that matter and is able to say, "Blame the IFRP", which does not even exist any more?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I think that the Member has asked his question.

**Mr Attwood:** The technical and legal answer is that I and the Commission have to keep on the right side of the law and on the right side of the independence of the panel, especially in circumstances where the law says the panel is not subject to the direction or control of the Commission or Assembly. There has been history behind how we came to that place; we do not have to rehearse that history. As I said, though, in my opening remarks, the Commission, being made up of MLAs and representing the views of MLAs, is not detached from much of the sentiment of the Member.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will Members please take their ease while we change the Table?

4.00 pm

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

## Private Members' Business

### People Diagnosed with HIV

*Debate resumed on amendment No 2 to motion:*

*That this Assembly notes the increasing number of people diagnosed with HIV in Northern Ireland, year on year; is concerned at the levels of stigma experienced by people living with HIV; acknowledges the need for a new campaign to promote awareness and prevention, specifically tailored to Northern Ireland; commends the work of Positive Life, Northern Ireland's only dedicated charity working to support people diagnosed with HIV; and calls on the Minister of Health to support this organisation in the development of a centre of excellence at its new headquarters. — [Mr Middleton.]*

*Which amendment was:*

*Leave out all after the third "HIV;" and insert*

*"calls on the Minister of Health to support this prevention work by bringing forward proposals to ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland has access to vital pre-exposure prophylaxis medication on the same basis as the rest of the United Kingdom; and further calls on the Minister to support Positive Life in the development of a centre of excellence at its new headquarters." — [Ms Bradshaw.]*

**Mr Sheehan:** The context for the debate has been the increase in diagnoses of people with HIV. The figures in 2004 were 64, and by 2014, they had risen to 94. While that is a 47% increase, in the overall scheme of things, the numbers are still quite small in comparison with those in other countries, but that is no reason to be complacent. It is important that we keep on top of this, and it is, of course, true that many advances have been made in the treatment of HIV.

I am sure that many of us remember back to the 1980s when the world was just starting to become aware of HIV and AIDS and that we remember the panic and fear it created in many communities around the world. The belief in those days was that it was a death sentence if you were diagnosed initially with HIV, and then when it developed to full-blown AIDS, your life was, effectively, at an end. The narrative that this was a disease that affected gay men exclusively quickly gained traction, even though it was not true. That is one of the myths about HIV. Even today, 41% of the new diagnoses of HIV are the result of heterosexual transmission. So, HIV is by no means a disease exclusive to gay men. It can affect everyone in society, and not just through sexual transmission but through contaminated needles and syringes and so on.

Of course, we all know that this condition has attracted a stigma. I am sure that everyone has heard the myths such as that you can catch AIDS from drinking from the same cup as someone who has HIV or AIDS or that the infection is airborne. This led to the marginalisation of and discrimination against people who had been diagnosed with HIV. Last week was the anniversary of the death of Freddie Mercury, and I noted from one of the documentaries on Radio Ulster that, although there was

much speculation about his ill health and the illness that he was suffering from, it was only on the day before he died that he made it public that he was suffering from AIDS. I have no doubt that that was because of the stigma that was attached to having that disease.

We have a lot of education and awareness building to do around HIV. Education is at the core of all of it. We need to be promoting safer sex and care around sharing needles and syringes. Anyone who feels that they have put themselves at risk should go as quickly as possible and get an HIV test. Of course, we should advise young people in particular to think about the fact that, when they have taken drugs or alcohol, their decision-making processes will not be what they should be. I want to commend groups such as Positive Life and Rainbow, which are working to prevent the spread of HIV and to provide support to those who have been diagnosed.

We support the motion and the amendment, although I do think that the amendment is slightly inaccurate where it says that pre-exposure prophylaxis medication is available in Britain. My understanding is that it is not, however we support in principle the view that, if the pilots that are being carried out —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close, please.

**Mr Sheehan:** — with that particular type of medication are successful, its use should certainly be looked at by the Minister.

**Ms Hanna:** I am very glad to speak on this motion on behalf of the SDLP just days ahead of World AIDS Day, which is, obviously, the global opportunity to raise awareness and improve education about HIV and AIDS and to improve the lives of people who are living with the diagnosis. It is also a time for debunking stereotypes and myths that do lead to prejudice and stigmatisation. It is a good opportunity for the Assembly and the Executive to offer support to those people diagnosed in Northern Ireland and reassurance that they will have protection in law, care without discrimination, including for mental health challenges relating to their diagnosis, which I know has been lacking, and adequate sexual health facilities.

I commend the Members who brought the motion, particularly Paula Bradley, who has been a very steadfast supporter of Positive Life. I do hope that it marks a change in approach by all parties. We agree with the need to increase awareness, but this is in part increasingly a challenge because of some of the misinformation and irrationality that had been out there around things like the gay blood ban, which I am sorry continued for so long. Thankfully, with the medical advances that are out there now, a diagnosis of HIV does not have to be a life sentence any more. The prejudice and the stigma that people experience can make their life very much more difficult than it needs to be, and, as such, information about transmission methods in particular need to be raised among the public at large. Organisations like the NHS and the PSNI should have active policies about how they deal with and work with people living with HIV.

While HIV and AIDS are by no means only contracted by men who have sex with men, any awareness work cannot ignore the fact that over half of diagnoses are in this category. As such, we would have supported the People Before Profit amendment, which we think had that focus.

Any campaign that arises from this motion needs to be very well designed, both to address the stigma and to give very clear prevention messages.

Before joining the Assembly, I worked in the field of international development for over a decade, including in Zambia, where there was a prevalence rate of 14% of adults living with HIV. While the figure of 800 or so diagnoses in Northern Ireland is far too high, we can take some reassurance that, with management and access to antiretrovirals (ARVs), the transmission risk is minimised. For example, mother-to-child transmission can be as low as 1%.

The World Health Organization estimates that, globally, around 34 million people live with HIV, of whom 3 million are children. Since the identification of the virus in 1984, more than 35 million people have died, making it probably the most destructive pandemic in history and the major infectious killer, which has reversed progress in poverty alleviation in many other areas. Despite the scientific advantage, we do not have a cure and we do not have a vaccine. Though you have ARVs, in a global context, you are often fighting poor public health and nutrition, and the best antiretrovirals in the world are no good to you if you do not have adequate nutrition.

The good news is that people with access to effective HIV treatment can have a normal life expectancy, and some 80% of those with a diagnosis can expect to live a healthy life with the right antiretrovirals.

World AIDS Day gives us the opportunity to revisit the facts. Despite scaremongering and misinformation, the truth is that there are only three ways to contract HIV: unprotected sex, which accounts for 95% of transmissions; sharing needles; and mother-to-child transmission. Pre-exposure prophylaxis drugs, which inhibit the virus remarkably, can minimise transition, and we support the Alliance's amendment to extend access. We hope that, in a very short time, that will become a generic and therefore much cheaper drug.

Today is our opportunity to keep HIV and AIDS education, awareness and treatment on the agenda, publicly and politically; and to ensure that fundraising is undertaken for groups like Rainbow and Positive Life that are doing tremendous work by fundraising to support research into treatment — and, hopefully and potentially, vaccination — and also by providing support for people living with the diagnosis.

It is also a time to remember the millions of people who have died —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** I ask the Member to draw her remarks to a close, please.

**Ms Hanna:** — throughout the world. We are happy to support the motion.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** Before I call the next Member to speak, let me remind contributors to the debate that amendment No 1 was not moved, and that contributions to the debate should refer to amendment No 2 and the motion. The Question on amendment No 1 will not be put.

**Mr Carroll:** HIV is certainly, first and foremost, a health issue. However, we cannot detach it from the wider context of the society that we live in. As has been previously mentioned, men who have sex with men are

disproportionately affected by the virus in the North. Of all the people currently living with HIV, the probable exposure category for 58% is sex between men; in 38% of cases, it was heterosexual contact; and fewer than 1% are thought to have been infected as a result of injecting drugs.

People do not grow up in a bubble, and we are all shaped, to some extent, by the society in which we are raised. The facts — that we have same-sex couples still unable to marry, men who can only donate blood if they have been celibate for a year and Ministers can propose such archaic ideas as the conscience clause — all feed into maintaining a society where LGBT people are still marginalised and denied even the most basic rights.

This directly relates to the issue that we are discussing. If we lived in a system where people's right to marry and sexuality were not questioned or challenged, those serious health problems would not follow. However, in our health service, major health inequalities exist for the LGBT community. They suffer a disproportionate impact from mental health problems. Young LGBT people are five times more likely to be medicated for depression, two and a half times more likely to self-harm and three times more likely to attempt suicide. Those are absolutely shocking statistics. Further to that, almost 30% of young same-sex attracted men show signs of a mental health problem. That is 20% more than those who are attracted to the opposite sex.

#### 4.15 pm

Our education system needs to be reflective of the reality of sex for people today. The truth is that sex education does not equip people for life as an adult who is sexually active. That needs to be tackled if we are to support safe sex. We also have to tackle and have zero tolerance towards homophobia in our schools and ensure that people will not be bullied because of their sexuality, or what other people perceive their sexuality to be.

New statistics show that 934 people are known to be living with HIV in the North. That is the highest number on record, and the 103 cases of HIV diagnosis last year is the highest number ever to be recorded in a single year here. We therefore have a growing problem that needs to be addressed. It is also estimated that hundreds more people do not know that they have HIV. There have been calls for a new sexual health strategy, a centre of excellence and targeted, specific sexual health messages. Those are issues that need to be looked at by the relevant Ministers going forward. I hope that the political will to invest in those things exists after the debate ends today.

HIV is still a condition heavily affected by the 1980s: by the misunderstanding of the 1980s, and by the propaganda and blatant homophobia of the 1980s that tried to blame gay men for the disease. The old stigmas and perceptions of the 1980s need to be challenged. We need a new message today that reflects what it means to be living with HIV in the North. The biggest challenge often mentioned by people with HIV is that living with the stigma uniquely affects their life. As a result, a lot of people do not talk about the fact that they are living with this life-changing condition. That has an ongoing impact on their mental health and their ability just to be and to live a fulfilled life. It is important that we have these conversations here and fight against the stigma that prevents them from happening on the ground.

**Ms Bailey:** I support the motion and commend Paula Bradley for bringing it forward. I am pleased that the House is talking today about people living with HIV. On Thursday all over the world, we will mark World AIDS Day. We must think of all those who have gone too early because of an illness that is preventable. HIV is an almost unique health condition, in that it carries with it a significant amount of social stigma. When people are diagnosed with other illnesses, they usually tell friends and family, and they usually receive support. They will disclose their illness to other health professionals as is relevant to their care, and they will never be judged for that illness. That is not often the case with HIV. People living with HIV are often fearful of disclosing their status in case of differential treatment, breach of confidentiality or negative attitudes.

I pay tribute to all those people living with HIV who have publicly told their stories to try to address stigma and prejudice. It is important that those stories be in the public eye.

We have also come a long way in the diagnosis and treatment of people living with HIV, particularly with prenatal screening. Although it remains a life-limiting condition, the advances in treatment and support mean that people can live a happy, healthy and fulfilled life following their diagnosis. In 2014, there were 809 people receiving HIV care in Northern Ireland. I want to reassure all those people that they are valued and worthy and should not have to experience stigma, prejudice or discrimination.

I am disappointed that the motion did not mention the group most impacted on by this illness — men who have sex with men. They are the people who are most disproportionately affected by HIV. When we talk about suicide, we clearly articulate and understand that it disproportionately affects men and that it is men who mostly die by suicide. We therefore must not shy away from the reality that certain groups are disproportionately affected by HIV. In 2014, 94 new cases of HIV were diagnosed in Northern Ireland, 46 of which came from transmission between men who have sex with men. That is 49%, yet men who have sex with men may represent only up to 5% of the total population.

That is a hugely disproportionate impact. Let us call it as it is: that community is disproportionately affected. The continued disproportionate impact of HIV on that community is largely due to historic and continued discrimination and prejudice. I hope that the House moves on addressing discrimination and prejudice on the basis of sexual orientation with the key lever of a sexual orientation strategy.

While we are broadly supportive of the Alliance amendment and would welcome the introduction of pre-exposure prophylaxis, we believe that that would be best done as part of a comprehensive sexual health strategy, which is something that we do not have. The sexual health sector has reached consensus that we need a sexual health strategy that prioritises relationships and sexuality education. In my unselected amendment, I called on the Minister of Health to bring one forward, and I hope that she will listen to those words and respond positively to the call for a strategy. Care and support for people living with HIV must also form part of that strategy. I urge caution against a piecemeal approach to these issues, with a motion here or a ministerial provision there.

Lifetime treatment for those living with HIV is estimated to be £360,000 per annum. It is a simple health economics argument that investment in prevention will save money in the long run. The Minister of Health is also very vocal on moving to a preventative model, and a sexual health strategy would be an excellent opportunity to demonstrate that.

PrEP is not available anywhere in the UK. NHS England lost an appeal against a court ruling that said that the commissioning of PrEP was its responsibility. Whilst we await the outworkings of that lost appeal and the statement from NHS England on the three actions that it is taking, one of which is giving consideration to funding PrEP, people are accessing PrEP at significant personal cost or are buying it online.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** Will the Member draw her remarks to a close, please?

**Ms Bailey:** I commend the fantastic work of Positive Life, the Rainbow Project and specialist HIV services in the genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinics and other statutory sectors. We support the motion.

**Mr E McCann:** I begin by apologising for the fact that, when the amendment in my name was called this morning, I was not in my place. I could give you an account of how that came about, but it is irrelevant.

A lot of the points that I would have made have been made, particularly by Claire Hanna, Gerry Carroll and Clare Bailey, but I want to focus on one thing. There has been a lot of talk about the stigma that attaches to people with HIV. Apparently, in the minds of some in the House, the stigma consists of people who have HIV but are not gay being perceived to be gay. Why should anybody be stigmatised? What is the basis for saying that to suggest that someone who is associated with a group of gay people or a member of the gay community is to stigmatise them? Nonsense. To do that in a speech that says that we must get rid of the stigma makes no sense. It is an illustration of the lengths that we still have to travel before we are in a place where we can discuss these matters rationally. Irrational homophobia is one of the explanations for the fact that HIV and AIDS are still with us in such preponderance.

In the early days, if I can put it like that, back in the 1980s, very little research was done into HIV and AIDS. Major companies would not sponsor it, and Governments would not undertake to search for a new drug or put money into it. The main reason for that was simple. Initially, it was said that only the three Hs were affected by AIDS: Haitians, heroin users and homosexuals. The implication was, "Sure, who cares about the lives of people like that? There is no need to take this disease as seriously as other diseases". That lingers. As Clare Bailey and Gerry Carroll said, that lingers. It is not so long ago that we had political leaders in this country mounting platforms in broad daylight, without any sense of shame, bellowing that they would save Ulster from sodomy. Who are they to save us? What is wrong with sodomy anyway? And what is wrong with gayness anyway? We all exist on some sort of spectrum in terms of sexual orientation. Personally speaking, Mr Deputy Speaker, I think I would have kissed more men in my time if it was not for the stubble factor. I do not know how other people — *[Interruption.]* It has just been confirmed to me that that is a genuine problem.

The point is that to make an argument that it somehow harms the case to admit and acknowledge the extent to which this affects gay people is in itself — probably unconscious, but nevertheless — a form of homophobia. Therefore, Gerry Carroll is absolutely right: the way to deal with any stigma that exists is to stand up to homophobia. It is to say that it is an outrage that there is not equal marriage in this society. It is to say that young people in classes who are being bullied and harassed should be safe. There should be strict policies that prevent that happening.

Think about this, and I will end on it: when we look at the situation of gay rights and the way our society treats gay people today, an apparent contradiction immediately arises. For example, every year at Gay Pride, you see thousands upon thousands of gay people and their supporters in colourful array marching through Belfast and Derry and being applauded from the pavements — apparently very popular. Lots of smiles, lots of colour and all that. And yet, there are young people in our society — teenagers — who are committing suicide because they have what they feel to be a stigma attached to them because of the way they know they are being regarded by the rest of society. Is there any more grotesque disparity in the way people are perceived in our society?

**Mr Clarke:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr E McCann:** OK.

**Mr Clarke:** It is very unfortunate that the debate had been measured up until the Member got up to speak. He is now stigmatising the young people in our society who commit suicide. Let me put it on the record that we are not going to make the assumption that every young person who commits suicide is gay, but, if you listen to the Member, there is an automatic assumption that just because they are gay, they commit suicide. Unfortunately, there are too many suicides, but Mr McCann is stigmatising the sections of the community who may not be gay.

**Mr E McCann:** What a ridiculous argument.

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

**Mr E McCann:** What a clear confirmation of the point that I was making. The Member does not seem to understand what he is saying. You are saying — *[Interruption.]* — you are saying that it is stigmatising people to suggest that they are in a category where the majority are gay. That is not to stigmatise people. It is you.

I will say openly that what the Member said — unconsciously, I will accept, but that tells you how deep the problem is — was an unconsciously homophobic intervention from him, and it shows that homophobia is not a thing of the past but still exists and exists in this Chamber.

**Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health):** We have had a useful debate up to this point. We should not be distracted from the fact that we are discussing a serious issue. For me, it is very much an equality issue, and it is great to see the Assembly discussing it. That has been long overdue.

We should build on the positive: the fact that everybody around the House has spoken in favour of the motion and the amendment. I have some concerns, but with regard to the way that the proposers of the amendment have

set it out in relation to PrEP — I will use “PrEP” in case I get the word wrong — whilst we are not saying we can deliver it tomorrow, we can work towards it if the evidence is there to suggest that it is the best thing to do to support individuals with HIV. I support the amendment in that regard, so we can work towards it and build our evidence. There is a lot of homework still to be done on whether it will best serve the population. I am happy to do that.

For me, this is an equality issue, and respect has to be at the heart of how we do our business. We all need to deliver for all our people and communities, so I am grateful for the fact that we are having the debate and are able to raise awareness of HIV and show our support and care for those living with HIV. As many Members have said, HIV treatment has vastly improved, and most HIV-positive people live longer and stay healthy on treatment. However, the needs of those living with HIV are not only for treatment, because they require a range of health and social care services.

It is important to note, as many Members did throughout the debate, that they also need societal support, so they need people to have a different attitude. We need to allow people affected by HIV to live their daily life free from stigma and discrimination.

#### 4.30 pm

I acknowledge the Members' concerns that the annual number of people diagnosed with HIV is rising. Early diagnosis with appropriate treatment improves health outcomes and helps to prevent onward transmission. HIV testing is, therefore, routinely offered and recommended to all patients attending antenatal clinics and genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinics. The latest published figures show that more than 60,000 HIV tests were carried out — an increase of 15% on the previous year — which shows that there is awareness and that people are looking to be tested.

Increasing the uptake of testing for HIV is critical in reducing the number of late diagnoses; that is, after the point at which treatment should have started. Obviously, better uptake will also reduce the number of people with undiagnosed HIV infection. In this regard, it is positive to note that HIV testing undertaken by GPs increased by 23% from the previous year. Although HIV testing continues to increase, and we have a low prevalence of HIV relative to other countries, we cannot be complacent. The consequences of increasing new HIV diagnoses must not be underestimated, and the personal impact, in particular, is considerable.

Many Members referred to the issue of stigma, and stigma is a barrier in the fight against HIV. Many people living with HIV continue to suffer from ill-informed stigma, often causing social exclusion and discrimination. That is unacceptable, and a few Members picked up on examples. During the debate, Trevor Clarke stood up and said that, a number of years ago, he could not have imagined taking part in this debate or speaking positively about the need to address stigma. That shows that we are a society on a journey, and we need to get to the destination quickly because we need to address the inequalities in society. That was significant and a positive moment in the conversation we are having today. A fear of stigma and marginalisation can create barriers to accessing tests and services. It is essential that we address this and help to empower people to access treatment and support.

HIV awareness training for HSC staff is delivered in the trusts with the aims of addressing stigma, providing effective support from front-line services and improving the accessibility of services. World AIDS Day is Thursday 1 December, and it provides another excellent opportunity to highlight the issue and lessen the stigma experienced by those living with HIV. I know that a number of noteworthy events are being promoted by voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations to mark the day. I am sure that everybody in the House will wish them every success with these events. I am also pleased to publicise the screening by the Belfast Trust's sexual health training team, in conjunction with the Belfast Film Festival, of two topical films on World AIDS Day to support those with HIV and help to put an end to HIV stigma.

Some Members referred to the campaigns in the early years of the HIV epidemic, particularly the AIDS: Don't Die of Ignorance TV adverts and the leaflets with tombstones, which brought fear and dread. The stigma and secrecy around HIV has been fuelled by that approach.

There is still no cure or vaccine available for HIV, but it is a condition that is treatable, and accurate information will help to raise awareness, promote openness and prevent transmission. Raising public awareness and HIV prevention are included in wider sexual health campaigns, but, throughout the debate, Members have been calling for a new sexual health strategy and asking when it will be published. I am very aware of the calls, and the Chair of the Committee has raised this with me on a few occasions. Also, Positive Life had a recent petition calling for a new sexual health promotion strategy.

I have asked officials to keep me informed of the recommendations and potential actions coming out of a recent sexual health workshop involving the regional sexual health improvement network. That exercise, involving key stakeholders from the statutory and voluntary sectors, should help to identify areas where we need to intensify our efforts in the future. I will certainly give my careful consideration to the recommendations and to the need for a strategy, should that be the best way to address these issues. I will also use the contributions to today's debate.

The Public Health Agency's current campaign will run until January 2017. The Choose to Protect Yourself: Always Use a Condom campaign aims to promote good sexual health and contribute to reducing sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Aimed at young adults, the campaign is supported by social media activity and a new sexual health website that provides accurate information and advice.

While the vast majority of men who have sex with men do not have HIV, those men continue to be the key population group most affected by HIV infection here. The Choose to Protect Yourself message applies to the whole population, including men who have sex with men. However, for this priority group, there are also targeted interventions such as outreach information and testing sessions. The regional centre for HIV care and management, based at the Belfast Trust, provides excellent services and support to people.

Better survival rates, combined with the growing numbers of new diagnoses, mean that the number of people living with HIV is rising. The latest figures indicate that over 930 people in the North are receiving HIV-related care. HIV therapies are complex and can be extremely demanding, which has major implications for planning and integrating

our HIV services in the context of strengthening the wider health and social care system. Treating people living with HIV holistically to support their needs is an important step in this regard.

For that reason, I wish to acknowledge, like every Member, the work of Positive Life and other groups, but particularly Positive Life, which I met earlier today. It provides a range of information and support services, including a helpline, counselling, complementary therapies, one-to-one support and peer support groups. I am looking forward to having an opportunity to visit Positive Life at a future date.

There are concerns about funding going forward. The Department has always awarded core grant funding to Positive Life over the past number of years. However, in recognition that this funding stream has not been open to all voluntary and community organisations, it is being reduced on a three-year phased basis and is due to cease in March 2018. I am considering how funding from the Department can best support the voluntary and community sector to deliver vital services in line with my vision of securing better health and well-being outcomes for patients. It is important that we support groups such as Positive Life, which is unique in the work that it does and in the contribution that it makes to those living with HIV. I made the commitment today that, in relation to what comes next in the innovation fund, we will get the information out there as quickly as possible so that groups can plan for how they can be part of that. I know that Positive Life celebrated its thirtieth anniversary this year, and I am sure that we will all congratulate it on that and wish it many more successful years into the future.

I have probably picked up on all the issues. We will come back to the sexual health strategy, based on the work that has been done and on the recommendations that come forward, but I am certainly open to looking at that. In deciding the direction of travel that we will take in Health and Social Care, and given what I said about how we will deliver, design and produce services together, we absolutely have to listen to the experiences of families and of those living with HIV. We have to listen to service users, families and staff on the ground, and, if we do that and let it shape our sexual health services in the future, we can deliver first-class services, improve what is there now and do more. I look forward to working with Positive Life, organisations such as the Rainbow Project and many others that provide excellent services on how we shape our HSC response to supporting individuals who need our support.

I commend the motion. I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak to it and look forward to working with Members as we design services to make sure that we deliver better health outcomes. That is what it is all about.

**Mr Lunn:** I support amendment No 2 and the motion. I will say straight away that it is really encouraging to hear two DUP Members — I fancy that we will hear from another one shortly — speak in support of the motion. You maybe do not realise that you are breaking new ground today by tabling a motion like this. That is to be welcomed. I take Mr Middleton's point that HIV is not restricted to a particular group in society, but that group is the main victim of it. I take the point that 40% of cases involve heterosexual contact. I listened particularly carefully to Mr Clarke. I thought that he made a very personal speech, and I will just say, "Well done". We are all Freddie Mercury fans in this place: it is cross-party, believe me. I also saw those

documentaries, and, when history is written, Freddie Mercury's contribution in all this will be recognised, if it has not already been.

On the back of yesterday's unanimous, or almost unanimous, acceptance of the need for a pardon for homosexual offences, which the DUP supported, this has been a good week for equality and minority rights.

We have no problem with the motion. Our amendment does not alter it; it supplements it slightly. I do not think Mr Sheehan is here, but I will correct what he said: our amendment does not demand the introduction of prophylaxis straight away. It requests — this is for the Minister, really — that, if the time comes when prophylaxis is accepted in the UK, we should not delay bringing it in here. Sometimes there is a big delay, but it is not necessary. It is already available in several countries. I think it was Clare Bailey who said it is available on the Internet as well. I know you have to go through the full tests and all the rest of it. It is a treatment that is targeted at at-risk groups, most obviously HIV negative men who are perhaps in a relationship with HIV positive men. It is sometimes referred to, I believe, as a contraceptive pill for HIV. Whatever about that, it is a treatment that has great possibilities, and we should embrace it if we can.

I advise you, Minister, to keep in touch with your colleagues across the water, because NHS England has now been instructed by the courts to consider commissioning PrEP. It is the Clinical Priorities Advisory Group that would essentially determine whether it has sufficient priority. The probability is that it will, not least because, for once with a new drug, the costs appear to be relatively low. The estimate for introducing it in the UK is under £20 million a year. Some of the treatments we hear about from advances in medicine will cost that for 200 patients, so that would probably equate to about — what? — under half a million in our case.

Our amendment specifically focuses on equity of access to medication across the UK so that we can benefit from research and commissioning work. It is entirely consistent with the prevention programme set out in the motion, and, just as relevantly, it is consistent with the stated intent in the Minister's road map to promote and emphasise prevention in general. Therefore, our amendment is about making a clear statement that people with HIV in Northern Ireland will not be disadvantaged compared to those elsewhere in the UK. We mean that to apply to heterosexuals and homosexuals — any group affected by this. We cannot meaningfully talk about removing the stigma if we cannot commit to that. On top of that, it is about putting the requirements in the motion to remove stigma and implement a centre of excellence into action and about making the principles of the road map, which is based on Professor Bengoa's report on early intervention and prevention, real for hundreds of people.

I hope the amendment and the motion will receive full support in the House today. I think they are very worthwhile. This is a good day for the Assembly.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** I call Paula Bradley to conclude and make a winding-up speech on the motion.

**Ms P Bradley:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will start by thanking the majority in the Chamber for a very positive and very timely debate, because, as we all know, it is World AIDS Day on Thursday.

For the record, I will state that I have supported this charity for a number of years. For a number of years, my party colleague Sammy Douglas and I have run events in this Building on World AIDS Day. That shows the commitment that I have and that he has to this subject.

I will also state that I brought forward the motion on behalf of everyone, no matter what their gender or sexuality, because I believe stigma has to be reduced when we talk about HIV. I know personally how HIV affects people, because it affects someone I love dearly. I know what it is like to be there on the day they receive their diagnosis. I know what it is like to go to hospital appointments with them. I know what it is like when they try to go on holiday. I know what it is like when they try to get insurance. I know what it is like when they try to tell people just how their life is affected by HIV. I will defend, and I will stand up and fight and do whatever I can to help anybody who is living with HIV or is at risk of contracting it.

#### 4.45 pm

I am delighted that people in the Chamber today have come together to support this cause. As I said, it is something that I feel so dearly about, and it is something that I can get quite emotional about as well, because I know how bad the stigma is.

I want to highlight something that Clare Bailey said earlier. I also think of all those people who are not here today because of this horrific disease. The person I love was diagnosed about 10 years ago but had it been 10 years prior to that the person might not be around today to tell their story. So, I am glad that we are where we are today when it comes to the drugs that are available and how people who have been affected by HIV can live a normal life albeit, I know, that they are stuck to a regime of medication that controls their life, almost. However, they are still able to live their life.

Thank you, everyone, for your contributions. I just hope that, tonight, when the media click on to this that it is not the altercation between Mr McCann and what he said about my colleague here. I hope that that is not the case, because I want a positive story coming out of the Chamber today on how we can talk about this issue in this Chamber.

I have to say a big thank you too to Mr Middleton and Mr Clarke. When I brought the motion to them, as my two Health Committee members, there was absolutely no question that they would sign it and speak on it. I thank Trevor Clarke especially for his honesty. Not only is he my party colleague, he is my friend. I know him very well, and I know that, several years ago, it might have been difficult for him to come into the Chamber and talk about HIV. But, that is not so now; he can come and talk about it.

Charities such as Positive Life speak and explain things to us as MLAs. They lay out on the table how this affects people's lives. As I said before, I am talking about everybody's lives regardless of gender or sexuality.

I want to turn to some of the contributions that some people made. First and foremost, several Members brought up the issue of a sexual health strategy. In the last mandate, it was something that I raised several times. I think that Mrs Dobson said that it had been discussed in Committee in 2013. She is absolutely correct. We discussed it then, and we got the addendum up to December last year. However, it has not gone far enough.

We need a sexual health strategy that is specific to us here in Northern Ireland. We are not the same as the rest of the UK; we are very different here. So, we need that sexual health strategy in place.

A few Members — I think that Clare Bailey was one of them — mentioned relationships and sexuality education (RSE) in schools and our sex education in schools. That is something else that we need to look at. I had cause to attend Knockevin Special School in Downpatrick a few weeks ago with the Family Planning Association (FPA), which was running specific sex education classes for children with additional needs. These classes were fantastic, because these children are probably the most vulnerable in our society. The classes were so good in that the children were being told — at a level that they required — about the choices they make in life, and this is part of it. As Mr McCann said earlier, our children have to make choices in life and they are not always armed with the right information to do so. I absolutely agree with that, and it is definitely something that we need to bring forward.

I am delighted that Positive Life has been talked of so highly in the Chamber today. As I said earlier, it is a charity that I have supported for a number of years, including its fundraising events. It had me dancing around and doing the waltz last year, and, as far as Members are concerned, I went round with a sponsor sheet to all the Members' offices earlier this year, and they all gave so generously to Positive Life. When they asked me what it was for, they had no difficulty in giving me the money to support me in my 'Strictly Come Dancing' with Positive Life. I want to thank Members for that. They have already taken part in advancing this charity's role.

I will not go without mentioning the work of Rainbow as well. I have to commend them also because they do sterling work. As Chair of the all-party group on sexual health, which I have been for the past four years, I have had cause to work with numerous charities, and I want to commend them all as they do excellent work. One of the Members — it might have been Ms Bradshaw — mentioned going to visit Brook. Anyone from the Chamber who has been there will know that you are not allowed to leave without a bag of condoms, because that is what Brook believes. It believes that the PrEP drug — I agree, I would love to see the PrEP drug being made available — is not the silver bullet.

We need to look at protection; it has to be at the core.

I think that three Members have used the word "condoms": how good is that? How long ago is it that that type of word would not have been used in the Chamber? I said to the CEO of Positive Life that I would also use it. We are here to promote safer sex. We should advise people that safe sex is the best message. It is all part and parcel of preventing the passing of infections. It is not just about HIV: look at the increasing prevalence of STIs. The Royal Victoria Hospital's GUM clinic is bursting beyond capacity. I commend it on the work that it does. Whether it is the doctors, the nurses, the allied health professionals or the social workers, they work hard with their HIV clients. I also commend the work that is done in the mother-and-baby unit. I have written to the Minister about this — I write to the Health Minister every year about baby formula for children born to HIV-positive mothers. That is another issue.

We need to look across the board. That is why I talked about reducing stigma and not making it just one person or another's disease. The disease affects so many people, whether it is mothers of children, the children themselves or men who have sex with men. Whoever it might be, it affects so many individuals.

I thank everyone here today. We will support Ms Bradshaw's amendment. We are still a long way off when we look at the PrEP drug and how we can manage that in Northern Ireland. I spoke out in the summer in support of it, and that has not changed. I thank Members for a good and positive debate and for putting HIV and the stigma around it on the agenda here in the Assembly today.

*Question, That amendment No 2 be made, put and agreed to.*

*Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly notes the increasing number of people diagnosed with HIV in Northern Ireland, year on year; is concerned at the levels of stigma experienced by people living with HIV; acknowledges the need for a new campaign to promote awareness and prevention, specifically tailored to Northern Ireland; commends the work of Positive Life, Northern Ireland's only dedicated charity working to support people diagnosed with HIV; calls on the Minister of Health to support this prevention work by bringing forward proposals to ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland has access to vital pre-exposure prophylaxis medication on the same basis as the rest of the United Kingdom; and further calls on the Minister to support Positive Life in the development of a centre of excellence at its new headquarters.*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** Members should take their ease while we change the top Table.

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

*Motion made:*

*That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy).]*

## Adjournment

### Outdoor Education Centres in South Down

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** In conjunction with the Business Committee, I have given leave to Mr Colin McGrath to raise the matter of the proposed closure of outdoor education centres in South Down. The proposer of the topic will have up to 15 minutes.

**Mr McGrath:** I welcome the opportunity to lead on this important Adjournment debate, which I approach from an interesting position. I have been an avid user of outdoor education centres over the past 25 years, as a young person, a student youth worker and a full-time youth worker; in fact, I have stayed at two of the four centres that are due to close and have stayed at one of them on many, many occasions. I have brought groups of young people to the centres and can detail to you, Minister, their roles, purpose and benefit and the absolute loss and tragedy that there will be if they are to shut.

At the outset, I seek clarification on something. Minister, two weeks ago in the House, during Question Time, you mentioned that the reason for the rationalisation was financial pressures, yet, at the presentation to the Education Committee on Wednesday a week ago, the Education Authority said that the reason for the cutbacks was to rationalise and provide an enhanced and better service and that all the money that would be saved would be pumped back into the same centres. We need to have that clarified, because, if it is the latter, we can put a good case to you to overturn the consultation process.

Why do we have outdoor centres? They are hubs. They are a space for young people to come together to learn and to do so in an experiential way. Young people learn important life skills, teamwork skills, communication skills and much more. They use the methodology of the outdoors and action activities such as mountaineering, hillwalking, canoeing, sailing, bouldering, abseiling, night lining and other outdoor pursuits to educate. It is exciting for children, thrilling for teenagers and a delight for the youth worker and teacher to use the medium to educate young people, especially those who do not often excel in the academic setting. It is invaluable for them. Outdoor centres and outdoor education are an essential and integral element of our education system and one that many in the world are jealous of. I can vouch for that, because I have brought groups from Louth, Kerry, Cork, Scotland, France, Hungary and Finland to stay in the centres. They have facilitated our young people to host guests from far and wide, make friends and share cultures, but, more importantly, they have helped our young people to open their mind and stretch their personal horizons far and wide as well. Why, oh why, would we cut back on them and reduce our capacity?

I turn to the consultation. I am disgusted that, once again, we have consultation Northern Ireland-style, which is one in which the proposed outcomes are included in the

introductory paperwork. That is a joke. It is a humiliation of the good people of Northern Ireland and makes a farce of the consultation process. I want to highlight a couple of elements of the consultation and the flaws that I see, in order to help the Minister take the decision that we would like taken.

There is concern about the way in which the figures for occupancy rates have been calculated and used in the document. The occupancy rate that all centres are benchmarked against is similar to that for the hotel industry. The hotel industry is a highly competitive industry that achieves big profits when it gets a high occupancy rate of around 75%. At that level, it is doing very well and is able to deliver profits for the owners. There is no such need for profits in the outdoor industry. Covering the costs and breaking even are perfectly acceptable. Therefore, to benchmark the centres against the Savoy or the Europa is unfair and a little bit crass. When benchmarked against all other outdoor education centres in the rest of the UK, the centres that are proposed for closure compare very favourably.

The building status is another fallacy that is trotted out in the document. The building survey that has been completed is not just a list of the essential and urgent work that is required but a list of what could be done to the buildings, which includes some urgent remedial work. Let me compare that to a holiday. I could go to Barbados in the Caribbean for my holiday, but I will probably only be able to afford somewhere in Europe. If I am lucky, I might be able to add a couple of weekends here and there, maybe even in north Down. That is where the difference is. It is the difference between what we can do, what we would like to do and what we actually do. To use that as a factor is a little unfair, especially when it results in one centre being picked over another for closure.

#### 5.00 pm

There is also a glaring inconsistency in the figures in the document used to calculate the rank order of those centres that are to be closed. In the review document supplied to us the order has Shannaghmore listed as third, Killyleagh fourth, Bushmills fifth and Ardnabannon sixth; yet in the evidence document Bushmills is third, Shannaghmore fourth and Killyleagh and Ardnabannon are joint sixth. This decision will see people losing their jobs and having to relocate, villages having the heart ripped out of them, and a lifetime impact on our youth. Are you prepared, Minister, to allow such a consultation to proceed with such schoolboy errors in such an important document? I can hear the judicial reviews being warmed up from here.

I worry too, Minister, about the fact that this decision, with all its enormity and impact, its employment consequences and the emotions that are stirred, is being delivered by an interim head of Youth Service, who will report to an interim chief executive. Is it fair, Minister, that you want these momentous decisions to be taken by people in interim roles? If it all goes wrong, it could maybe even see your position being interim too.

The review is being carried out as a response to the 'Priorities for Youth' document of a few years ago, which stated that:

*"This will include a review of the statutory youth estate and outdoor education centres."*

It said "and outdoor education centres", not "merely" outdoor education centres. One would have thought that the review of the Youth Service estate and outdoor education centres would be undertaken in a complementary manner, not picking one sector and then doing the other. What if the rationalisation in the Youth Service estate in that consultation might save money that could then be pumped into the outdoor education sector? Why is it being done in such a disjointed manner? We have to get answers to those questions.

I conclude by saying to the Minister that he has the power to intervene, that he has the capacity to stop this massacre of our outdoor education centres. It is too early in the lifetime of the Education Authority (EA) for this decision to be taken. It is being taken for all the wrong reasons.

Our children will have fun in these places; they will learn and gain new skills and make long and lasting friendships; they will break down barriers and help to develop our country; they will be the leaders of tomorrow. We owe them the opportunity to learn the skills that they need. Let us not cut provision and make our outdoor education centres the preserve of the chosen few; let us make them a luxury that we can offer to many. I plead with the Minister: please keep all our outdoor education centres open.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** There is substantial interest in this Adjournment debate, and a number of Members have indicated their intention to speak. I propose, therefore, to give four minutes to Members from the constituency, and they will be called first. Other Members will have three minutes.

**Ms Ruane:** I support outdoor pursuits and education centres. I remember, many moons ago, when I trained as an outdoor education facilitator in an outdoor pursuits centre on Achill Island, which was funded by the education system. I have some of the best memories of those times. That centre is still open and still funded by the education system.

The centres at Killowen and Ardnabannon are vital assets to the South Down community. Killowen has been open since 1982 at its current site, providing outdoor activities on Carlingford lough and the adjacent forest parks. Ardnabannon opened in 1967 and provided a large range of outdoor activities for the youth of South Down and further afield. I met representatives from Killowen last week to discuss the proposed closures and to offer my full support for keeping the centres open. They told me how centres such as Killowen, Ardnabannon and Delamont, as well as other centres throughout the North, not only keep young people active but help with mental health, the obesity crisis, and academic achievement. While I am on the subject, and I hope the Deputy Speaker will indulge me, I note today that our primary-school children are sixth in the world for maths. I pay tribute: that is phenomenal. I pay tribute to the primary schools, their teachers, the staff, parents and, indeed, successive Education Ministers who brought in literacy and numeracy policies, including myself and John O'Dowd. It is to be celebrated.

During difficult budgetary times it is important to focus where money should be focused, and that is why I ask the Minister to really think carefully about cutting money and closing these centres, because they do contribute to academic as well as physical education. I visited both the centres in my own constituency as Minister for Education. I funded both

centres, and continued to fund them, during my time as Minister. I saw at first-hand the good work they are doing. I offer my full support for both centres to remain open.

I believe this Minister has an open mind, and I hope that, rather than listen to officials or people who want to cost-cut — and I am not saying all officials want to cost-cut — he takes his own mind about this. The Minister has a substantial budget — and I note he is pointing at the Minister for Finance — and money should be found from within his budget to fund these centres, rather than passing the buck. I am sure the current Minister will not do that, but I do plead with him to continue to fund these centres because they provide such an important facility for people right across the island, as my constituency colleague Colin McGrath has mentioned.

My own family have attended the centres, and their classmates from both sides of the border have really appreciated the facilities they offer. I ask the Minister to please support the centres. It is a small saving of little over £1 million when you consider the money that the centres bring in themselves. It is not fair that we ask them to be self-sufficient.

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

**Ms Ruane:** Please keep them open.

**Mr McKee:** As one who resides in a rural community in South Down, I very often take for granted the beauty of the countryside, the Mourne mountains and the coastal waters of Carlingford and Strangford loughs. With this in mind, I am really concerned for the many young people who enjoy going to the outdoor education centres of Ardnabannon, Delamont and Killowen.

The proposal to close down three centres in South Down which cater for young people across Northern Ireland should be justified by reports showing systemic failures to deliver objectives and perhaps health and safety issues and so on. We have seen no such findings in this report, and I seriously question and, indeed, oppose the proposals being put forward by the Minister in this case.

When I read the findings of this review, I cannot see any justification for the rationalisation of larger statutory centres. In fact, I can only see reasons to preserve, support and promote the services, as I am sure many young people in Northern Ireland do not have the opportunity to visit one of these centres with school or through a youth group. Indeed, as the report shows, there is capacity in both the statutory and voluntary sectors for more young people to experience and benefit from the services of outdoor centres.

In the majority of performance statistics, statutory centres rate as equal or higher than the voluntary sector. The report states:

*“Throughout the review it was apparent that Residential and Outdoor Education is highly valued by all those who use the service, with regard to the quality of provision, the overall outdoor experience, the calibre and experience of staff and its value for money”.*

The review also states that Education and Training Inspectorate assessments over the last five years have ranged from satisfactory to outstanding, and that outdoor education brings added value to both the formal and non-

formal education spheres. There is not even a mention in the report of the savings to be made, but with a total budget of 0·15% of the Department's budget, I believe the advantages of outdoor education centres far outweigh the costs.

If the centres close, there is a greater cost to the young participants who have availed themselves of them for education on the environment, conservation, adventure and outdoor recreation including climbing, orienteering, abseiling, sailing, canoeing, mountain biking and rock climbing etc. Most importantly, the physical exercise contributes to the child's health and well-being.

I quote from a review paper written in 2000 by Edward Lappin:

*“Outdoor education enables students and teachers to interact in an environment free from the limitations of the classroom.”*

The review document states that there is “a cluster” of OECs at the southern coast. Where else would you locate them when you have a natural environment with the Mourne mountains in an area of outstanding natural beauty and the loughs of Carlingford and Strangford? Ardnabannon, Delamont and Killowen are seen as an invaluable front-line service by geography and science teachers in helping them to cover the requirements of GCSE and A-level specifications. They are also used by students studying a range of vocational courses, and many go on to gain their Duke of Edinburgh's award. If the proposed closures go ahead, with the loss of 191 beds in residential outdoor education centres, there is no way that the voluntary sector will be able to address the shortfall.

I call on the Education Minister to reverse his proposal and allow schoolchildren and community groups to continue in their outdoor activities at Ardnabannon, Delamont and Killowen outdoor education centres.

**Ms S Bradley:** First, I thank my South Down colleague Colin McGrath for securing the Adjournment debate in the Chamber this evening. I also thank the Minister for being in attendance, which is critical to the debate moving forward. No doubt, through many submissions, the Minister will have been made aware of the strong reasons that surround the need to keep the centres open; indeed, in the last week or two, I had the opportunity to visit the purpose-built Killowen centre. I put on record my support for the retention of that centre, along with the other two centres in South Down, which, I believe, offer an equally good service.

The arguments that have been made are largely self-evident in that you will protect jobs and continue to offer enriched educational experiences beyond the classroom. I ask the Minister to take note of the fact that some children who visit those outdoor centres may excel for the very first time in their life. It is an opportunity for them to break away from the confines of the classroom and find that they are particularly good at something that they would not otherwise have had the opportunity to be introduced to. Events such as visits to outdoor educational centres build their confidence, and that stays with them for life. How do we measure that, Minister? How can we make a judgement on whether it would sit well on a balance sheet?

**Mr McNulty:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms S Bradley:** I will give way.

**Mr McNulty:** The Member will note the positive impact that teachers, headmasters and headmistresses say that visiting Killowen has on the development of their kids. Anna Shields of Anamar Primary School in south Armagh has been going to Killowen every year for the last 20 years and is devastated by its potential closure.

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

**Ms S Bradley:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I take the Member's point.

I ask the Minister simply to pause and take note of what is being presented here today. These are very positive, popular centres for good reason. The issues of health, obesity and outdoor pursuits have been raised, and the Programme for Government clearly reflects their importance and makes repeated references to them. The proposals to close the centres contradict everything that the Programme for Government, as it is being built, represents or claims to represent. The contradiction is so wide that it cannot sit comfortably with the Minister. In that vein, I urge him to sit down and set the proposals or the possible proposals against the objectives of the Executive. The information in the public domain to date does not, I have to say, fill me with confidence that that work has even been undertaken, and I urge him to consider that.

I put this to the Minister again: how do we measure the added confidence that young people get from visiting the centres? How do we measure the personal development that takes place when young children stay away from their parents, perhaps for the very first time? I know that some of the leaders at the centres — this was referred to — have the skills and ability to deal with the very delicate issue of homesickness, and the children learn to network with their friends. It is so difficult to put a value on that. How do we measure the spirit — the community spirit — that is engendered by the young people who step up to do courses and volunteer? They take that far beyond the centres through their life and carry that community spirit with them. They really bring such social added value that we cannot measure it.

### 5.15 pm

I truly hope that the Minister has come here with an open mind. If anything comes out of the debate, I ask him to consider facilitating a meeting with representatives of the sector to discuss the review. I refer not to adding to the review but to looking at it and seeing how it was constructed and the faults that lie in it and whether he is willing to consider at least pushing the pause button. I ask him please to consider the centres and all the social value that you will never see presented to you by officials in the form of a balance sheet. I urge him to take on board that request and thank him very much for being in attendance.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** That completes the contributions from constituency Members. I am prepared to grant an additional minute to the non-constituency Members who have indicated that they wish to speak, who will now each have up to four minutes.

**Mr Humphrey:** I thank the Member for South Down for securing the debate, and I thank the Minister for his attendance. As someone who is involved in youth work — I declare an interest as a member of the Scout Association — I have been to many outdoor centres and have seen at

first hand the absolute improvement in young people in their personal development when they attend the centres. That is hugely important and cannot be quantified by economists looking at the bottom line in any consultation, review or work that discusses or decides whether the centres should be retained or closed.

I take issue with two things. First, the member for South Down Ms Ruane said that the Minister should retain an open mind. I have spoken to the Minister, and he clearly has an open mind on the issue. Secondly, Mr McKee referred to “the Minister's proposals”. I hope that the Ulster Unionist Party was not scoring points. It is important that people remember that they are not the Minister's proposals; they are the Education Authority's proposals. The consultation and review that the proposals came from were the Education Authority's consultation and review. The proposals are the Education Authority's proposals, and people need to be absolutely clear about that.

**Mr Storey:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Humphrey:** I will, surely.

**Mr Storey:** The Member will be aware that there are political representatives on that board, including those from the Ulster Unionist Party.

**Ms Ruane:** Will the Member take an intervention?

**Mr Humphrey:** I have just taken one; I want to make some progress. You had your opportunity.

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

**Mr Humphrey:** Having been to Killowen, Ardnabannon and Delamont — I have not been to Bushmills — over the years, I am absolutely aware of the facilities that they provide. In fact, I first visited Killowen way back in 1989 when there was a huge scout camp at Gosford. I was there last year on a visit with the CAL Committee, and the facilities are excellent. I understand absolutely that the centres are in close proximity to the coastline and allow kids to do water activities. They also allow them to go into the Mourne and learn new skills there. That is hugely important.

For the Minister, it is clearly a case of speaking to the Education Authority, which I am sure that he has done and will continue to do. It is about conflicting demands on the budget, which is not infinite.

The reality is that we must always put the young people first, and I say that as a governor of two schools. It is about the development of our young people. When our young people have the opportunity to go away, their leaders — in this case, perhaps, their teachers — have the opportunity to see them in the context of an outdoor centre or an outward bound centre and the activities that they are involved in and observe a monumental change in them.

It is also about sweating the assets, but we need to be realistic. The Department also funds other centres such as the Crawfordsburn Scout Centre, where the Minister recently opened a new cabin and chalet. We have other great centres in north Down like the Lorne Guide centre and the Boys' Brigade centre at Ganaway.

I have to stress again to the House that we need to get the facts absolutely clear. I know the Minister and have known him a long time.

The Minister is absolutely committed to delivering for young people in our community, but this was a piece of work initiated out of a review that came from the Education Authority; the consultation was the Education Authority's consultation; and these proposals are the Education Authority's proposals. I have no doubt the Minister will be sympathetic — it is up to the Minister to respond to the debate in a way that, I have no doubt, he will — but, equally, Members need to be fair and not place undue criticism on the Minister that is not and should not be directed to his office.

**Ms S Bradley:** I thank the Member for giving way. Will the Member clarify that, in the interests of having that detail correct, the Education Authority's review suggested this was not a monetary decision; it was about a review of service?

**Mr Humphrey:** Mr Storey made a contribution in an intervention and made it very clear that political representatives sit on the Education Authority. I am not one of those people. I have not had the opportunity to be privy to the report and the review. I am sure the Member has party colleagues who have; perhaps she could ask them.

I will draw my remarks to a conclusion, but I will simply say that the Member should bear in mind the facts of this issue and not deal with fantasy.

**Mr Lyttle:** I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the valuable contribution made by outdoor education centres and their staff to the development of our children and young people across Northern Ireland and, specifically, those in South Down.

When we think of education, understandably, we think of schools, given the central role they play. However, we must also acknowledge that education ought to take many forms and include the vital contribution the Youth Service and outdoor education make. Outdoor education provision accounts for only a small portion of the overall education budget, but it provides unique learning opportunities and skills development for around 150,000 children and young people every year, which is approximately as many pupils as attend all our post-primary schools put together.

Residential and outdoor education centres across Northern Ireland provide a wide range of positive education experiences and opportunities to develop interpersonal and practical skills, teamwork and communication skills and social and emotional resilience through a wide range of physical activities that all aid our children and young people's ability to achieve a positive future for themselves and contribute to their community.

That has been supported by the correspondence I have received from primary and post-primary schools in my constituency of East Belfast regarding just how valuable the outdoor education centres at Delamont, Ardnabannon and Killowen in South Down are to them. The Education Minister and the Education Authority must, therefore, ensure that all children and young people have the opportunity to participate in all forms of education, including youth services and outdoor education.

As Deputy Chairperson of the Education Committee, I was glad to support our decision to invite the Education Authority to update us on its approach to this matter. The Education Authority cited over-provision, duplication, economic viability and failure to meet delivery models as reasons for the proposed closures. However, I must say

that serious questions were raised by all parties about the reasons the Education Authority gave for the proposed closures of the outdoor education centres. There is clear concern that this exercise is more about cost-cutting than about improving education provision for children and young people in our community.

I have consulted South Down Alliance elected representative councillor Patrick Brown from Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, who also questions the approach taken by the Education Authority on the proposed rationalisation of the centres, and, indeed, he opposed the closure of the three centres in South Down.

There is shock that some of the busiest, largest and most popular centres are being proposed for closure. They are centres that are consistently busy throughout the year during and out of term time. They are centres that accommodate school and youth groups from across Northern Ireland and bring children and young people from across our community to exciting, outdoor, shared spaces that are vital to the aim of building a united community in Northern Ireland.

Given its natural resources, it should be no surprise that the south Down/Mourne area has a concentration of outdoor residential centres, however the proposed cuts will reduce the number of bed spaces and opportunities available for children and young people to experience outdoor residential activities throughout Northern Ireland.

**Ms Lockhart:** I thank the Member for bringing this debate to the Floor of the Chamber. I commend the large number of people who have turned out in force, obviously demonstrating to us the depth of feeling that there is amongst the community on this very important issue. I also thank the Minister for taking time to come and listen to the debate. Obviously, he will make his comments in due course.

At the outset, I want to talk about the invaluable service that these outdoor centres have given to our society, our constituents and our young people. I can think back to my time at school when I attended some of the centres, and that is not that terribly long ago, although it maybe feels a little bit longer than what it is. They are fantastic facilities, and they do give a real added benefit to a child's overall growth and social skills. There is no doubt that they have a positive impact on their communication skills, their leadership skills, their teamworking skills and their ability to experience the real outdoors. For many who are from a town setting, it often is potentially the only time that they will have access to that real outdoor experience. I commend the many workers who, throughout the years, have had that impact on children and young people who have used this service.

When we received the briefing from the EA at the Education Committee, I was somewhat shocked at some of the revelations that the EA came forward with. As my colleague William Humphrey pointed out, this is an EA consultation, and it is an EA recommendation. I think that we have to be aware that the EA has arrived at this consultation stage.

**Ms Ruane:** I thank the Member very much for taking my intervention, and I absolutely accept that the Education Authority made this decision. Will the Member agree that it is the Minister who will make the final decision?

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

**Ms Lockhart:** I will certainly not take any lectures from the Member across the way, because, when she was Minister, the unfortunate thing is that the education and library boards did not tackle the problem and the under usage. I will not take any lectures from her.

Our Minister is compassionate about our young people, and I have no doubt that he will do everything in his power to ensure that young people get the very best education and outdoor experience during his term in office. I do go back to the fact that we are in changing times. There is not a bottomless pit of money, and it would be wrong of us as a party of government to say that things will not have to change. I understand that things will have to change and that there does have to be a rationalisation and a looking at the entire estate. That does not mean that I am an advocate of them closing. It means that I am an advocate of the EA actually sitting down and telling us the facts and the truths around whether, if centres are to close, there is the capacity in the ones that remain open to deal with the numbers of young people that will be going to them. I also think that the EA has been slightly disingenuous with its comments —

**Ms S Bradley:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms Lockhart:** I am conscious of my time.

I think that the EA has been disingenuous around the figure of £1.3 million, because it has said that that will be reinvested into peripatetics. I question that, and I think that the EA has a lot of questions to answer. We all have representatives on the EA board, and it is vital that the political representatives on the EA board question the EA on its rationale for bringing this consultation forward. I ask everyone in the House to make their comments known to the Minister and make them known to the EA, because it is the EA that, I believe, has serious questions to answer in all of this.

### 5.30 pm

**Mr Agnew:** After two North Down Adjournment debates, I joked with the Minister for Infrastructure, who is from South Down, that he had done more than anyone else to dissolve the border between North and South Down. I fear that, if the EA proposals are implemented by the Minister, he will have done more than anyone else to reinstate it. I know that he is paying attention to the debate and that he is not a man who wants to see a hard border, so, hopefully, he will not go down that line.

Adjournment debates are often constituency-based and, at a cursory glance, this looks like a South Down debate. However, we can see from the fact that we have representatives of three of the Belfast constituencies, North Antrim, Lagan Valley, Strangford — I will not list them all — as well as our North Down constituency —

**Mr McNulty:** Newry.

**Mr Agnew:** There is also Newry and Armagh, of course. The centres serve a wide catchment area, and when we come to the question of why there is an overprovision, as it is deemed by the EA, in South Down, it is clear from the number of people here today that many from across Northern Ireland access the centres and come from well beyond the borders of South Down. The point has been

made by others that South Down has a lot to offer in terms of natural environment and access to outdoor facilities. It is right that the provision should be there.

Minister, there is talk throughout the EA document about voluntary provision. I suppose that, if we were to go down that road and rely on the voluntary sector — I am hopeful that, given the number of representations from your party, you are minded to take a different route — the question that I would put is this: what guarantee is there of sustainability for those centres? What will your Department do to ensure that sustainability, so that those alternatives are there? There is a real sense of connection, as well, to these places. There is a history that goes with them. That, in itself, is not sufficient reason to keep them open, but it is sufficient reason to look twice at the proposals. As was put to me by one teacher, this will impact on my children, because Bangor Central school uses Ardnabannon every year. I put it to the Minister that this will affect many of our constituents directly. There will be annoyance, for there is an attachment to the centres, if they are to close without good reason.

My final point is around the consultation. Much has been made of it, and there is a real feeling that it has not been a genuine consultation. I do not know whether the EA was trying to be innovative by using SurveyMonkey, saying, “Look how modern we are. We are using new technology and new ways of engagement”. The EA should not be knocked, if that is what it was trying to do, but there is certainly a feeling that the SurveyMonkey questionnaire that was produced very much directed people towards giving the answers it wanted to receive rather than remaining sufficiently open to the answers that people wanted to give.

**Mr Hazzard:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Apologies, we were in Budget discussions. That was very timely, given the subject matter, I suppose, but it is why I missed the earlier contributions. The number of people here today is testimony to the feeling about the issue we are discussing. I have been here for five years, and I do not think that I have seen an Adjournment debate with so many people at it, so fair play to Colin and to everybody else for being here.

When we look at the small sum of money that is being talked about here and the money that Ministers, such as the Education Minister and I, have to look towards saving, something that should be borne in mind is the outcome that the centres give not just to our children but to the local economy. Take Killowen, Ardnabannon and Delamont: those centres are vital, and, no doubt, that has been touched on. The centres and their staff are very much part of the local community. They are also part of the learning process. Many of our young people, including kids who come out from Belfast, benefit from the environmental learning and heritage in the likes of the Mourne, Kilbroney and Carlingford lough in South Down. We see it all the time. That is their bed of learning when it comes to outdoor living and outdoor learning. It would be a travesty if we somehow could not re-engage with the consultation, speak to the centres and find an appropriate way forward that matches the needs and outcomes of the Department.

It is for the Department and the Minister to take the decision on this. Last year, when there was an issue regarding special educational needs in the Education Authority, John O’Dowd, the previous Minister, stepped in. It is maybe time to do that on this issue.

I know I am time-bound, so, finally, as the Member who spoke previously said, it is important that we look at different ways to consult, but it is also important that we do not take away from the consultation process. I fear that, as with the social security offices, which are also going under review, we have maybe taken away something from the consultation processes. I therefore ask the Minister to re-engage on that.

**Mr Weir (The Minister of Education):** I thank all Members who have contributed to the debate. As the Member who has just spoken indicated, Adjournment debates are undoubtedly specifically constituency-focused. It is clear, however, that this is an issue that goes well beyond a single constituency. It is also clear that there is a level of interest in and passion for the subject; indeed, it is commendable that so many people are in the Public Gallery to see the outcome.

I say at the outset that I do not think that anybody would demur from the idea that general youth provision is a tremendous asset in young people's lives. It should be noted — Chris Lyttle referred to it — that the natural inclination is for all of us to think purely of schools when we think of education, but youth provision is an important aspect of it. Some £34 million has been spent on revenue from the youth budget this year, while there has been about £9 million of capital expenditure, much of it to improve youth facilities. The provision that is made by a range of youth centres is a major advantage to children's lives. No one doubts that, but this is where we run into some difficulties that I will highlight.

The situation arose from an overall assessment of what youth services were needed and what could be maintained. From that point of view, significant as what we are hearing today is, we need to recognise and put it in context that we originally had five boards making their own outdoor education centre provision. One board now has that focus. If you were starting from scratch, you would not have the layout and provision that you have at present. At the moment, there are 11 statutory outdoor education centres and four voluntary. On the long-term future of those, I can say that a number, such as Lorne and Ganaway, which Mr Humphrey mentioned, are facilities that have been there for decades, so they will not be under particular pressure or threat. There is an issue about trying to ensure that we have a match between what is provided and what is needed. Undoubtedly, there will be major implications if the proposals go through on that basis. Again, I indicate that this is a proposal — indeed, a draft consultation — by the Education Authority. The people who will make the decision are on the Education Authority board. It is not the officials. The officials may have a particular view, but the board, on which at least four parties in the Assembly, as well as different sectors, are directly represented, will make the decision.

I do not want to mislead people. I believe that there is a funding issue, as there is with almost anything in education at the moment. Mr Hazzard talked about the previous Education Minister intervening on an issue. That was very welcome.

I will not pretend that there is not a financial aspect to this. The Minister made the intervention last year, but I am in a different position with this year's budget. I am not talking about a reduction in real terms, which is sometimes bandied about: in actual terms, it is £52 million down. The

pressures in this year's budget are probably somewhere in the region of £100 million. Some of that is down to circumstances that have been imposed on Northern Ireland — not just in terms of the block grant —, such as the changes by the Chancellor on national insurance and superannuation, which are hitting everybody and are making a fortune of a difference. So, the room for manoeuvre that I have or which the Education Authority has is not as wide as it was. There is no doubt about that.

**Ms Ruane:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Weir:** I will give way in a moment.

While we do not know the budget for 2017-18, there is no doubt that we will be in very trying circumstances, where, unless there is a radical shift in the Budget across the Executive, there will be major problems for education. I give way to the Member.

**Ms Ruane:** I thank the Minister for giving way. I understand the difficulty with budgets, as we all do, but does he agree with me that at a time of austerity, at a time when we have a serious obesity crisis, at a time when the Executive are working together to try to bring about changes, and at a time when we want to deal with underachievement, it is especially important that we find £1.3 million, particularly given the huge budget that the Minister has. I was in your position; I know the amount of money that is in the education budget.

**Mr Weir:** That is a matter of public record. If I start off down by the equivalent of £150 million, the only way I can do that is through cuts.

**Ms S Bradley:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Weir:** I have only 10 minutes. Mr McGrath made an important contribution, and I want to deal with the issue.

There will undoubtedly be major pressures in 2017-18, which will particularly bear on the Education Authority because we want to try to protect as much of the front-line schools budget as possible. Unless there is a radical change, I think other cuts will have to be made that will be more painful and more politically difficult for the House than the one to outdoor education centres.

**Ms S Bradley:** Will the Minister please give way?

**Mr Weir:** I will give way briefly, then.

**Ms S Bradley:** I am concerned because the debate has completely turned and we are now talking about finance. The terms of reference of the Education Authority never made any reference to finance. We had serious questions about the review, but now we are questioning whether the terms of reference of the review are changing before our very eyes.

**Mr Weir:** I am being absolutely honest with the House: finance is critical to education, and it will be critical to this debate. There will have to be cuts by the Education Authority. I have no alternative other than to stay within budget nor has the Education Authority, and I am not going to pretend that there is not a pressure with finance where money will have to be found. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Order.

**Mr Weir:** With respect, I am trying to answer and I am being honest.

While there is work that will be done by the Education Authority to try to ensure that it has the best possible facilities for people, I will not pretend that finance is not an important aspect of that. It would be misleading to the House to pretend otherwise.

I reiterate that unless there is a radical change to the budget — to be fair to the Finance Minister, he does not have a great deal of room for manoeuvre either with the block grant — I suspect that in 2017-18 the House will face more painful decisions. I do not want to mislead anybody in relation to that.

Members have asked, “Is this the right choice?”, and, “Have things been got right in the consultation?”. Having spoken to members of the Education Authority, I believe they are not taking a doctrinaire position and saying that this is some sort of panacea or that it should be a plan set in stone. We are talking about proposals that will ultimately be decided on by the Education Authority board. In tackling that, and this is where I urge people in the House and in the consultation — *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Order. I ask Members to show respect to the Minister when he is addressing the House.

**Mr Weir:** If Members are looking for an alternative route, it is incumbent on them to put forward a strong alternative that is commensurate with where we are with finance. People are not hung up on a particular solution. What they are hung up on is trying to ensure that the budget of the Education Authority is used in the best possible fashion. There may well be other things that the Education Authority will have to do that will be more difficult than even this.

If Members are looking at what the provision is, for instance, for outdoor education centres, I urge them to look at what the overall proposals should be, look at alternatives and provide those alternatives. I think they will find that if they produce alternatives that are able to provide a strong level of support in terms of outdoor centres but can match it much more within the budgets that will be available to the Education Authority, nobody is going to be objecting to that. However, people will not make the best use of a consultation if they simply say, “No, we oppose all cuts”. That is where there has to be maturity in the debate.

The decision will ultimately be taken by the Education Authority board. I think it is open to hear what is being said by others. I urge people to take part in the consultation, whatever doubts they have about it, and put forward their proposals directly, if indeed it is not to be confined by a SurveyMonkey or anything of that nature. Speak directly to Education Authority board members, and come up with an alternative that is workable and can be financed.

*Adjourned at 5.46 pm.*

# 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.



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# Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 25 November 2016

## Written Answers to Questions

### Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline (i) how her Department has aligned Agri-Environment Schemes with the sustainability agenda for agriculture, including the promotion of increased woodland, and the promotion of biodiversity within our production systems; and (ii) why in some instances producers are being rewarded for the production of public goods as well as food.

**(AQW 5513/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs):**

- (i) My Department's new Agri-Environment Scheme, the Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS) has been designed to address specific environmental needs and enhance the sustainability of local agriculture. Therefore, the EFS has a range of measures to support biodiversity, improve water quality and create woodland. The woodland measures include planting of native woodland, tree corridors, new hedgerows and agro-forestry.
- (ii) The EFS will offer participants a 5 year agreement to deliver a range of environmental measures. Payments will be for the cost incurred / income foregone associated with carrying out the measures, in recognition of the public goods that they will deliver.

Subject to the necessary financial approvals, the EFS is planned to open for applications in February 2017.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) how many candidates were considered for Ministerial Special Adviser; (ii) what account was taken of potential imbalance in religious background or gender in the pool from which she selected her Special Adviser; (iii) how wide was the trawl for candidates and how did she ensure that it was broadly based as required by the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers; and (iv) to publish the job description and person specification drawn up before the Special Adviser was appointed.

**(AQW 5813/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** My Ministerial Special Adviser was appointed in accordance with the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers.

**Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the Agri-food Processors Investment Scheme including (i) when it is likely to open; (ii) entry requirements; and (iii) the eligibility for funding.

**(AQW 5901/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** The Agri-food Processing Investment Scheme aims to improve the economic performance and competitiveness of the agri-food sector through capital investment in the processing/marketing and/or development of agricultural products. Proposals for the scheme were included in the EC approved Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

My officials are working closely with their counterparts in the Economy Department and InvestNI in further developing the scheme to ensure that it best fits the needs of the local agri-food processing sector.

Subject to the necessary approvals and funding availability, I hope to launch the scheme by the end of March 2017. Until we have obtained the necessary approvals, it is not possible to be specific about the final details of the scheme, including the timing, entry requirements or the eligibility for funding.

**Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline (i) the funding her Department provides to Waterways Ireland for biosecurity projects; and (ii) any match funding her Department has provided to Waterways Ireland with the Irish government for biosecurity projects.

**(AQW 5924/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** DAERA has no funding streams available for biosecurity projects and has therefore not provided funding to Waterways Ireland for biosecurity projects.

My Department has not provided any match funding to Waterways Ireland with the Irish Government for biosecurity measures.

However, my Department does provide advice and guidance to Waterways Ireland on biosecurity measures, which feed into its Environment and Heritage Policy.

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in light of the decision to put the York Street Interchange project on hold, whether any EU funded projects in her Department are at risk following the decision to Brexit. **(AQW 5933/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** The Chancellor Philip Hammond announced on Monday 4 October that the Treasury will now guarantee EU structural and investment funds for projects signed up until the point at which the UK departs from the EU. The announcement provides confirmation that EU funding for contracts signed before the UK departs the EU will be honoured.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the (i) total number; and (ii) proportion of (a) Assembly Written Questions; (b) Assembly Priority Written Questions; and (c) Freedom of Information requests directed at his Department that have been answered within the maximum permitted timescales since May 2016.

**(AQW 5946/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** Up to 21 October 2016, the information requested is outlined below:-

	<b>Total received since May 2016</b>	<b>Number answered within timescale</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
AQs Written	412	172	42
AQs Priority Written	31	5	16
FOIs	190	59	31

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what plans she has to reduce the use of bituminous coal.

**(AQW 6013/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** Under the Clean Air (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, district councils may, by order confirmed by my Department, declare the whole or any part of the district of the council to be a Smoke Control Area. There are approximately 126 Smoke Control Areas in Northern Ireland.

In Smoke Control Areas, only authorised fuels (such as smokeless coal and other low-smoke fuel products, electricity and gas) are permitted to be used by households. In addition, exempted appliances may be used to burn certain fuels (for example, untreated wood in particular models of wood burning stoves, or oil in boilers), where laboratory tests have shown that emissions limits are below a certain threshold. My Department publishes a list of authorised fuels and exempted appliances, which is updated monthly. More information on these can be found on my Department's website:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/air-pollution>.

Bituminous coal is not an authorised fuel, nor is it specified for use in any exempted appliance and, as such, it may not be burned in Smoke Control Areas.

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the penalties in place for individuals that do not conform to animal welfare checks.

**(AQW 6087/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** The maximum penalties in the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 (the 2011 Act) are -

- for conviction on indictment, 5 years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine; and
- on summary conviction for offences of causing unnecessary suffering and animal fighting, 12 months imprisonment and/or a £20,000 fine;
- on summary conviction for other offences, 6 months imprisonment and/or a £5,000 fine.

Under the 2011 Act a court can deprive an owner of possession of an animal, and disqualify a person from owning, keeping, or participating in the keeping of an animal.

Inspectors can serve an Improvement Notice on the owner of an animal requiring them to take remedial action to achieve compliance with the 2011 Act.

The 2011 Act provides powers for my Department to make regulations to secure the welfare of animals, and these provide for penalties of up to 6 months imprisonment and/or a £5,000 fine for any breaches of these regulations.

The 2011 Act requires a number of activities involving animals to be licensed by my Department or by Councils. Non-compliance with the 2011 Act or with licence conditions can lead to a licence application being refused, or an existing licence being suspended or revoked.

Under the 2011 Act both my Department and Councils can apply to a court following a conviction to require the owner of an animal to reimburse the expenses incurred in seizing and caring for an animal, and in enforcing the provisions of a range of orders made under the Act.

The Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulation (NI) 2012 were made under powers in the 2011 Act and transpose a range of EU legislation relating to farm animal welfare. Non-compliance with this legislation may lead to the imposition of cross-compliance penalties by my Department, in addition to the penalties set out above.

My Department has made the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Regulations (NI) 2006, and the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing Regulations (NI) 2014, under powers in the European Communities Act 1972, to protect the welfare of animals during transport and at the time of killing respectively. The maximum penalties for non-compliance are 3 months imprisonment and/or a £5,000 fine.

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the steps her Department is taking to ensure individuals storing animals for food production, in large warehouses, meet animal welfare standards.  
(AQW 6088/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** My Department enforces the animal welfare legislation covering food production animals. This legislation is:

- Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011;
- Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (NI) 2012; and
- Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (NI) 2012.

In addition, my Department has a range of Codes of Practice, for both farmed and non-farmed animals. The Codes are a statutory requirement in that any person responsible for, or attending to, animals must ensure that they and their staff are familiar with and have access to the Codes. The Codes are available to view, or download, from the DAERA website at:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/codes-practice-non-farmed-animals>

My Department plays an important and active role in educating livestock keepers in standards of welfare and carries out an annual programme of animal welfare surveillance. Farm premises are inspected against legal requirements, and a range of enforcement actions can be taken where necessary. This can range from providing detail of legislative requirements and guidance, to issuing a legally binding Improvement Notice or potential prosecution. The Department's Veterinary Service Animal Health Group (VSAHG) has responsibility for these inspections.

Inspections take place for a number of reasons, which includes: as a result of complaints from members of the public; targeted as a result of information produced by vets working in meat plants; and programmed as part of the statutory cross compliance surveillance system to assess whether on-farm welfare meets the standards laid down in the legislation.

The vast majority of Northern Ireland keepers are compliant with the animal welfare legislation.

**Ms Archibald** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of the introduction of minimum pricing legislation for farm produce.  
(AQW 6156/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** I believe that all along the supply chain should get a fair return for their work, including farmers. However, the price farmers receive for their produce is a commercial matter and my Department has no remit to intervene.

Any proposal to introduce legislation on the prices farmers receive for their produce would have to be legal, and workable for Northern Ireland. Introducing such a measure is outside the legislative competence of the Assembly, as the regulation of competition issues is a matter for the UK Government. It would also be counter to the EU Common Agricultural Policy.

In addition there are significant practical issues associated with such a proposal. For example, Northern Ireland relies heavily on exporting its food and there could be significant implications for the price competitiveness of our produce in markets outside of Northern Ireland.

Whilst the factors contributing to the continuing low prices are outside DAERA's control, my Department will continue to do what it can to assist farmers here to help them cope with future market volatility.

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the total convictions for the misuse of snares in each of the last five years.  
(AQW 6229/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** The PSNI are the only body with legal powers of entry to investigate potential snaring offences. My department does not keep records of convictions for the misuse of snares. The Northern Ireland Court Service, Public Prosecution Service, or PSNI may be able to provide data on this type of wildlife crime.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline her Department's timetable for negotiations on the United Kingdom's future relationship with the European Union regards agri-food and farming.  
(AQW 6264/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** It is not possible to provide a definitive timetable for negotiations as this will depend on precisely when Article 50 is invoked. The Prime Minister has indicated that this will take place no later than the end of March 2017.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the number of Basic Payment Scheme payments for 2015 that are still not paid.  
(AQW 6266/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** 68 eligible farm businesses have yet to receive their Basic Payment for the 2015 scheme year. Officials are working hard to pay these claims as quickly as possible. However, 51 of these cases are not paid due to factors outside my Department's control such as probate proceedings & farmers not providing bank account details. Payment can only be made in these cases when the necessary information is provided.

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how many applications for compensation relating to the Scheme of Emergency Financial Assistance, implemented following last winter's flooding incidents, (i) were received; (ii) were successful; (iii) were unsuccessful; (iv) appealed against unsuccessful applications; (v) appeals that have been upheld; and (vi) appeals that have been overturned.  
(AQW 6372/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** There were 564 applications received for the farmland element of the Scheme of Emergency Financial Assistance. 354 were successful, 210 unsuccessful, 98 appealed and submitted a "Reviews of Decision Application" form, 10 of these appeals have been upheld (with payments to issue shortly through the Councils) and 88 appeals overturned.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the number of incidences a notifiable disease was reported under the Diseases of Animals Order (NI) 1981 over each of the last ten years; and for a breakdown of diseases.  
(AQW 6375/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** A list of diseases, which if suspected or confirmed must be notified in accordance with the 1981 Order (as amended) and any Order made under the 1981 Order, is available on my Department's website at

[www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/notifiable-diseases-northern-ireland](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/notifiable-diseases-northern-ireland).

My Department collects information on certain notifiable animal diseases, where this is required, for submission to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the European Union and the World Organisation for Animal Health, for purposes of maintaining disease freedom and international trade.

The table below, lists those notifiable diseases which are present in Northern Ireland and where suspicion/incident of disease in the last 10 years has been reported to my Department.

Notifiable Disease	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Aujeszky's Disease (No. Herds)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	8
Avian Infectious Laryngotracheitis	(Jan to Jun) 1	5	7	24	2	3	6	4	0	2
Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE)	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	3	4	14
Bovine Tuberculosis (Mycobacterium Bovis)	Figures available at <a href="https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/tuberculosis-statistics-northern-ireland">https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/tuberculosis-statistics-northern-ireland</a>									
Brucellosis (Brucella Abortus)	Figures available at <a href="https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/brucellosis-statistics-northern-ireland">https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/brucellosis-statistics-northern-ireland</a>									
Porcine Reproduction and Respiratory Syndrome (Blue Eared Pig Disease)	(Jan to Jun) 0	8	1	1	0	0	1	2	1	0
Salmonellosis (number of isolates – Note some of the isolates may have originated from the same farm)	(to 7th Nov) 243	421	336	338	279	325	355	250	373	390
Scrapie (includes Classical and Atypical)	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	3	7

The following table, lists those notifiable diseases which are present in Northern Ireland, but where data on the number of incidents is not available.

- Caseous Lymphadenitis
- Duck Septicaemia (*Anatipester*)
- Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis (IBR)
- Influenza A Infection
- Jaagsiekte Complex
- Johne's Disease (*Paratuberculosis*)
- Paramyxovirus Infection in pigeons
- Porcine Respiratory Corona Virus
- Sheep Scab

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how many Marine Protection Areas have been designated; and of these, how many have adopted management plans.

**(AQW 6579/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** There are currently 38 designated sites in the Northern Ireland network of Marine Protected Areas. The network is comprised of 8 Special Areas of Conservation designated under the Habitats Directive, 9 Special Protection Areas designated under the Wild Birds Directive, 20 Coastal ASSIs designated under the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, and 1 Marine Conservation Zone designated under the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013.

My Department is committed to the establishment of an ecologically coherent network of well-managed Marine Protected Areas and undertakes a rolling programme of surveillance and monitoring of all sites to ensure the conservation objectives are achieved and potentially damaging activities are controlled.

Management Plans are optional, but provide a useful tool to help make effective management decisions, and have been specifically developed and adopted for both Strangford Lough SPA/SAC and Rathlin SPA/SAC. As agreed in the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy my Department has initiated a programme to develop management plans for all SACs by December 2020. Where a nationally designated site such as a coastal ASSI or Marine Conservation Zone falls within an SAC this will be considered in the management plan for the site.

Some of the management plans will be developed by my Department, but funding has also been provided to external organisations through the Environment Fund and the programme is to receive significant funding from INTERREG Va.

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline when she will be consulting on the second round of Marine Conservation Zones.

**(AQW 6580/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** My Department is committed to establishing an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas and is in the final stages of preparing the designation orders for the first round of Marine Conservation Zones. Any further designations will be targeted towards filling gaps in the network and to inform this my Department has commissioned the Joint Nature Conservation Committee to undertake a network assessment which is scheduled to be completed in March 2017.

I am not in a position to confirm the timescale for the designation of any further Marine Conservation Zones until I have considered the recommendations of the network assessment and have an understanding of the number of sites and the features for which they should be designated.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of how many years the application process for the capital element of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme will remain open.

**(AQW 6599/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** The Farm Business Improvement Scheme (FBIS) – Capital was formally opened on 31 October 2016. The Capital Scheme includes tiered capital investment support linked to the needs in the farmer's business plan at 40 percent of eligible costs.

Tier 1 of the Scheme will support smaller scale investments, costing under £30,000, to improve the sustainability of farm businesses. Applications for Tier 1 of the Scheme may be submitted until 16 December 2016.

Tier 2 will drive larger scale, transformational investment in projects, costing in excess of £30,000. Its focus is on future proofed, fit for purpose, modern infrastructure and equipment. This higher level of support is for farmers who have a clear long term vision for their business and who have developed a robust whole farm business plan. Applications for Tier 2 of the Scheme may be submitted between 19 December and 24 February 2017.

Two tranches of both tiers are planned in the initial phase of the Scheme. The second tranche is planned for autumn 2017.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an estimate of the number of people working in the local poultry sector in each of the last ten years.

**(AQW 6602/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** The table below shows the total number of people working in the poultry sector in each of the last ten years. The figure is made up of total employment in the poultrymeat and eggs processing sectors, and the labour on farms with poultry.

	Poultrymeat processing sector	Eggs processing sector	Farm labour	Total employed
2007	4,350	211	1,533	6,093
2008	4,698	221	1,834	6,753
2009	5,079	217	1,479	6,775
2010	5,262	228	1,577	7,067
2011	5,124	263	2,006	7,393
2012	4,985	268	1,745	6,997
2013	5,014	291	1,753	7,058
2014	4,510	311	1,918	6,739
2015	4,513	342	2,027	6,882
2016	*	*	*	*

\* Note figures for 2016 are not yet available.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline whether she will ban the sale of aversive training devices.

**(AQW 6643/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** My Department, in conjunction with DoJ, completed a Review of the Implementation of the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 in February this year. The Review considered the views of a range of stakeholders and reviewed the available scientific evidence on the impact of training devices on animal welfare. The Review concluded that there was insufficient evidence to justify a ban on such devices, and given the strong penalties available if animal welfare was compromised by their misuse, it did not recommend any change in the current position.

Owners whose dogs have behavioural problems are encouraged to seek the advice of properly qualified professionals who are trained and insured to advise about the best methods to deal with those problems, and the best training methods for their particular dog. Aversive training aids should not be used if a more appropriate training method is available.

If an aversive training aid is used in Northern Ireland the operator remains subject to Section 4 of the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011, which places a duty of care on those responsible for an animal to protect it from unnecessary suffering. Contravention of this provision can lead to a maximum penalty of up to 5 years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine.

My Department will keep the use of aversive training aids under review. Any plans to introduce a ban would be subject to public consultation.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline (i) the number of individuals that are in receipt of Basic Payments and have been convicted on animal cruelty charges; (ii) how much of their payment has her Department reclaimed due to fines; (iii) how many cases of this issue there have been in 2016 to date; and (iv) the total amount reclaimed in each case.

**(AQW 6644/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** The welfare of animals is protected by the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. It does not contain an offence specifically referred to as 'animal cruelty' but specifies a range of offences including those relating to activities which may cause animals to suffer unnecessarily.

In the last five years, the Public Prosecution Service have directed prosecution in respect of 28 people who also were applicants for the Single Farm Payment (SFP) or its replacement in 2015 the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), for offences involving unnecessary suffering under Section 4 of the 2011 Act. 16 of these people have been convicted for offences involving unnecessary suffering.

In total my Department deducted £128,187 in Cross Compliance penalties from the SFP/BPS payments due to the businesses prosecuted. 7 of these prosecutions have taken place in 2016. The financial value of the Cross Compliance penalties deducted from the Basic Payment of these 7 applicants is £77,184.

**Mr Allen** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how many staff left her Department under the Voluntary Exit Scheme in 2015-16.

**(AQO 586/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** The Voluntary Exit Scheme was managed within individual Departments prior to NICS restructuring and in my Department's case, before the formation of DAERA.

Applicants were selected for early exit over 4 tranches to leave in September 2015, November 2015, January 2016 and March 2016. At the point of exiting NICS, those staff were employed across the former DARD, DOE and DCAL. I can confirm that a total of 460 staff left these Departments under the Voluntary Exit Scheme and this reflects the composite DAERA position following Departmental restructuring. This includes 35 staff who were on career break. By way of breakdown by job category, the total comprises 275 administrative staff and 185 who had been in professional, specialist and technical posts.

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she has had any discussions with the Minister of Justice regarding the development of a strategy to combat ongoing rural crime in Newry and Armagh.

**(AQO 587/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** Veterinary Service Enforcement Branch (VSEB) represents my Department on the Department of Justice (DOJ) led Rural Crime Partnership, a multi-agency body which is developing strategies to counter rural crime.

**Mr McGuigan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline any discussions she has had with the Minister for Communities in relation to rural proofing the proposed closure of Cookstown Jobs and Benefits Office.

**(AQO 588/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** On 10 October, I wrote to Executive Ministers reminding them of the Executive's existing commitment to undertake rural proofing of new and revised policies and strategies.

I have been advised by the Minister for Communities that a public consultation exercise on proposals to close a number of Social Security Centres and JobCentres commenced on 20 September; that an initial rural proofing exercise has been completed; and that evidence will be gathered before deciding whether a further rural proofing exercise is required during the consultation process.

Officials from my Department have provided guidance on rural proofing and met with officials from the Department for Communities to explain the process. It is the responsibility of the Department for Communities to ensure these proposals are rural proofed.

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she plans to continue the ban on fracking.  
**(AQO 589/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** I have not imposed a ban on hydraulic fracturing. My Department is responsible for assessing all applications for environmental authorisations that are placed before it. It takes an evidence-based, robust and rigorous approach to this role. However the issue of whether or not hydraulic fracturing should proceed in Northern Ireland is a cross-cutting one and is therefore a decision for the Executive.

**Mrs Little Pengelly** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the actions her Department has taken to address puppy farming in the last 12 months.

**(AQO 590/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** In February this year, my Department published the final report of a major Review of the Implementation of the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011.

The report, which was well received by welfare stakeholders, recommended that the DAERA guidelines for dog breeding establishments are strengthened to include verification that pups are properly socialised and their environment is appropriately enriched. It also recommended that the licence fee is reviewed to ensure that operators meet the full cost of the multiple inspections that Councils subject their premises to annually.

An Action Plan, to ensure the recommendations of the Final Report are fully implemented, is available on my Department's website and will be updated every six months.

DAERA staff based at Belfast and Larne Ports work with ferry operators to identify consignments of dogs in transit to assess compliance with welfare during transport and trade legislation. Further work is underway with local operators to enhance detection capability.

My officials are working with local councils and liaising with animal charities here, and with equivalent organisations in Scotland, to improve data and intelligence sharing.

Stopping illegal "puppy farming" will take a concerted effort by members of the public and enforcement agencies working together to identify breeders who put financial gain before the welfare needs of their dogs and pups. Councils have been active in the last 12 months investigating suspicions of illegal breeding establishments, and I would encourage anyone with specific evidence of illegal dog breeding to provide this to Councils.

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the financial support for the farming and fisheries sectors after the United Kingdom leaves the European Union.

**(AQO 591/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** It is too early to be outlining the details of domestic support policy after we leave the EU, however I can assure you that I remain committed to getting the best deal for Northern Ireland agriculture.

The current focus is on defining the key issues for Northern Ireland and ensuring that we are kept closely and directly involved in the agricultural, environmental and fisheries policy and trade agendas as they unfold.

**Ms Ní Chuilín** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she intends to contribute to the all-Ireland forum, established by the Taoiseach, on the impact of the European Union referendum result.

**(AQO 592/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** I do not intend to contribute to the all-Ireland forum, however, I am committed to engaging with those who are in a position to make decisions which will benefit Northern Ireland going forward.

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the steps she is taking to eradicate Reeves' muntjac in Northern Ireland.

**(AQO 593/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** Reeves' muntjac or Muntjac deer is an invasive species native to parts of Asia. Introduced to Britain in the early 20th century, the species has since spread rapidly. The species negatively impacts woodland understorey and is a cause of increased traffic collisions with deer.

My officials are taking a number of actions with respect to Muntjac deer. These include specific action at local levels, surveillance activity and research when necessary.

My officials have also developed an exclusion strategy and contingency plan for a range of non native deer including Muntjac. The Mount Stewart Muntjac Action Group was established (2010) in response to increased Muntjac sightings in this particular area and comprises departmental officials, academic, estate land owners and environmental NGO interests. A Muntjac deer action plan for the Mount Stewart National Trust site and adjacent properties was developed and is currently being implemented by both National Trust and Forest Service staff, along with five other registered volunteer marksmen approved by the group's selection criteria.

With respect to surveillance, possible Muntjac sightings are reported through CEDaR (Centre for Environmental Data and Recording). Records are automatically directed to NIEA. Similarly DAERA Veterinary portal inspectors monitor entry points to Northern Ireland.

Queens University Belfast have conducted research into Muntjac Deer in Northern Ireland, recently focusing on the Ards area in particular with a survey conducted in the Ards Peninsula in 2013-2014.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, given that the majority of rural citizens have no direct connection to either the farming or agri-food industries, to outline any discussion she has had with the Minister for the Economy in relation to policy and support for the development of other rural businesses.

**(AQO 594/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** The Department for the Economy is the department with lead responsibility for developing the economy in Northern Ireland and my Department works with the Department for the Economy on the Rural White Paper Action Plan. This paper contains a number of actions aimed at supporting the sustainable development of the rural economy, including commitments to support rural businesses, encouraging the development of rural tourism and to promote the social economy in rural areas.

My Department has also taken forward initiatives including the Rural Business Investment Scheme under the Rural Development Programme and a pilot scheme under Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme (TRPSI) called the Rural Business Start Scheme.

The Rural Business Investment Scheme is implemented at a local level by 10 Local Action Groups (LAGs), using the LEADER methodology. The purpose of the scheme is to provide capital grant aid to help micro and small businesses create much needed jobs in all rural areas. Job creation is the major theme of the Rural Business Investment Scheme and currently 84 Letters of Offer have issued to successful applicants, worth just under £2.3m of grant aid, targeting the creation of 184 full time equivalent jobs.

The Rural Business Start Scheme is a pilot initiative which aims to encourage entrepreneurship and the creation of new self-employment opportunities for young people (18 to 30 years of age) and women and is running in the Mid Ulster area during its pilot phase. The pilot closed for applications on Friday 30 September. A review of the pilot will be completed in order to determine the longer term potential of this approach and will inform the decision on whether to roll the Scheme out to other areas.

**Mr Bell** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on her Department's involvement in discussions on the United Kingdom leaving the European Union.

**(AQO 595/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** I have had meetings and discussions with a number of Ministers to discuss the important issues that need to be resolved in the months ahead.

In addition to meetings with both my Welsh and Irish counterparts, in October I met with the Northern Ireland Secretary of State, James Brokenshire, and the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, David Davis. I impressed upon them the importance of the Agri-Food sector to our economy and sought an assurance that we would be kept closely and directly involved in the agricultural, environmental and fisheries policy and trade agendas as they unfold over the coming months and years.

In the last few weeks I have also met both Andrea Leadsom and George Eustice and impressed on them the unique position of our agri-food sector. I hosted a visit by George Eustice last month to Northern Ireland and facilitated meetings with a range of agrifood, environmental and fisheries stakeholders and Departmental officials.

My officials have been and continue to engage with officials from Whitehall, the other Devolved Administrations and the Republic of Ireland.

I have also met with a number of stakeholders from the agri-food, rural development, fisheries and environment sectors and as you are already aware I have set up the joint Brexit Consultative Committee with Minister Hamilton.

Our Departments will also engage at Ministerial and official levels with a wider range of stakeholder organisations outside of this arrangement as necessary and in line with the normal course of business.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether a qualified vet would have the required skill set to be a farmer.

**(AQW 6646/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** Individuals who qualify as veterinarians are required to achieve and demonstrate a high level of competence in the areas of food and companion animal medicine and surgery. However the range of modules behind the veterinary degree varies widely between university courses and countries – for example, some place a greater emphasis than others on food versus companion animal medicine, or on public health and / or food processing.

Courses in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland have historically included a small element of animal husbandry, which will include the management and care of farmed animals, but this is not universally the case, and the inclusion of farm animal husbandry is not necessary for a university's course to be recognised and accredited by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, or for its graduates to register with the Royal College and be authorised to practise as veterinarians in the UK.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the level of qualification her Department recognises an MBA in conjunction with a degree in Veterinary Medicine.

**(AQW 6647/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** The level of qualification required of individuals varies with the category of employment they seek, or scheme or organisation they wish to participate in.

To practise as a veterinarian in the UK requires registration with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, following graduation from a recognised and accredited course. Individuals are required to achieve a high level of competence in animal medicine and surgery, based on completion of a range of modules which can vary widely between university courses and countries.

Masters of Business Administration courses similarly vary widely in the constituent modules offered by the awarding body, and, within institutions, in the range of particular modules available for selection by the student.

While the Royal College applies a standardisation process to the differing veterinary degree courses by ensuring an equivalence of outcome sufficient to assure standards and protect the welfare of animals, there is no such process in place for MBA's. There is also almost no over-lap in either the content or the focus of the modules studied, between the two disciplines.

While a veterinary degree is classed as Level 6, and an MBA as Level 7, any assessment of qualification or eligibility based on an MBA or veterinary degree, either separately or in conjunction, must take into consideration the individual modules upon which the qualification is based.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how many applicants have been successful in obtaining support from the Young Farmers Scheme without attending a CAFRE course.

**(AQW 6648/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** All successful applicants for Young Farmers' Payment (YFP) have provided documentary evidence of a Level II qualification in agriculture (or a related subject) containing a farm business management module. This qualification does not have to be from the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE).

Identifying the number of successful YFP applicants who held a qualification from an institution other than CAFRE would incur disproportionate cost.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline why Seapark and other Holywood beaches are not included in the water quality monitoring process; and how they can be added to this process.

**(AQW 6714/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** My Department is responsible only for monitoring water quality at those bathing waters that have been formally identified under The Quality of Bathing Water Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008.

Should anyone wish to nominate a site for consideration as a formally identified bathing water, they can do so at any time, subject to certain criteria being met.

The nomination process and associated criteria can be found at: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/bathing-water-quality>

## Department for Communities

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) how many Orders under the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 have been made without proper authorisation by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland since 2011; and (ii) the action is he taking to advise those affected by such Orders that were made unlawfully.

**(AQW 6542/16-21)**

**Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities):**

- (i) A number of cases have been lodged with the Charity Tribunal challenging the legality of the orders made by the Commission.
- (ii) The Department will consider the outcome from those cases to determine what, if any, action is necessary.

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) on how many occasions the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland has obtained personal information about charity trustees and members without proper authorisation; and (ii) what action is he taking to advise those trustees and members affected of their rights under the Data Protection Act and Article 8 of the European Court of Human Rights, which may have been breached.

**(AQW 6543/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** My Department is not aware of any instances when the Charity Tribunal or the Courts have found that the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland has obtained personal information about charity trustees or members without proper authorisation. Similarly the Department is not aware of any complaint made to the Information Commissioners Office about how the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland fulfils its responsibilities under the Data Protection Act 1998 being upheld.

**Mr Allen** asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) a breakdown of the 2011 House Condition Survey costs; (ii) the cost of the current survey; (iii) whether it will include cavity wall inspections; (iv) the size of the sample; and (v) how many NIHE properties will be included.

**(AQW 6598/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) has provided the following information on the House Condition Survey.

- (i) The cost breakdown in relation to the 2011 House Condition Survey is as follows:

Activity	HCS 2011 Expenditure
Fieldwork: Surveyors and supervisors	£236,178
Training	£27,228
Software Development and Support	£77,605
Standard Modelling (Fuel Poverty, SAP rating etc)	£185,133
NIHE Project Staff	£61,192
<b>Total</b>	<b>£587,336</b>

- (ii) The NIHE Board Approved Budget for the 2016 House Condition Survey is £445,000 (not including modelling of key indicators) for a sample of 3,000 properties, with the aim of achieving a response rate similar to 2011 (71%). The total actual cost of the survey against budget is not yet available.
- (iii) In line with UK wide practice, surveyors carrying out the field work for the Northern Ireland House Condition Survey (HCS) look for evidence of the presence of cavity wall insulation, but are not mandated to check its quality.
- (iv) The sample in 2011 was 2,030 properties; surveys were carried out at 1,437 homes (71% response rate).
  - The 2016 HCS sample is 3,000 properties: approx. 1,400 are a re-sample from the 2011 Survey, to allow monitoring of tenure dynamics over time and demolitions/closures.
  - The remaining 1,600 properties are a fresh sample, taken from the Pointer (using signs of life) database held by NISRA.

- (v) The 2016 sample consists of approximately 200 addresses (selected at random) for each of the new council areas outside Belfast and approximately 200 each for North, South, West and East Belfast. The tenure of the properties is not known until the survey is carried out.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for Communities (i) to list the Sport NI posts located in County Tyrone; and (ii) whether Sport NI has any plans to increase the number of administrative, management and sports development posts located in community settings or sports centres in County Tyrone.

**(AQW 6676/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** Sport NI staff are located in the House of Sport, Belfast, Tollymore National Outdoor Centre, Newcastle and the Sports Institute Northern Ireland at Jordanstown.

Sport NI do not have any plans to locate any staff in County Tyrone.

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister for Communities to detail his Department's Invest-to-Save Scheme.

**(AQW 6728/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** No Invest-to-Save Schemes have been put in place in the Department for Communities to date.

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the number of jobs at the Jobs and Benefits Office in (a) Coleraine; and (b) Limavady, currently under review.

**(AQW 6826/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Department is continuing to work on understanding the impact of the introduction of Universal Credit in September 2017 on the existing Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support Benefit Processing Centres and Telephony Support Units across all local Jobs and Benefits Offices in Northern Ireland. Until this work is completed it is not possible to confirm the staffing impacts for the Coleraine and Limavady offices although it is unlikely there will be any significant change until 2018 at the earliest.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister for Communities whether he will seek the automatic payment of pension credit.

**(AQW 6847/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** There are no plans to introduce automatic payment of Pension Credit.

In March 2012, the Department of Work and Pension published a report on the automatic payment of Pension Credit following a small research study. It concluded that the approach of using automatic payments had little impact on increasing uptake of Pension Credit.

Improving benefit uptake is a key part of my Department's social inclusion agenda and over the last ten years, more than £100million in additional annual benefits have been generated through this initiative with almost 75% from claims relating to older people. Carers and older people remain among the key groups being targeted in the latest three year strategic plan for improving benefit uptake which was recently published.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Communities when he plans to bring forward a new disability strategy.

**(AQW 6875/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** I am keenly aware of the level of disability in Northern Ireland and the challenges faced by people living with disability. One in five of the local population has a disability; around 5% of children, 17% of the working age population and 60% of those people aged over 65.

'Improving the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families' is a strategic Indicator in the new Programme for Government. The draft delivery plan for Indicator 42 has been developed through extensive engagement with people with disabilities and their representative organisations.

The draft Programme for Government Framework, including the Indicator 42 delivery plan, is currently subject to full public consultation prior to being finalised. The consultation is open until 23 December 2016.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister for Communities for an update on funding provided for shop fronts in (i) Lisnaskea; and (ii) Enniskillen.

**(AQW 6876/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** My Department is not currently providing funding for shop fronts in either Lisnaskea or Enniskillen. My Department's urban regeneration function provides support for regeneration projects in towns and cities with a population of 5,000 or over. As the population of Lisnaskea is less than 5,000 persons it is defined by NISRA as a rural settlement it falls within the remit of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

My Department has invested significant amounts in support the regeneration of Enniskillen town centre and its local businesses over recent years. Included within these investments was funding of £562,355 for shop front paint and signage which benefitted 215 properties in Enniskillen.

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister for Communities pursuant to AQW 5986/16-21, to outline (i) what provision, under the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, permits the Charity Commission NI to delegate the exercise of powers to its staff; (ii) in the absence of such provision, on what basis the Charity Commission delegates power; and (iii) where this can be found in the Commission's Management Statement and Financial Memorandum.

**(AQW 6877/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** There are no provisions in the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 for the Commission to delegate its powers to staff. The Commission has operational procedures in place which set out levels of authorised decision, as agreed by the Commissioners. There is no reference in the Commission's Management Statement and Financial Memorandum to the delegation of the powers of the Commission.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Communities whether he plans to protect rural libraries and mobile library services that serve people (i) that are socially isolated; (ii) that are unemployed; and (iii) with a disability.

**(AQW 6906/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** I have already stated publicly that I recognise the importance of libraries - including rural libraries and mobile services - to rural communities, people who are socially isolated and people with a disability. I am equally aware that rural libraries and mobile library services provide valuable support to people in rural communities who are unemployed.

I believe that the best way to protect rural and mobile library services is by ensuring that they remain both relevant to the needs of rural communities and contribute effectively to broader public sector policies in this area. To that end Libraries NI (LNI), with the support of my officials, are working to develop a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). One of the underlying purposes of this MOU will be to protect rural and mobile library services through the development of joint activities with DAERA that benefit people in rural communities including those who are socially isolated, unemployed or have a disability.

The MOU with DAERA is expected to be finalised in the coming months. In the meantime LNI, DfC and DAERA officials are continuing to meet to consider potential collaborative activities, projects and programmes that rural library services can support in the future.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister for Communities whether he plans to introduce legislation on gambling by May 2021.

**(AQW 6909/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** Certain aspects of gambling legislation are currently under review and I will make an announcement of outcomes in due course.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister for Communities pursuant to AQW 6439/16-21, to provide a breakdown of the figure supplied against the breakdown of houses supplied in the answer to AQW 6443/16-21.

**(AQW 6910/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Executive has advised that heating contractors provide a response maintenance repair service on a 'per boiler' basis irrespective of the number of faults reported. There are two such contracts, one for North Region and one for South Region. The cost of the wood pellet boiler response maintenance repair service in each region is as follows:

North Region: £300 for each property which has a wood pellet boiler heating system.

South Region: £500 for each property which has a wood pellet boiler heating system.

Based on this tendered rate the maintenance costs per region are:

North Region	No. of wood pellet boilers	Service and maintenance cost per year
Ballycastle	16	£4,800.00
Londonderry	1	£ 300.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>£5,100.00</b>

South Region	No. of wood pellet boilers	Service and maintenance cost per year
Banbridge	14	£ 7,000.00
Downpatrick	4	£ 2,000.00
Dungannon	2	£ 1,000.00
Fermanagh	15	£ 7,500.00
Newry	1	£ 500.00

South Region	No. of wood pellet boilers	Service and maintenance cost per year
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>£18,000.00</b>

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister for Communities to detail the average housing points needed for social housing in Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

**(AQW 6912/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Selection Scheme awards points under four categories: intimidation, insecurity of tenure, housing conditions and health & social care needs. The total points awarded will determine an Applicant's position on the Waiting List. Allocations of social housing are made on the basis of greatest housing need in accordance with the rules of the Housing Selection Scheme and as a general rule, each allocation is made to the relevant Applicant with the highest points.

The Housing Executive has advised that when a question of "average points" is asked MEAN and MEDIAN averages are provided. Therefore, based on 12 months of allocations to 30th September 2016 in Fermanagh and South Tyrone Parliamentary constituency, the mean average points on allocation to a household from the waiting list is 94 points and the median points is 106.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the number of social housing properties; (ii) the number of vacant social housing properties; and (iii) whether there are plans for new social housing builds, in Irvinestown.

**(AQW 6913/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Executive (NIHE) and the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations have advised that:

- (i) There are 176 NIHE properties and 53 Housing Association properties in Irvinestown;
- (ii) There are currently three void NIHE properties and no void Housing Association properties in Irvinestown; and
- (iii) The NIHE has advised that social housing need in Irvinestown is currently being adequately met through existing provision and there are no plans to provide new social housing in the town as part of the Social Housing Development Programme.

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the Enabling Success strategy.

**(AQW 6914/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** Enabling Success was the last Executive's strategy for addressing Northern Ireland's high economic inactivity rate.

The Executive remains committed to tackling economic inactivity and my Department will take this forward through the Programme for Government which is now being consulted on by the Executive Office.

My department has developed a Programme for Government Delivery Plan that sets out the interventions it believes will lead to a reduction in economic inactivity. Building on Enabling Success, the commitments made are action oriented and focused on delivering a step change in our approach to supporting people with health conditions and disabilities, and those with family and caring responsibilities who want to work.

Through the actions proposed we will ensure that work pays, that people have the skills they need to access and progress in work, that they have access to the health related support they may need to stay in work and that they can afford good quality childcare if they need it.

The Delivery Plan proposes an important role for local government, committing us to working closely together, through the Community Planning process, to deliver improved skills and employability outcomes for the economically inactive.

The actions have been designed with input from the Department of Health, the Department for the Economy, the Department of Education, the Public Health Agency, the Health and Safety Executive, employers, employer organisations and a wide range of important stakeholders. It is our aim that these partners will also have a role in delivery.

In support of the public consultation being led by the Executive Office, the Senior Responsible Owner for the Delivery Plan has initiated a number of engagement events, to take place during November and December, to capture views that will help us further develop the content of the Delivery Plan.

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister for Communities to detail any departmental funding provided to help communities attract businesses to start up in areas with high levels of deprivation, since 2011.

**(AQW 6918/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** My Department, alongside the Department for the Economy, provides funding to support Social Enterprise Hubs across Northern Ireland. Social Enterprise Hubs are available for use by new social enterprises or existing social enterprises with a new product or service. They offer mentoring, advice, signposting, training, best practice visits, and space (administration or retail) where the social enterprises can test trade. There are nine hubs located across eleven locations in

Londonderry, North Belfast, South Belfast, East Belfast, West Belfast, Lisburn, Downpatrick, Lurgan, Ballymena, Strabane and Enniskillen.

The North West Hub is located at the Diamond in Londonderry and has supported 1 test trader, 6 new social enterprises and 7 community regeneration projects since April 2016.

The Social Enterprise Hubs pilot project was one of the Signature Programmes taken forward with funding support (to the end of financial year 2015-16) from the Northern Ireland Executive's Delivering Social Change framework. An extension to funding in the 2016-17 year financial has been provided by my Department and the Department for the Economy and we are actively considering the future of the Hubs beyond this period.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister for Communities whether his Department plans to build new social housing in Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

**(AQW 6957/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** I can advise you that there are currently 77 social housing units under construction in the Fermanagh & South Tyrone Parliamentary Constituency. The detail of these schemes is provided below.

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Habinteg	The Cloisters, Phase 2, Killyman Road	Dungannon	New Build	28	2014/15	2016/17
Helm Housing	4-6 William Street & 8-20 Sloan Street	Dungannon	New Build	28	2014/15	2016/17
Habinteg	1 The Cloisters, Killyman Road (DPF)	Dungannon	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	1	2015/16	2016/17
Habinteg	Killymaddy Hill	Dungannon	Off-the-Shelf	19	2015/16	2016/17
Triangle	45 Killyman Street	Moy	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	1	2015/16	2016/17
			<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>		

A further, 89 new social housing units programmed to start on-site in the Fermanagh & South Tyrone Parliamentary Constituency as part of the current Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) 2016/17 to 2018/19. The detail of these schemes is provided below.

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Choice	Castle Grove / Place (Transfer)	Castle-caulfield	New Build	5	2016/17	2017/18
South Ulster	63 Crevenish Road	Kesh	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	3	2016/17	2017/18
Triangle	Dungannon	Dungannon	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	10	2016/17	2017/18
Apex Housing	Roskeen Park (Transfer)	Moygashel	New Build	8	2017/18	2018/19
Fold	Quarry Lane	Dungannon	New Build	40	2017/18	2019/20
South Ulster	Annagole	Dungannon	New Build	13	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Dungannon	Dungannon	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	10	2017/18	2018/19
			<b>Total</b>	<b>89</b>		

Please be advised that schemes can be lost or slip to future years for a variety of reasons e.g. delays in acquiring sites and/or failure to secure planning permission.

The annual programme formulation process is currently underway for the new SHDP period 2017/18 to 2019/20, and further schemes may be added for the Fermanagh & South Tyrone Parliamentary Constituency. Additional schemes can also be added to the SHDP in-year through the purchase of Existing Satisfactory / Off-the-shelf properties.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities to detail how many Direct Earnings Attachments are ready to be sent to businesses locally.

**(AQW 6963/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** Issuing a Direct Earnings Attachment will be a remedy of last resort. My Department's preferred approach is for debtors to contact my Department directly and to agree voluntary repayment, and thus avoid the need to send a Direct Earnings Attachment request to an employer.

My Department will only seek to implement a Direct Earnings Attachment where a debtor fails to agree a voluntary repayment and where we receive information from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs that the debtor is working.

The legislative provision to serve a Direct Earnings Attachment came into effect on 15th November 2016. Officials have now started to contact debtors seeking payment in full negotiation of a sustainable repayment plan where payment in full cannot be secured. The Debtor has 21 days to respond to this letter, if no reply is received and the debtor is working, the employer will be contacted to commence a Direct Earnings Attachment.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the percentage of an individual's wages that will be claimed back through a Direct Earnings Attachment.

**(AQW 6964/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The percentage of deductions to be taken through Direct Earnings Attachment is calculated based on net earnings, and thus will be determined on a case by case basis.

Deduction rates can range between 3% and 40%, depending upon net earnings and the reason for the overpayment. No employee will be left in a position where they will be left with less than 60% of their net earnings in any pay period.

My Department has provided employers with comprehensive guidance on the deduction rates to be applied, has established a helpline for employers should they require any assistance in determining the rate of deduction to apply and has also recently introduced a dedicated employer telephony team where employers can receive a quick response to any deduction queries.

Support and advice for individual debtors is available from my Department or via an Advice or local Law Centre where an individual prefers independent advice.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the consequences to the employer if they fail to do a Direct Earnings Attachment for an employee.

**(AQW 6965/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** My Department has undertaken an extensive communication exercise, which has involved writing to more than 6000 local employers, trade bodies, political representative and payroll providers in the lead up to the enactment of Direct Earnings Attachment legislation from 15th November 2016.

As part of this communication and engagement strategy, my Department has emphasised to employers that they are legally required to implement a Direct Earnings Attachment when asked to do so. There is also extensive information, for both employers and employees, on the NI Direct portal, while information about Direct Earnings Attachments was contained in the Welfare Reform booklet delivered to every household in Northern Ireland.

My Department will work sympathetically and in close co-operations with affected employers and their representatives, on a case by case basis where required, to ensure that employers are in a position to implement a Direct Earnings Attachment.

Ultimately, employers can be fined up to £1000 for each employee where they fail to comply with the request.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the flexibility employers will have when asked to do a Direct Earnings Attachment for an employee.

**(AQW 6966/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** As prescribed in the Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015, employers have a legal obligation to implement Direct Earnings Attachments, effective from 15 November 16. However there may be legitimate circumstances when they cannot do so.

As part of the comprehensive communication and engagement exercise with employers, trade bodies and political representatives over the past number of months, my officials and the supporting guidance have emphasised the importance of employers contacting my Department at the earliest possible opportunity if they have difficulty in implementing a Direct Earnings Attachment.

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister for Communities pursuant to AQW 6477/16-21, (i) why it took over five years to implement a stand alone staff code of conduct for the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI) when its Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM) states this should have been implemented in 2011 and published on their website; and (ii) for his assessment of how this is not considered a governance failure when the CCNI board minutes reflect that the MSFM is checked regularly on a six monthly basis.

**(AQW 6971/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:**

- (i) Relevant sections in CCNI's Staff Handbook meet the requirements of the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (Annex 5A Model Code for Staff of Executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies). The Staff Handbook was approved by the Commissioners in 2011 and is subject to review. Annex 5A also requires that "the Code of Conduct should be a public document, freely and easily available to both the NDPB staff and board members and on request, available to the general public". A CCNI standalone Code of Conduct has been developed and following approval by the Commissioners will be available on request.
- (ii) Given that relevant sections in the Staff Handbook met the requirements of the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum Annex 5A the department is content there has been no material breach of governance. Publication of a standalone Code of Conduct will ensure best practice and full compliance with the requirements of Annex 5A.

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister for Communities (i) for an update on the total number of tenancy deposits protected; and (ii) the percentage this represents of the total private rented sector, broken down by constituency over the last three years since the scheme came into operation.

**(AQW 6974/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:**

- (i) The total number of deposits protected since the introduction of the Tenancy Deposit Scheme (TDS) up to and including the 30th September 2016 is 80,491.
- (ii) The information is not available in the format you have requested, however the following may be of use.

TDS was introduced on 1 April 2013 and a total of 18,628 deposits were protected in the first year of the scheme. The data collected in this period was not available by geographical area.

Following a change to the IT system, data on deposits protected by Council area was available from 14/15 financial year, and Table 1 has the information for, the then, 26 district councils.

<b>Council</b>	<b>Number Protected April 2014 – March 2015</b>	<b>Value Protected April 2014 – March 2015</b>
Antrim	337	£214,094.83
Ards	808	£477,308.37
Armagh	225	£116,408.00
Ballymena	423	£227,272.53
Ballymoney	196	£119,798.50
Banbridge	515	£263,016.07
Belfast	10548	£6,257,011.74
Carrickfergus	575	£321,986.15
Castlereagh	477	£334,768.50
Coleraine	1174	£646,517.35
Cookstown	244	£134,423.56
Craigavon	679	£299,901.33
Derry	1011	£454,792.13
Down	579	£341,478.35
Dungannon	234	£129,591.75
Fermanagh	262	£131,207.40
Larne	287	£132,645.93
Limavady	176	£87,746.68
Lisburn	620	£374,333.55
Magherafelt	192	£90,283.80
Moyle	79	£36,018.00
Newry & Mourne	418	£233,687.50
Newtownabbey	834	£489,233.00

<b>Council</b>	<b>Number Protected April 2014 – March 2015</b>	<b>Value Protected April 2014 – March 2015</b>
North Down	721	£424,305.64
Omagh	325	£137,231.50
Strabane	73	£27,453.00
Unknown	21	£18,783.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>22033</b>	<b>£12,521,298.16</b>

Table 2 shows the deposits protected by the 11 council structure for the 2015/16 year.

<b>Council</b>	<b>Number Protected April 2015 – March 2016</b>	<b>Value Protected April 2015 – March 2016</b>
Antrim & Newtownabbey	968	£515,309.10
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	1206	£606,804.68
Belfast	11336	£7,062,299.79
Causeway Coast & Glens	2570	£1,411,491.92
Derry & Strabane	2715	£1,469,217.95
Fermanagh & Omagh	781	£384,720.49
Lisburn & Castlereagh	1112	£704,229.01
Mid & East Antrim	1144	£615,702.74
Mid Ulster	803	£444,582.95
Newry, Mourne & Down	873	£519,485.94
North Down & Ards	1504	£902,047.75
Unknown	26	£12,778.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>25,038</b>	<b>£14,648,670.32</b>

Table 3 shows for each of the three years in question, the number of landlords who registered and the number of properties they reported as owned, and the total number of properties with a protected deposit.

**Table 3**

<b>Year</b>	<b>No of Landlords Registered</b>	<b>No of Properties Declared</b>	<b>No of Deposits Protected</b>
13/14	2,898	7,314	18,628
14/15	37,055	79,216	22,033
15/16	6,622	12,233	25,038
<b>Total</b>	<b>46,575</b>	<b>98,763</b>	<b>65,699</b>

The information provided is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

**Mr Middleton** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the Housing Executive's housing improvement schemes planned for the Newbuildings area of Londonderry, over the next 12 months.

**(AQW 7014/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Executive has advised that the following schemes are planned for the Newbuildings area over the next 12 months:

<b>Project No</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Estimated Start Date</b>	<b>Total dwellings in scheme</b>	<b>Dwellings in Newbuildings in scheme</b>
01.68.1004	Waterside Smoke Alarm Replacement	November 2016	342	6
01.78.1001	Elder Crescent/Stevenson Double Glazing	August 2017	460	70

Project No	Title	Estimated Start Date	Total dwellings in scheme	Dwellings in Newbuildings in scheme
01.70.1003	Primity Terrace/Ardnabrocky	November 2017	128	70

**Mr Middleton** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the Housing Executive's housing improvement schemes planned for the Waterside area Londonderry, over the next 12 months.

**(AQW 7015/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Executive has advised that the following schemes are planned for the Waterside area over the next twelve months:

Project No	Scheme	Estimated Start Date	Number of dwellings
01.78.0180	Caw ECM	November 2016	162
01.68.1004	Waterside Smoke Alarm Replacement	November 2016	342
01.70.1002	Lincoln Court/ Barnailt Park Kitchens	February 2017	142
01.78.0181	Strathfoyle ECM	February 2017	274
01.70.1000	Waterside Triangle Water Ingress scheme	April 2017	52
01.78.1001	Elder Crescent/Stevenson Double Glazing	August 2017	460
01.70.1003	Primity Terrace/Ardnabrocky Kitchens	November 2017	128

Please note that this information is for the area covered by the former Waterside District Office.

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the review of the Housing Selection Scheme, including when he intends to make a policy announcement.

**(AQW 7016/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** I am giving the review proposals my full consideration, taking account of the issues raised during the Private Members Business debate on this issue on 12 September 2016. Any proposals for change will be subject to a full public consultation, which I expect to announce before the end of the current financial year.

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister for Communities for (i) a breakdown of statistics on length of stay in temporary accommodation in each constituency; and (ii) if this information is not published, to detail the reasons why.

**(AQW 7017/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:**

- (i) The breakdown requested cannot be provided since information on length of stay in temporary accommodation is not recorded by constituency. However, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) can provide figures broken down by NIHE Area Office. The figures outlined in Table 1 represent the average length of stay in temporary accommodation for the 2015/16 financial year.
- (ii) Statistics on length of stay in temporary accommodation in each constituency are not published because the information is not available in this format. The average figure for Northern Ireland of 37.7 weeks was published in the Housing Executive's 2016 Annual Report.

**Table 1: The average length of stay in temporary accommodation by NIHE Area Office**

NIHE Belfast Region	Average Weeks
North Belfast	32.7
South/East Belfast	47.2
West Belfast	45.5
Lisburn/Castlereagh	41.0
Homelessness Services Unit*	34.0
Belfast HSST*	8.1
<b>Total Average</b>	<b>34.8</b>

<b>NIHE North Region</b>	<b>Average Weeks</b>
South Antrim	27.8
East	28.6
Causeway	17.1
West	49.6
Causeway HSST	6.7
<b>Total Average</b>	<b>25.9</b>

<b>NIHE South Region</b>	<b>Average Weeks</b>
North Down and Ards	29.6
South Down	39.7
South	21.1
South West	22.3
Mid Ulster	52.7
<b>Total Average</b>	<b>37.6</b>

\* Please note that due to ongoing changes within the NIHE, the Homelessness Services Unit in Belfast has been reformed as the Belfast HSST (Housing Solutions and Support Team) during 2015/16.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister for Communities to detail where the £800,000 currently allocated to the Women's Centre Childcare Fund will be allocated after March 2017.

**(AQW 7018/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The budget for 2017/18 has not yet been agreed, accordingly, I am not therefore in position to advise where the resources currently allocated to the Women's Centre Childcare Fund will be allocated after March 2017.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister for Communities to detail his legislative programme for this mandate.

**(AQW 7046/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** It is important that my legislative proposals for this mandate reflects and supports the priorities in the Programme for Government. It would therefore not be appropriate to outline my legislative programme at this stage until the Programme for Government has been agreed.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the source of Housing Executive funding for 146 houses for cavity wall Insulation in Whiterock, Belfast.

**(AQW 7050/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Executive has advised that the cavity wall insulation scheme in Whiterock is being funded as part of the Interim Investment Priorities Programme that commenced in 2015/16.

**Mr M Bradley** asked the Minister for Communities pursuant to AQW 6071/16-21, to outline where the further 216 social housing units will be located in East Londonderry.

**(AQW 7051/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The locations of these schemes are provided in the table below.

<b>Housing Association</b>	<b>Scheme Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Units</b>	<b>Onsite Year</b>	<b>Completion Year</b>
Apex Housing	2 Ashbourne Park	Coleraine	Rehab	1	2016/17	2016/17
Triangle	Coleraine ESPs	Coleraine	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	5	2016/17	2016/17
Habinteg	Girona Avenue	Portrush	New Build	10	2016/17	2017/18

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Triangle	Portstewart/ Portrush ESPs	Portstewart	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	10	2016/17	2017/18
Apex Housing	Chapelfield, Laurelhill Road	Coleraine	New Build	18	2017/18	2018/19
Helm Housing	Ramore Hall, Ramore Street	Portrush	New Build	8	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Artikelly	Limavady	New Build	6	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Coleraine ESPs	Coleraine	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	5	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Harpurs Hill, Phase 2 (Transfer)	Coleraine	New Build	9	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Portstewart/ Portrush ESPs	Portstewart	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	10	2017/18	2018/19
Fold	Beresford Place	Coleraine	New Build	26	2017/18	2019/20
Fold	Coleraine Road	Portstewart	New Build	85	2017/18	2020/21
Helm Housing	1-5 Portrush Road	Coleraine	New Build	8	2018/19	2019/20
Triangle	Coleraine ESPs	Coleraine	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	5	2018/19	2019/20
Triangle	Portstewart/ Portrush ESPs	Portrush	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	10	2018/19	2019/20

Please be advised that schemes can be lost or slip in future programme years for a variety of reasons e.g. relating to delay in acquiring site and/or failure to secure planning permission.

You may wish to note that the annual programme formulation process is currently underway for the new SHDP period 2017/18 to 2019/20, and further schemes may be added to the programme for the East Londonderry Parliamentary Constituency. Additional schemes can also be added to the SHDP in-year through the purchase of Existing Satisfactory/Off-the shelf properties.

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the mitigation measures in place for people on benefits following the Fresh Start Agreement.

**(AQW 7070/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group recommended that a number of Welfare Supplementary Payment schemes be introduced to provide cash payments to claimants affected by the welfare changes.

My department has brought forward the necessary legislation to make these payments and has put in place the operational arrangements to make payments to impacted claimants. Table A shows the list of mitigation schemes which are now currently operating and the claimants who qualify for payments.

It is planned to introduce further schemes in early 2017 to mitigate the impact of other changes as recommended by the Mitigation Working Group.

Welfare Change	Mitigation Provided	Duration of Payment
Time-limiting of contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance.	100% of actual loss of benefit of contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance.	Up to one year.
Benefit Cap on total welfare benefits.	100% of actual reduction in Housing Benefit entitlement.	Up to four years.
Introduction of Personal Independence Payment.  Mitigation provided for people that have no (or reduced) entitlement following reassessment from Disability Living Allowance.	100% of the loss of Disability Living Allowance following an appeal of the decision not to award Personal Independence Payment.	Until the outcome of the appeal is known.

Welfare Change	Mitigation Provided	Duration of Payment
	75% of the difference between the award of Disability Living Allowance and a reduced award of Personal Independence Payment. The difference must be at least £10.	Up to one year.
	A payment equivalent to either the standard rate of the mobility component or the relevant standard rate of the daily living component of Personal Independence Payment.  Payable in cases where a person has a conflict-related injury, has been refused Personal Independence Payment but has been awarded at least 4 points in their assessment.	Up to one year.
Introduction of Personal Independence Payment.  Mitigation provided for people that have no (or reduced) entitlement following reassessment from Disability Living Allowance.	A payment equivalent to the loss of any disability premiums paid in addition to an income-related benefit.	Up to one year.
	A payment equivalent to the loss of the severe disability element of Working Tax Credits or State Pension Credit.	Up to one year.
	A payment equivalent to the loss of Carer's Allowance.*  OR  A payment equivalent to the loss of a carer premium (or equivalent) paid in addition to an income-related benefit.	Up to one year.

\* The difference in the amount of payments for Carers will be confirmed in a set of amendment regulations that the Department intends to bring into operation in early 2017.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Communities to detail the budget allocated through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to the Supporting People Programme, in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 7079/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** Please note the Supporting People programme budgets for the years requested in the table below:

Year	Budget
2011-12	£ 65,184,000
2012-13	£ 66,384,000
2013-14	£ 69,584,000
2014-15	£ 71,781,000
2015-16	£ 72,798,000

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Communities to outline employment services for people with a disability in rural East Antrim.

**(AQW 7111/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Department for Communities provides a range of services and programmes to help and support people with disabilities to progress towards, move into and sustain paid employment. This support includes the following:

Access to Work (NI): Access to Work (NI) provides practical and financial support to approximately 750 disabled people each year to help them move into or retain paid work.

Workable (NI): 692 people, the majority of whom have a learning disability or mental ill-health, are currently being supported through this specialist in-work disability programme.

Condition Management Programme (CMP): CMP is a dedicated health and employment programme, delivered for the department by multi-disciplinary teams in each of the five Health and Social Care Trusts.

Full details of all these health and disability employment programmes can be found at: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/employment-support/work-schemes-and-programmes>

Work First Project: This is a partnership project between the department and the Northern and Southern regional colleges of Further Education. Since September 2015, there have been 34 students referred to the Work First project. The majority of students involved have a learning disability or an Autistic Spectrum Condition.

European Social Fund: DES also provides public match funding to 17 disability employment projects, including Acceptable Enterprises Limited, based in Larne.

Steps 2 Success: In addition to the above specialist provision and support, Steps 2 Success is the Department's main employment programme for adults who are unemployed or economically inactive. In East Antrim, the programme is delivered by PeoplePlus NI.

People living in East Antrim can find out more about all of these services through their local Jobs and Benefits Offices, in Carrickfergus, Newtownabbey and Larne, or by contacting the local Disability Employment Manager, Eileen.Traynor@communities-ni.gov.uk or 028 27660156.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the Housing Executive maintenance schemes planned for Millisle village, over the next two financial years.

**(AQW 7152/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Executive has advised that the following maintenance schemes planned in the next financial year include homes in Millisle:

Project No	Scheme	Start Date
24700425	Portaferry/Millisle Kitchens/Bathrooms	April 2017
24661002	Ards Heating	May 2017
24780080	Millisle/Carrowdore ECM	December 2017
24661004	Peninsula Heating 17/18	January 2018

The start dates currently anticipated for these schemes are subject to the scheme design and approvals process as well as the availability of funding. Schemes from 2018/19 onwards will be programmed as part of the new 10 Year Investment Plan which is currently being prepared.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Communities to outline employment services for people with a learning disability in rural North Antrim.

**(AQW 7163/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Department for Communities provides a range of services and programmes to help and support people with disabilities to progress towards, move into and sustain paid employment. This support includes the following:

Access to Work (NI): Access to Work (NI) provides practical and financial support to approximately 750 disabled people each year to help them move into or retain paid work.

Workable (NI): 692 people, the majority of whom have a learning disability or mental ill-health, are currently being supported through this specialist in-work disability programme.

Condition Management Programme (CMP): CMP is a dedicated health and employment programme, delivered for the department by multi-disciplinary teams in each of the five Health and Social Care Trusts.

Full details of all these health and disability employment programmes can be found at: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/employment-support/work-schemes-and-programmes>

Work First Project: This is a partnership project between the department and the Northern and Southern regional colleges of Further Education. Since September 2015, there have been 34 students referred to the Work First project. The majority of students involved have a learning disability or an Autistic Spectrum Condition.

European Social Fund: DES also provides public match funding to 17 disability employment projects across Northern Ireland.

Steps 2 Success: In addition to the above specialist provision and support, Steps 2 Success is the Department's main employment programme for adults who are unemployed or economically inactive. In North Antrim, the programme is delivered by PeoplePlus NI.

People living in North Antrim can find out more about all of these services through their local Jobs and Benefits Offices, in Ballymena and Ballymoney or by contacting the local Disability Employment Manager, Eileen.Traynor@communities-ni.gov.uk or 028 27660156.

**Mr Clarke** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the stage that Councillor's in local government are exposed to surcharge.

**(AQW 7257/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** In Article 19 of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (the 2005 Order), where it appears to a local government auditor at any audit held by her, that any item of account is contrary to law, she may apply to the High Court for a declaration the item is contrary to law. Subsequently the High Court may order the repayment, in whole or in part, of an item of account deemed to be unlawful, by the person responsible for incurring or authorising that item (a surcharge).

**Mr Dunne** asked the Minister for Communities for (i) an update on; and (ii) the timeframe of the roll out of the Sub Regional Stadia Programme for soccer.

**(AQW 7266/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The consultation on the Sub Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer resulted in 1,279 responses being received by my Department.

My officials are currently finalising their consideration and analysis of the responses to the consultation together with all other relevant information to inform recommendations to me on the way forward.

I hope to make a decision on the programme going forward shortly and I anticipate that the programme will be launched and open for applications in the coming months.

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister for Communities for a breakdown on where the £721,000 funding made available for Limavady Town Centre will be spent.

**(AQW 7267/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The £721,000 funding for Limavady will be spent as follows:

- Connell Street Public Realm works - £244,000
- Irish Green Street Public Realm works - £127,000
- Market Street Revitalisation scheme - £350,000

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister for Communities for a timeframe for ReVitalise and the public realm works to be undertaken in Limavady.

**(AQW 7268/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** It is anticipated that the construction phase for the Revitalisation scheme in Limavady will commence early in 2017 and complete before the end of the calendar year.

Public Realm works on Connell Street commenced on 7 November 2016 and are expected to complete on or before 31 March 2017, whilst works on Irish Green Street commenced at the end of October 2016 and are expected to complete before Christmas 2016.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of claimants that were in recipient of Disability Living Allowance and were rejected for Personal Independence Payments.

**(AQW 7280/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The information requested is not available as Personal Independence Payment (PIP) was only introduced in Northern Ireland on 20 June this year. Information on PIP will be published in due course in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the discussions his Department has had with local groups on the future of the Herdman's Mill site in Sion Mills.

**(AQW 7281/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** My officials continue to maintain contact with the Sion Mills Building Preservation Trust regarding buildings in Sion Mills, including Herdman's Mill. Having been informed on 30 September that the Trust received a court order which enables them to take possession of the Work Units, Chimney and associated yard at Herdman's Mill, my officials advised a representative of the Trust of the funding available at that time, for Building Preservation Trusts to carry out holding repairs to buildings on the Built Heritage at Risk in Northern Ireland register, through the Historic Environment Fund which I launched on 14 September. The period for applications to the scheme for 2016-17 has now closed and applications have been assessed.

My Department has also had ongoing contact with Derry City and Strabane District Council regarding Herdman's Mill. This has included taking forward, as part of the Historic Environment Fund, the joint funding of a heritage development officer for the council area, as a pilot study, to assess the benefits of such a post.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister for Communities to list each Ministerial Direction he has issued since May 2016, including (i) the date; (ii) its purpose (iii) whether he was overruling any concerns of officials either before or after the Direction; and (iv) whether each Direction was accompanied by a full business case.

**(AQW 7294/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** I have not issued any Ministerial Directions since taking office in May 2016.

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister for Communities to outline his plans for funding of the Women's Centre Childcare Fund post April 2017.

**(AQW 7355/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Executive's Childcare Strategy, which is being taken forward by the Department of Education, is the appropriate vehicle to address the matter of pre-school childcare in the future and I am working to ensure that we have a transition that, as far as possible, is not detrimental to the Women's Centre Childcare Fund.

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of Housing Executive occupational approved housing adaption schemes over the last five years in Upper Bann.

**(AQW 7356/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Executive has provided the following table setting out the number of occupational therapist approved housing schemes over the last five years in Upper Bann\*. This does not include housing adaption schemes for Housing Association properties:

Year	Major Adaptations	Minor Adaptations	Total
2011	45	600	645
2012	38	534	572
2013	43	519	562
2014	24	637	661
2015	19	627	646
<b>Total</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>2917</b>	<b>3086</b>

In addition the Housing Executive has issued the following number of Disabled Facilities Grants within the Upper Bann\* area over the past 5 years:

2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016-Oct 2016	Total
145	109	97	121	104	64	640

\* Please note that the Housing Executive does not hold this information in the format requested (at constituency level). Figures are collated by District Office areas. The Housing Executive has therefore supplied the information based on figures from its Armagh, Banbridge, Portadown and Lurgan Offices.

## Department of Education

**Mr Logan** asked the Minister of Education to detail how long the waiting list is to access the Literacy Teaching and Support Service.

**(AQW 5440/16-21)**

**Mr Weir (The Minister of Education):** The EA has advised that its literacy support service is provided at Stage 3 and Stage 5 of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Information provided by the EA indicates that 372 pupils across Northern Ireland are waiting to access its literacy support service. For children with a statement of SEN (Stage 5), there should be no waiting list. Children at Stage 3 rarely wait more than three months for their support to be initiated.

The Stage 3 literacy service is complementary to the support that should continue to be provided by the school; children on the waiting list should continue to receive school-based support.

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) how; and (ii) when Oakwood Special School communicated the removal of occupational therapy staff and provision from the school to parents.

**(AQW 5489/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority has advised that Oakwood School sent a letter to all parents on the 19 May, on foot of an e-mail received that same day from the Health and Social Care Trust Occupational Therapy (OT) Manager, informing them that, while OT was not being delivered in school, children were still being seen either at home or at Beech Hall Community Clinic.

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Education whether all statements of special educational need have been met for children at Oakwood Special School since the removal of Belfast Health and Social Care Trust occupational therapy staff and provision at the school.

**(AQW 5491/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority has confirmed that although not delivered in school, Occupational Therapy has continued to be delivered in accordance with assessed needs and that the provision on pupils' statements was met.

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Education to detail how her Department works with the Department of Health to ensure that children are school-ready by having the best possible speech, language and communication skills.

**(AQW 6355/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Examples of collaborative working between Education and Health in order to develop children's speech, language and communication skills from an early age are as follows:

#### **Sure Start**

The Department of Education invests a significant level of funding in the Sure Start Programme. A key focus of the programme is improvement of children's ability to learn by improving their language skills. By working collaboratively with Health professionals, Sure Start complements core Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) provision provided by the Health and Social Care Trusts. There is a clear role for the Sure Start Speech and Language Therapist in transitioning children into preschool education settings, alongside delivery of services to children and their families living within Sure Start catchment areas.

#### **Early Intervention Transformation Programme**

Another strand to this collaborative working is the Early Intervention Transformation Programme (EITP) which aims to improve outcomes for children and young people through embedding early intervention approaches. As part of Workstream 1 of the programme every pre-school education setting with DE-funded places now has a named Health Visitor assigned to it. In addition, a pilot 3+ Health Review has been introduced, led by the Public Health Agency, which involves Health Visitors conducting the review with parents and children in the pre-school setting. This review provides the opportunity for Health Visitors to review a child's development and provide further information and signposting to other services where appropriate, including SLC services.

#### **Getting Ready to Learn Programme**

This programme of support for parents includes programmes that have been developed collaboratively across health and education, one aim of which is to ensure that children are school ready by having the best possible support from home to develop their speech, language and communication skills.

#### **Early Years' Inclusion Service**

The aim of the Education Authority's (EA) Early Years' Inclusion Service is to enhance access to formal education for children during the early years by improving early identification and assessment of their special educational needs in the context of Language and Communication (and Social Emotional and Behaviour Difficulties); followed by appropriate interventions, ensuring a smooth transition from pre-school into Year 1 in a mainstream primary school.

This initiative includes a comprehensive training programme for all staff in early years' settings. Some of these training courses are delivered collaboratively with the Health sector's Speech and Language Therapists.

#### **Language and Communication Service**

The EA is establishing a regional language and communication service. This service currently exists in some EA offices and will be extended to all regions during the 2016/17 year.

In areas within the EA where this service already exists, the staff work with Health to provide a comprehensive support programme to early years' practitioners, parents and children.

The EA also has language outreach services that are delivered for selected special schools.

#### **Advisory Support for Individual Children**

Pre-school settings can request advisory support for children with specific language difficulties. This will be facilitated by teachers and/or Health sector Speech and Language Therapists.

#### **Speech and Language Classes**

Across the EA, there are specialist speech and language classes for children with speech and language difficulties. These classes provide opportunities for intensive teaching and speech and language therapy in a language rich environment. The staffing complement includes both teachers and Health sector Speech and Language Therapists.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) all composite classes in all (a) primary; and (b) post-primary schools; and (ii) the number of separate groups in each class listed.

**(AQW 6362/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:**

- (a) The following is a breakdown of the number of composite classes in primary schools in 2015/16 and the year groups associated with each:

Reception - P1	34
Reception - P2	21
Reception - P3	5
Reception - P4	1
P1 - 2	202
P1 - 3	23
P1 - 4	17
P1 - 7	1
P2 - 3	147
P2 - 4	4
P2 - 5	1
P3 - 4	197
P3 - 5	27
P3 - 6	1
P3 - 7	1
P4 - 5	177
P4 - 6	1
P4 - 7	10
P5 - 6	132
P5 - 7	67
P6 - 7	257
Total number of composite classes	1326
Total number of classes (excluding nursery classes and learning support centres)	6850

- (b) The Department does not collect appropriate information regarding composite classes in post-primary schools.

**Source:** NI school census

**Notes:**

- 1 All classes exclude nursery classes and learning support centres
- 2 Year group breakdown refers to the minimum and maximum year group in each class; for example, a class with only pupils in P1 and P3 has been recorded as "P1 – 3".

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Education whether his Department will engage actively with children and young people attending Gaelscoileanna / Irish-medium schools to help inform the development of the Children and Young Person's Strategy.

**(AQW 6514/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** My Department has been developing the next Executive Strategy for Children and Young People through an inclusive co-design process which has seen my officials engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, including representatives from organisations who work on behalf of the Irish-speaking community in Northern Ireland.

As part of the public consultation on the draft Strategy, my officials are planning a programme of further engagement with key stakeholders. This will include parents and guardians, all schools, the Education Authority and related sectoral bodies including Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, the Health and Social Care Board and Trusts, and local Councils via Children and

Young People's Strategic Partnership, voluntary and community organisations, and active engagement with children and young people across Northern Ireland.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Education to outline when his Department will appoint the multi-disciplinary Design Team to advance the new build scheme at Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh, Strabane.

**(AQW 6515/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** A procurement competition to appoint an Integrated Consultant Team (ICT) to take forward the design of the new school for Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh had been undertaken but unfortunately had to be terminated when the initial site purchase fell through. This site change was seen as a significant change in scope from the original procurement that required a fresh competition.

Now that a new site has been secured for the new school, CPD is taking forward the procurement of the ICT, which we expect to issue to the procurement framework in the coming weeks.

A professional team is expected to be in place early in the New Year.

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Education to outline the initiatives he has put in place to reduce stress for young people in education.

**(AQW 6517/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Department's 'iMatter' Programme is the overarching vehicle for promoting pupils' emotional health and wellbeing. The Programme is about addressing how the entire school community should be engaged in promoting resilient emotional health for all pupils, what support systems are available for vulnerable pupils and what support is available to schools in the event of a crisis. The Programme aims to support a school in integrating its individual policies and support systems in a consistent and coherent way.

Under this programme a suite of homework diary inserts, leaflets and posters on topics of concern to young people were developed, including the topic 'Coping with Stress' and were distributed to post-primary schools. They are also available from the DE website. They include useful telephone numbers, websites and details of organisations that can provide further advice and assistance.

An iMatter 'message of the month' on the subject of exam stress issues to schools each May and contains tips on preparing for, and coping with, exams.

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister of Education (i) for an update on the application for minor works at St Mary's Primary School, Barr; to detail (ii) what work is required; and (iii) when he expects the work to commence.

**(AQW 6521/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** A Minor Works application for additional accommodation at the school was received in November 2014. The Education Authority (EA) provided a scoping report and estimate of costs for the works in June 2016. Business case approval to progress the scheme was granted in August 2016. The EA is currently completing a pre tender estimate and it is anticipated it will be with the Department for consideration in week commencing 28 November. The work required is the provision of two prefabricated modular units, one to relocate a P3 classroom and the other to provide a designated Special Educational Needs classroom. Other associated works are planned to convert an existing room for resource use and to convert a classroom used as the dining area, solely for dining use. If the costs are approved work is expected to commence around March/April 2017.

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the job title for each of the 295 Education Authority staff exits; and (ii) how this reduction has affected service provision.

**(AQW 6545/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:**

- i) The Education Authority (EA) has advised the number of employees released under the 2015/16 EA VES was 205 and not 295. As the job titles in many instances are quite specific, in accordance with the confidentiality principle of the Statistic's Authority Code of Practice on Official Statistics, figures have to be suppressed where small numbers are involved. The table below provides the numbers of staff exiting the EA under four broad staff categories as supplied in AQW 5044/16-21 and lists all job titles falling within each of these staff categories.

No's of staff	Job Categories
18	<b>Senior Management ASEO level and above (or equivalent) includes:</b> Former ELB 1st and 2nd tier, Former ELB 2nd tier and Assistant Senior Education Officer.
52	<b>Middle Management Assistant Principal Officer to Education Officer (and equivalent) includes:</b> Education Officer, Adviser, Assistant Adviser, Advisory Teacher/Senior Teacher, Principal Officer, Head of Music Service, Energy Conservation Officer (APO), Training Officer (APO), Leading Architectural Technician (APO), Youth Officer (Soulbury 1-7) and Senior Librarian (SAO).

No's of staff	Job Categories
58	<b>Supervisory Management Executive Officer to Senior Administrative Officer (and equivalent) includes:</b> Maintenance Officer (ADOF), Clerk of Works (SExO), Administrative Officer, Behaviour Support/ Parenting (ADOF), Music District Co-ordinator, Executive Officer, Personal Assistant, Senior Executive Officer, Technical Support Officers, Librarian (SExO), Senior Library Assistant (ExO), Area Cleaning Manager (SExO), Cleaning Supervisor (ExO), Catering Manager (APO) and Catering Supervisor (ExOf/SCOF).
77	<b>Clerical and Support Clerical Officer and Senior Clerical Officer (and equivalent) includes:</b> Library Assistant (SCOF), Cook (CLOF), Driver (CLOF), Painter, Plasterer, Storeman, Stores Supervisor, Printer, Mechanic, Senior Clerical Officer and Clerical Officer/ Clerk Typist.
205	

- (ii) All applications for VES were subject to scrutiny against the criteria of the EA's Scheme prior to approval. Proposals were required to detail the impact the permanent removal of a post would have on service delivery and the measures taken to reduce and/or mitigate any impact. Such measures included a primary focus on continued delivery of statutory duties, absorption of residual duties by remaining employees, consideration of cessation of non-essential back office duties not impacting service provision, training and development and capacity building of staff.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Education whether schools have to implement advice given from the Inclusion and Diversity Service.

(AQW 6546/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** The Inclusion and Diversity Service supports Newcomer pupils through the provision of advice and practical support to pupils, schools and parents. It is for each school to determine the role that this advice and support plays in the assistance that is offered by a school to Newcomer pupils.

**Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Education how many educational psychologists have been employed in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6547/16-21)

**Mr Weir:**

	Number Employed (full-time and part-time)	Full time equivalent number employed
2016	*161	*136.0
2015	171	145.0
2014	166	144.7
2013	167	141.4
2012	161	141.7

\* The lower number for 2016 is in part the result of recent resignations. There was a major recruitment exercise at the end of June 2016 and following this there were no remaining reserve candidates available.

Please also note this data includes Educational Psychologists on secondment to QUB, as well as those deployed to regional specialist settings, i.e. Beechcroft and Lakewood.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many times the five levels of (a) management boards; and (b) committees met in each year; and (ii) what is the difference between their roles and functions.

(AQW 6550/16-21)

**Mr Weir:**

- (i) The Delivering Social Change (DSC) Ministerial Sub-Committees has met six times, the DSC Programme Board ten times, the DSC Atlantic Philanthropies Programme Board fourteen times and the DSC Shared Education Signature Project (SESP) twelve times. The Expert Advisory Committee do not hold meetings; members are commissioned as appropriate to provide expert opinion.

**(ii) DSC Ministerial Sub-Committees**

The Delivering Social Change Ministerial Sub-Committees on Poverty and Social Inclusion and Children and Young People were established to lead and oversee the Delivering Social Change programme of work.

**DSC Programme Board**

The role of the DSC Programme Board is to oversee the delivery of the DSC delivery framework and to ensure that key milestones and targets are achieved. The Board oversees a family of initiatives, monitoring in particular project formation and delivery.

**DSC Atlantic Philanthropies Programme Board**

The DSC/AP Programme Board oversee joint DSC/Atlantic Philanthropies initiatives. Its role is to provide the DSC SESP Project Board with the necessary authorisation for the project to proceed, monitoring progress and address any problems.

**DSC Shared Education Signature Project (SESP) Board**

The DSC SESP Project Board, chaired by DE, comprises representatives from AP, TEO and the Education Authority. It provides strategic management of the Shared Education Signature Project.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister of Education to outline how the Education and Training Inspectorate have (i) monitored; and (ii) evaluated the impact of the Shared Education Programme.

**(AQW 6552/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:**

- (1) The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), as part of its on-going schools inspection programme, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of collaborative links and partnerships between and among schools, including those developed under the shared education programme. Through its District Inspector network, the ETI will, where appropriate, monitor the progress of partnership schools as they develop shared education provision for their learners.
- (2) The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) was commissioned by the Department of Education to provide an independent evaluation of the Shared Education Signature Project and will issue a final report in 2018.

To date, ETI has carried out a number of evaluations of school partnerships, and based on the evidence from these has written a draft interim report which will soon be published on its web site.

The ETI has just commenced another round of baseline, monitoring and management visits, with further visits taking place through 2017 to inform the final report in 2018.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister of Education how the cost of shared education will be met when the current Atlantic Philanthropy funding is exhausted.

**(AQW 6553/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Sharing Works policy commits to use the learning from both the Delivering Social Change Signature Project and Peace IV Shared Education initiative, as well as other long standing practices of collaborative, inclusive and citizenship education to determine how best to support educational establishments in offering Shared Education in the longer term when current funding streams end.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Education pursuant to AQW 5821/16-21, AQW 5822/16-21, AQW 5823/16-21 and AQW 5824/16-21, to detail the current stage of the appointment of a regional manager.

**(AQW 6554/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority has confirmed that an interim regional manager for Early Years Special Educational Needs (SEN) has been identified and has begun the process of moving towards a single service entity.

It is anticipated that this will facilitate progress towards long-term management and service delivery arrangements, ensuring that the Early Years' SEN Service can be accessed consistently across the Authority for those children who require this service.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Education pursuant to AQW 5821/16-2, AQW 5822/16-21, AQW 5823/16-21 and AQW 5824/16-21, to outline a timeframe for the creation of the single Early Years Special Educational Needs Service.

**(AQW 6555/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority has confirmed that an interim regional manager for Early Years Special Educational Needs (SEN) has been identified and has begun the process of moving towards a single service entity.

It is anticipated that this will facilitate progress towards long-term management and service delivery arrangements, ensuring that the Early Years' SEN Service can be accessed consistently across the Authority for those children who require this service.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Education whether an audit was conducted on the Bushmills Education Centre in advance of the proposal for its closure.

**(AQW 6556/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority has confirmed that an audit was conducted on the Bushmills Education Centre in advance of the proposal for its closure.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Education how the educational objectives delivered by Bushmills Education Centre will be provided if it is permitted to close.

**(AQW 6557/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority has advised that the educational objectives currently being delivered by Bushmills Education Centre would be provided via access to residential and outdoor provisions in Woodhall Residential Centre and Magilligan Field Studies Centre, which are recommended to remain in service.

In addition to these two statutory centres, there is a wide range of voluntary and community organisations that can facilitate residential and outdoor education.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister of Education how much funding has been spent on (i) buses; and (ii) other forms of transport since the start of the Shared Education Signature Project.

**(AQW 6560/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The total spend on transport up to end of September 2017 is £156,176 of which £152,184 relates to hiring of vehicles and £3,992 relates to school mileage.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) the rationale behind; (ii) the intended impact on curriculum delivery; and (iii) the risk assessments conducted prior to circular 2016/11 'Class Sizes in Post-Primary Schools - Practical Subjects' being issued to schools.

**(AQW 6561/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** My decision to extend the flexibility in determining class sizes in practical subjects to cover the subject areas of Technology & Design, Home Economics and Music was taken in recognition of the significant challenges that the existing statutory requirements presented for schools, particularly in the current financial context and, to provide schools with increased autonomy in determining class sizes.

My Department recognises that some schools face significant challenges in terms of their finances, particularly smaller post-primary schools. The primary focus of a school should be to ensure its pupils receive a high quality education. In terms of practical subjects, this means providing pupils with every opportunity to engage in practical activities to support and enhance their learning experience. Therefore, when determining the class size, the Department would expect teachers and school leaders to have due regard to the quality of the pupils' educational experience and ensure that all the pupils in the class have the opportunity to engage in good quality practical activities. My Department does not want to see a situation where the quality of the practical activities are diluted or replaced by theory-based teaching and learning for the sake of facilitating larger class sizes.

No risk assessments were conducted prior to the issue of circular 2016/11. It is up to individual schools to undertake a health and safety risk assessment and the findings of this assessment will in effect determine the upper limit of the class size that can be facilitated.

Ultimately, the decision on whether or not to invoke the additional flexibility I have provided is a matter for each school.

**Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of Education who has responsibility for young adults with a statement of special educational need but that have now left full time education.

**(AQW 6590/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** A statement of special educational needs (SEN) will remain in force until the Education Authority ceases to maintain it, or until the child is no longer its responsibility; for example, on moving to further or higher education or to social services provision.

The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of SEN allows for, with the agreement of the young person concerned, the transfer of information in relation to the young person's SEN to a Further Education College or other provision to be attended. Relevant information may include a copy of the statement and the report of the young person's most recent Annual Review, including the Transition Plan.

Once they leave the school system, responsibility for further and higher education and employment and skills programmes lies with the Department for the Economy. Young people may also access training opportunities through the voluntary sector.

For young people with a disability seeking employment, the Department for Communities has responsibility for the Disability Employment Service.

Young people with particularly complex learning difficulties may also move to health and social care provision under the responsibility of the Department of Health.

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister of Education to detail what capital investment is planned for schools in East Belfast by May 2021.

**(AQW 6614/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** There are several ongoing capital programmes to improve accommodation across the schools' estate funded from the Department's capital budget, however, Capital Budgets for future years are not yet confirmed.

A Major Capital projects for Elmgrove Primary School was announced to proceed to planning in January 2013 and is due to commence in July 2017 to provide a new nursery school followed by the refurbishment and extension of the main school building. It is anticipated that completion will be in August 2018 at an estimated cost of £9.953m.

There is currently 1 School Enhancement Programme (SEP) scheme in East Belfast, for Strandtown Primary School. The SEP proposal at the school involves the construction of 12 new classrooms and removal of four mobile classrooms to address the existing under-provision of teaching facilities. The project has an approved total cost of £3.972m, which includes the construction works, professional fees, statutory charges and F&E. The Education Authority (EA) is hopeful that works will commence in early 2017.

I have already stated that it is my intention to make a second call for applications under the School Enhancement Programme and I hope to be in a position to do so in the near future.

In addition, there is a substantive programme of work progressing under the Minor Capital Works Programme across the schools' estate. Due to the reactive nature and the volume of these works it is not possible to give a breakdown of planned projects. At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, are progressing to delivery.

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Education pursuant to AQW 5796/16-21, to detail (i) the top ten issues raised during the 33,330 counselling sessions delivered in post-primary schools; and (ii) the percentage of relevance for each.

**(AQW 6616/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:**

#### Post-primary Schools

Top 10 issues raised 2015/16	Percentage
Anxiety	7.43
Self-Worth	4.73
Stress	4.71
Relationship Peers	3.98
Anger	3.56
Family	2.71
Depression	2.53
Sleep	2.17
Academic Difficulties	2.15
Behaviour	2.03

#### Special Schools

Top 10 issues raised 2015/16	Percentage
Anxiety	22
Family	19
Anger	16.5
Behaviour	13
Self-Worth	12
Relationship peers	11
Stress	4

Top 10 issues raised 2015/16	Percentage
Academic	1
Depression	1
Bereavement	0.5

The Education Authority has confirmed that these figures are in respect of the top ten issues recorded by the Independent Counselling Service for Schools. There are many other topics which have been given at the initial assessment point as the reason for referral however these are not in the top ten. At present the Education Authority does not have readily available the percentages for these other issues.

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Education pursuant to AQW 5796/16-21, to detail (i) the top ten issues raised during the 5,163 counselling sessions delivered in special schools; and (ii) the percentage of relevance for each.

**(AQW 6617/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:**

#### Post-primary Schools

Top 10 issues raised 2015/16	Percentage
Anxiety	7.43
Self-Worth	4.73
Stress	4.71
Relationship Peers	3.98
Anger	3.56
Family	2.71
Depression	2.53
Sleep	2.17
Academic Difficulties	2.15
Behaviour	2.03

#### Special Schools

Top 10 issues raised 2015/16	Percentage
Anxiety	22%
Anger	16.5%
Stress	4%
Family	19%
Relationship peers	11%
Academic	1%
Self-Worth	12%
Behaviour	13%
Depression	1%
Bereavement	0.5%

The Education Authority has confirmed that these figures are in respect of the top ten issues recorded by the Independent Counselling Service for Schools. There are many other topics which have been given at the initial assessment point as the reason for referral however these are not in the top ten. At present the Education Authority does not have readily available the percentages for these other issues.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education how many members of his Department's staff have undertaken rural proofing training.

**(AQW 6618/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Fifteen members of DE staff have attended a 'Think Rural – An Essential Guide to Rural Proofing' training course since August 2010.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education how many members of staff from the (i) Education Authority; and (ii) Council for Catholic Maintained Schools have undertaken rural proofing training.

**(AQW 6619/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:**

- (i) The Education Authority has confirmed that 5 staff have attended rural proofing training (3 staff directly involved in Area Planning, and 2 senior staff within Operations and Estates); and
- (ii) The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) has advised that no CCMS staff have undertaken rural proofing training.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education what investigations have been made into the viability of online learning as a mechanism to ensure a broad curriculum is provided in small rural schools.

**(AQW 6620/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority (EA) C2k Education Network provides a portfolio of eLearning services which are available to all schools in Northern Ireland to help support delivery of the curriculum in an online environment. This gives smaller schools an equity of status and enables access to teaching and learning experiences that they may not have otherwise been able to access due to geographical location, size of school and budget constraints.

Promotion of eLearning by C2k and the use of online tools to help improve teaching and learning has seen significant levels of adoption not only within the classroom but also extending beyond the classroom allowing students and staff to have access to a multitude of curriculum resources outside of the normal school hours. This can in turn also stimulate increased parental engagement in their child's education.

There is a range of online learning and collaboration tools available, in particular:

- A regional Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) called Fronter, which enables all teachers to create an online classroom where pupils can work independently on topics related to the NI Curriculum. Within Fronter a range of 'Ready to Go Rooms' have been designed by teachers, student teachers and external organisations to assist schools in the delivery of the curriculum in an easy to use and effective way.
- Virtual Classroom software, called Collaborate, which allows for real time collaboration either across schools or by linking in with other experts that can enrich the curriculum experience. This software allows schools to access virtual visits in educational settings while remaining in their classroom. Virtual Fieldtrips, organised through C2k and EA.TV, attract interest and participation amongst a significant number of schools, with many small rural schools taking part on a regular basis.
- A digital library called Equella. This contains thousands of resources and allows schools to upload and share resources either across their own school or Area Learning Community or with the wider NI schools community. Within the digital library resources are categorised and linked to the relevant Key Stage and the NI curriculum area of study. In addition to the digital library, there is a media library which currently holds in excess of 3,000 videos which are used to support staff CPD and pupil learning.

The EA run regular training sessions to support teachers in the use of these key services and encourage schools to work together by providing opportunity to get involved in elearning partnerships. Bespoke training is also delivered to established sharing education partnerships.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the potential impact of small rural school closures on local communities as a result of the proposals made by the Draft Area Plan.

**(AQW 6621/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** All pupils deserve access to an education that meets their needs and equips them with the knowledge and skills that will allow them to fulfil their aspirations for the future. My aim is to ensure that no pupil is disadvantaged simply because of the badge on their uniform or the location of their school but all are entitled to access quality education in an educationally sustainable and financially viable school.

The aim of the draft Strategic Area Plan for Northern Ireland: "Providing Pathways" focuses on the educational interests of children and young people.

High level and strategic, it identifies issues to be addressed at a regional and Local Government District level and does not identify individual schools.

The final Strategic Area Plan will form the basis for proposals for actions to address issues identified. The school Planning and Managing Authorities will engage at a local level with communities and schools to determine how best to shape education provision in an area to ensure a network of sustainable schools for our children and young people to enable them to have access to high quality education regardless of where they live. In this way local communities and schools will have an opportunity to inform the development of the area solutions.

If it is determined that a significant change is proposed for a school, such as a school closure, a statutory process ensues including the publication of a Development Proposal which will trigger a further (statutory) public objection period in which views and comments may be expressed to my Department and will be considered before I make a final decision.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many (a) primary schools; and (b) post-primary schools are situated in rural areas; and (ii) the definition of rural area used in this case.  
(AQW 6622/16-21)

**Mr Weir:**

(i) The urban/rural breakdown of schools in 2016/17 is as follows:

	Rural	Urban
(a) Primary	463	358
(b) Post-primary	39	162

(ii) The definition of urban/rural is based on settlements. Schools situated in a settlement that has a population of 5,000 or over (what is classified as a 'small town') is urban. Schools in settlements with a population of less than 5,000 are classified as rural. Further information can be found here: <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/geography/review-of-the-statistical-classification-and-delineation-of-settlements-march-2015.pdf>

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Education to outline his Department's definition of rural area.  
(AQW 6623/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** The definition of urban/rural the Department uses for statistical purposes is based on settlements. Schools situated in a settlement that has a population of 5,000 or over (classified as a 'small town') is urban. Schools in settlements with a population of less than 5,000 are classified as rural.

Further information can be found here: <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/geography/review-of-the-statistical-classification-and-delineation-of-settlements-march-2015.pdf>.

An alternative definition of urban/rural has been used for specific projects in the past. Specifically, the Department's Sustainable Schools Policy defines rural areas as those outside of what were the former Belfast and Derry City Council areas.

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Education what mechanisms are currently in place to give teachers the opportunity to share good practice.  
(AQW 6624/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** Area Learning Communities are the main forum through which schools plan the curriculum they offer and they provide a mechanism for sharing of best practice.

As part of the legacy from the Delivering Social Change Literacy and Numeracy Programme my Department funded dissemination of effective approaches to tackling underachievement including online resources, newsletters and events to share good practice. My Department's Literacy and Numeracy Key Stage 2/3 project, the Keeping Safe Preventative Education Programme, Sharing Works: A Policy for Shared Education, the establishment of the Early Years Education Support Clusters and Learning Leaders my Department's Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning all provide opportunities for teachers to share best practice.

In addition, my officials have been working with the Department of Education & Skills in Dublin to progress teacher professional development in the area of educational underachievement. Two conferences to disseminate best practice have already taken place with a third planned for February 2017. An online communication and learning platform has also been launched through which educators can share good practice.

Disseminating good practice within and between schools is central in the current models of teacher professional development delivered by the Education Authority. Examples include the:

- use of structured visits to identify best practice schools/teachers as a strategy for schools who are addressing areas for improvement following inspection;
- deployment of outstanding and very good leaders to provide support for other schools;
- deployment of outstanding and very good principals as mentors and coaches;
- identification of best practice for sharing with schools through conferences, clusters and EA TV.

The C2k Education Network provides eLearning services and resources for schools and supports the dissemination of good practice. This includes online learning and collaboration tools such as Fronter, Equella, Media Library and Collaborate. In addition, it provides teachers with opportunities to share good practice through a variety of collaborative tools including Google Apps for Education, Microsoft Office 365, Microsoft OneNote and C2k Exchange. The C2k School User Forum facilitates regular face-to-face contact and sharing of best practice between staff across all education sectors.

The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools has advised me that it facilitates sharing of good practice through Principal conferences and ongoing cluster work with a clear focus on school improvement through self-evaluation.

CCEA also provides a range workshops, online courses and webinars to share good practice. Case studies of experiences of delivering cross-curricular skills at Key Stage 3 will be available shortly. In Irish Medium, CCEA is collaborating with C2k and post-primary teachers to share resources and practice through teacher-created Fronter rooms.

School Principals and teachers are innovative in sharing best practice, for example, through TeachMeets, Ed Camps, conferences, social media and local networks.

In November 2015 the Department commissioned the National Children's Bureau to carry out research on the dissemination of best practice in schools. The aim was to provide a comprehensive list of methods that are effective in sharing best practice by and with schools. This will ensure that information about effective practice is widely disseminated. The full report and summary will be published early next year.

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Education to detail how many free training events were provided by the Middletown Centre for Autism in each year since its establishment.

**(AQW 6625/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Middletown Centre for Autism has provided an average of 120 free training events in Northern Ireland, per year since 2010, which is when their training service began. This includes half day events, one day events, five day programmes and six week programmes. This equates to a total of approximately 810 training events to the end of September 2016.

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Education to outline how the Middletown Centre for Autism contributes to the aims and objectives as set out in the Autism Strategy.

**(AQW 6626/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Since the launch of the cross-Departmental Autism Strategy and Action Plan in January 2014, the Department of Education (DE) has worked closely with the Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA) on the implementation of the education-specific actions to develop support and provision for children and young people with autism. These include delivering a broad range of training programmes for teachers, educational professionals, youth workers and parents and providing ongoing effective support for pupils with autism.

Since December 2007, Middletown Centre for Autism has provided the following training in Northern Ireland:

- Training to 21,312 educational based professionals
- Training to 4,736 parents, and
- Provided phone and email advice and information service for parents and education professionals.

The Centre also delivers a programme of research, with research bulletins being developed to meet the needs of professionals working in education with children and young people with autism.

Middletown continues to improve autism provision in Northern Ireland by building the capacity of schools to support the needs of children with autism through their delivery of autism specific training and the capacity building work delivered as part of its specialist direct support offered to children with autism.

DE is represented on the Autism Strategy Implementation Group which is collectively responsible for monitoring progress against the actions and reflecting how implementation is progressing.

I am confident that the education-related actions in the Action Plan will help to ensure that children and young people with autism are provided with high quality education services that evolve to meet their needs as they progress through the education system.

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Education to detail how many professionals from Northern Ireland attended free training events provided by the Middletown Centre for Autism, in each year since its establishment.

**(AQW 6627/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The following table details the number of professionals from Northern Ireland that attended free training events provided by the Middletown Centre for Autism, in each year since its establishment:

Year	Number attending
*Dec 2007 – 31/3/2011	3123
1/4/2011 – 31/3/2012	3404
1/4/2012 – 31/3/2013	3331
1/4/2013 – 31/3/2014	2384
1/4/2014 – 31/3/2015	4074

Year	Number attending
1/4/2015 – 31/3/2016	3606
1/4/2016 – 30/9/2016	1390
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,312</b>

\* Note that the training service at Middletown Centre for Autism only began in mid 2010.

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Education what official support mechanisms are in place for schools placed on formal intervention.

**(AQW 6628/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Through the Formal Intervention Process, schools assessed as needing to address urgently significant areas for improvement following inspection by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) receive tailored support from the Education Authority (EA) and, in the case of Catholic maintained schools, from the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS).

The EA consults with the school to determine a management response to the main findings in the inspection report, together with an indication of how the school intends to address the areas for improvement. The EA (in liaison with the CCMS where appropriate) works with the school to prepare and implement an agreed post-inspection action plan detailing the actions that will be taken to address the areas for improvement.

The action plan is quality assured by the ETI and the school's progress is evaluated by the ETI through the follow up inspection process.

Information on the Formal Intervention Process is available on the Department of Education website at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-improvement>

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Education pursuant to AQW 5886/16-21, to detail the number of pupils enrolled in (i) nursery schools; and (ii) reception classes, over the same time period broken down by year.

**(AQW 6654/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Enrolments in nursery schools and reception classes from 2008/09 – 2015/16 are as follows:

	(i) Nursery schools	(ii) Reception classes in primary schools
2008/09	5869	601
2009/10	5857	576
2010/11	5906	491
2011/12	5911	444
2012/13	5910	417
2013/14	5852	343
2014/15	5882	329
2015/16	5904	241

**Source:** NI school census

**Notes:**

1 Enrolments refer to funded pupils only

**Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Education when he expects Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre to be integrated with the Education Authority.

**(AQW 6655/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Since 09 May 2016 the EA have been providing ongoing direction and practical operational support for the delivery of education and vocational training within the JJC.

The TUPE transfer of existing YJA teaching staff to the EA involves statutory processes which have not yet concluded, however, this has not impacted in any way upon the quality of current provision.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the weight the Education Authority should give to external or private assessments of special educational needs in the statementing process.

**(AQW 6658/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** It is normal practice for the Education Authority (EA) to give due consideration to reports from other professionals during statutory assessments of special educational needs (SEN).

In terms of psychological advice, regulation 9 of the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (NI) 2005 requires that such advice be sought from a person regularly employed or engaged by the EA as an educational psychologist. That advice will be given after consultation, as appropriate, with any other psychologist that has relevant knowledge of or information relating to the child.

Paragraph 3.57 of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of SEN makes clear that the educational psychologist from whom the EA seeks advice must consult, and record any advice from, any other psychologist, such as a clinical or occupational psychologist, who may have relevant knowledge of or information about the child. The educational psychologist employed or engaged by the EA should also consider any advice which parents may submit independently from a fully qualified educational psychologist.

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Education pursuant to AQW 5796/16-21, to outline the measures in place to determine the levels of success or outcome of counselling for post-primary children.

**(AQW 6660/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** ICSS is not assessed in terms of success or failure. The service is in place to provide confidential, independent counselling support to young people, addressing whatever issues are of concern to the individual.

Nonetheless, evaluation is an integral element of the service, the details of which are outlined in the ICSSS Handbook. <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/icss-handbook>

Common issues in the past year have included anxiety, peer issues, bereavement, anger, self-worth, bullying, family and school issues.

#### 2013/14

Post-primary Schools	Special Schools
Anxiety 5.87%	Anxiety 20%
Family 5.73%	Family 18%
Anger 4.34%	Anger 14%
Self-Worth 3.63%	Self Worth 12%
Relationship Peers 3.02%	Behaviour 11%
Depression 2.48%	Relationship Peers 9%
Stress 2.37%	Bereavement 5%
Academic 2.17%	Other known 4%
Behaviour 1.62%	Stress 4%
Sleeping 1.12%	Bullying 3%

#### 2014/15

Post-primary Schools	Special Schools
Anxiety 6.65%	Anxiety 21%
Family Issue 4.22%	Family 18.5
Behaviour Issues 1.83%	Anger 15%
Anger 3.95%	Self-Worth 12.5 %
Relationship Peers 3.5%	Behaviour 11 %
Stress 3.54%	Relationship Peers 10 %
Bereavement 2%	Bereavement 4.5 %
Bullying 0.05%	Other Known 4.5 %
Self-Harm 0.15%	Stress 4.5 %
Depression 0.35%	Bullying 3%

**2015/16**

<b>Post-primary Schools</b>	<b>Special Schools</b>
Anxiety 7.43%	Anxiety 22%
Self-worth 4.73%	Anger 16.5%
Stress 4.71%	Stress 4%
Relationship Peers 3.98%	Family 19 %
Anger 3.56%	Relationship Peers 11%
Family 2.71%	Academic 1%
Depression 2.53%	Self-Worth 12%
Sleep 2.17%	Behaviour 13%
Academic Difficulties 2.15%	Depression 1%
Behaviour 2.03%	Bereavement 0.5%

The Education Authority has confirmed that these figures are in respect of the top ten issues recorded by the Independent Counselling Service for Schools. There are many other topics which have been given at the initial assessment point as the reason for referral however these are not in the top ten. At present the Education Authority does not have readily available the percentages for these other issues.

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Education pursuant to AQW 5796/16-21, to detail (i) the top ten issues affecting those receiving counselling sessions during the periods (a) 2013-14; (b) 2014-15; and (c) 2015-16; and (ii) the frequency of each issue.

**(AQW 6661/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** ICSS is not assessed in terms of success or failure. The service is in place to provide confidential, independent counselling support to young people, addressing whatever issues are of concern to the individual.

Nonetheless, evaluation is an integral element of the service, the details of which are outlined in the ICSSS Handbook. <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/icss-handbook>

Common issues in the past year have included anxiety, peer issues, bereavement, anger, self-worth, bullying, family and school issues.

**2013/14**

<b>Post-primary Schools</b>	<b>Special Schools</b>
Anxiety 5.87%	Anxiety 20%
Family 5.73%	Family 18%
Anger 4.34%	Anger 14%
Self-Worth 3.63%	Self Worth 12%
Relationship Peers 3.02%	Behaviour 11%
Depression 2.48%	Relationship Peers 9%
Stress 2.37%	Bereavement 5%
Academic 2.17%	Other known 4%
Behaviour 1.62%	Stress 4%
Sleeping 1.12%	Bullying 3%

**2014/15**

<b>Post-primary Schools</b>	<b>Special Schools</b>
Anxiety 6.65%	Anxiety 21%
Family Issue 4.22%	Family 18.5
Behaviour Issues 1.83%	Anger 15%
Anger 3.95%	Self-Worth 12.5 %

Post-primary Schools	Special Schools
Relationship Peers 3.5%	Behaviour 11 %
Stress 3.54%	Relationship Peers 10 %
Bereavement 2%	Bereavement 4.5 %
Bullying 0.05%	Other Known 4.5 %
Self-Harm 0.15%	Stress 4.5 %
Depression 0.35%	Bullying 3%

**2015/16**

Post-primary Schools	Special Schools
Anxiety 7.43%	Anxiety 22%
Self-worth 4.73%	Anger 16.5%
Stress 4.71%	Stress 4%
Relationship Peers 3.98%	Family 19 %
Anger 3.56%	Relationship Peers 11%
Family 2.71%	Academic 1%
Depression 2.53%	Self-Worth 12%
Sleep 2.17%	Behaviour 13%
Academic Difficulties 2.15%	Depression 1%
Behaviour 2.03%	Bereavement 0.5%

The Education Authority has confirmed that these figures are in respect of the top ten issues recorded by the Independent Counselling Service for Schools. There are many other topics which have been given at the initial assessment point as the reason for referral however these are not in the top ten. At present the Education Authority does not have readily available the percentages for these other issues.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister of Education what is the cost per pupil for schools if every child participates in shared education.

**(AQW 6673/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The cost per pupil will vary considerably depending on a range of factors, including a school's level of Shared Education experience; delivery method, amount of time spent in shared learning, transport costs as well as the number of shared learning opportunities in which a pupil participates.

Consequently it is not possible to provide a cost per pupil if every child participates in Shared Education.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister of Education what is the net cost saving that the Shared Education Programme has achieved in each of the last four years.

**(AQW 6674/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Delivering Social Change Signature Project is not predicated on the delivery of cost savings. However, collaborative working provides the opportunity to make more efficient use of resources and collaborative procurement arrangements have the potential to result in savings for individual school budgets. Any such saving impact is captured within individual school budgets and will vary considerably depending on the level of collaboration.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister of Education to outline any evidence to show improved academic educational outcomes from shared education rather than just improvement in access to more curriculum subjects.

**(AQW 6675/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** It is too early to assess the improvement in academic educational outcomes from Shared Education. Mechanisms are in place to gather evidence but it will take time to accurately assess the impact.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Education, in relation to circular 2016/11 'Class Sizes in Post-Primary Schools - Practical Subjects'; (i) whether he recognises that many Home Economics and Technology class rooms in post-primary schools are designed to accommodate 20 students; (ii) for his assessment of the practical implications for the students who will be

affected by class sizes increasing from 20 to 26; and (iii) whether the outworkings of this circular could require additional classroom assistants or for classes to be split across two rooms.

**(AQW 6734/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** My recent decision to allow more flexibility for class sizes in practical subjects was taken following correspondence received from a number of post-primary principals about the challenges they were facing with the then existing statutory requirements in relation to class sizes in practical subjects, particularly in the current financial climate. From the schools' perspective the problems related to budgetary restrictions/staffing, the need to accommodate pupils with a special educational need and the admission of pupils on the basis of successful appeals who are supernumerary in terms of the approved admissions and enrolment numbers but who impact considerably on the organisation of practical class sizes.

I recognise and appreciate the challenges our schools face and, while I understand that some classrooms will only be able to accommodate 20 pupils, it is also important to realise that there will be classrooms across the school estate that can accommodate more pupils. The Department's latest guidance does not require schools to consider a larger class, rather it provides them with the flexibility for a larger class size if they deem it safe to do so having considered all relevant factors.

My decision gives more freedom to schools to use their budget as they see fit and could remove the need for them to employ additional teachers in specific subject areas to meet a class size limit which they could easily exceed whilst still meeting all health and safety requirements.

It is important to note that where a school is considering setting the class size in excess of 20 pupils for practical activities in any of these subject areas it must first carry out a health and safety risk assessment. This assessment should determine the maximum class size within the limits set. The health and safety of pupils remains paramount and the school's Board of Governors must be content that any practical activities are unlikely to present a risk to the health and safety of pupils.

The Department of Education delegates as much funding as possible to schools and it is the Board of Governors, as the manager of the school budget that determines staffing complement and class sizes. As I stated in my response to AQW 6561/16-21, ultimately, the decision on whether or not to invoke the additional flexibility I have provided is a matter for each school.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) organisations operating in the school estate, including charities and community organisations, playgroups and youth organisations broken down per Education Authority region; and (ii) the rental income received from these organisations in the past three years either directly to (a) the school, (b) the legacy education boards or (iii) the Education Authority.

**(AQW 6752/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Neither the Department of Education nor the Education Authority hold the information requested.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Education to list the grant schemes available to the community and voluntary sector for youth provision via the Education Authority; broken down by allocation per Education Authority region, in the last five years and that exceeded £5000.

**(AQW 6753/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority has provided the following information regarding grant schemes available to the community and voluntary sector for youth provision for each of the last five years.

**Breakdown of Grant Schemes to the Community and Voluntary Sector for Youth Provision Via the Education Authority**

Grant Schemes	2011/12 (£ 000's)	2012/13 (£ 000's)	2013/14 (£ 000's)	2014/15 (£ 000's)	2015/16 (£ 000's)
<b>Education Authority Office: Armagh</b>					
Voluntary PT Clubs > £5000	123,613	171,280	132,176	113,949	153,750
Extended Provision Scheme	0	132,036	326,407	365,339	342,273
Youth Intervention Programme 2	29,660	34,118	18,000	0	28,668
Together Building a United Community (TBUC) - Summer Camps	0	0	0	0	52,788
Irish Medium	0	0	0	5,987	0
Inclusion	0	0	74,417	46,585	121,002
<b>Total</b>	<b>153,273</b>	<b>337,434</b>	<b>551,000</b>	<b>531,860</b>	<b>698,481</b>

Grant Schemes	2011/12 (£ 000's)	2012/13 (£ 000's)	2013/14 (£ 000's)	2014/15 (£ 000's)	2015/16 (£ 000's)
<b>Education Authority Office: Belfast</b>					
Summer Intervention	69,180	83,640	93,682	134,487	89,212
Community Relations, Equality and Diversity Funding	9,268	8,500	14,193	8,900	0
Irish Medium	36,000	37,000	38,000	39,000	41,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>114,448</b>	<b>129,140</b>	<b>145,875</b>	<b>182,387</b>	<b>130,212</b>
<b>Education Authority Office: Ballymena</b>					
Community Relations, Equality and Diversity Funding	206,000	210,000	218,000	221,000	0
Together Building a United Community (TBUC)	0	0	0	0	110,000
Irish Medium	8,000	9,000	15,000	12,000	0
Intervention	126,000	128,000	130,000	117,000	132,000
Inclusion	0	0	452,503	395,675	439,000
Building Set Aside for sole purpose of Youth Work	138,050	129,529	148,028	142,110	136,119
<b>Total</b>	<b>478,050</b>	<b>476,529</b>	<b>963,531</b>	<b>887,785</b>	<b>817,119</b>
<b>Education Authority Office: Dundonald</b>					
Community Relations, Equality and Diversity Funding	190,000	195,000	209,000	277,000	0
Youth Outreach	193,000	198,000	203,000	208,000	208,000
Intervention	66,000	68,000	70,000	72,000	72,000
Irish Medium	14,000	14,000	13,000	13,000	8,000
Targeting Social Need	0	127,000	508,000	508,000	507,000
Together Building a United Community (TBUC) - Summer Camps	0	0	0	0	104,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>463,000</b>	<b>602,000</b>	<b>1,003,000</b>	<b>1,078,000</b>	<b>899,000</b>
<b>Education Authority Office: Omagh</b>					
Youth Intervention	34,137	22,265	35,898	0	52,644
Extended Provision	0	0	260,025	262,062	264,518
Inclusion	0	0	133,826	23,743	19,512
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,137</b>	<b>22,265</b>	<b>429,749</b>	<b>285,805</b>	<b>336,674</b>

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Education what transitional plans are in place to facilitate the movement of the Women's Centre Childcare Fund from the Department for Communities.

(AQW 6755/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** The Department of Education is leading on the development of the Executive's Childcare Strategy which, when agreed by the Executive, may include further opportunities for a range of childcare provision to be supported. The future of the Women's Centre Childcare Fund (WCCF) is currently under the control of the Minister for Communities. Officials from DE and DfC will continue to engage on the development of the Childcare Strategy and on the timescale for the development and delivery of its constituent actions.

I hope to bring forward the full version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken account of the many consultation responses received, the Programme for Government and the new opportunities that now exist to align childcare and Early Years initiatives.

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister of Education to detail any capital projects in his Department which have benefited from European Union funding during each of the last ten years.

**(AQW 6768/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** None of the Department of Education's capital building projects have utilised European funding in the last ten years.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Education to outline how additional funds provided for schools to address the needs of newcomer pupils is audited.

**(AQW 6781/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Funding for Newcomer pupils, alongside other funding provided through the Common Funding Scheme, is delegated to schools to determine how best it is utilised. This allows schools to take account of the individual needs and circumstances of their own pupils and to deploy the funding in the way that they believe to be most appropriate within their school. As with all funding delegated to schools, it is for the school's Principal and Board of Governors to account for how such funding is used.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Education how the progress of newcomer pupils is assessed following the provision of additional funds to meet their needs.

**(AQW 6782/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Department of Education provides additional funding through the Common Funding Formula to schools in respect of every pupil who has been designated as a Newcomer. Departmental guidance issued to schools recommends that they monitor each child's progress throughout their designation as a Newcomer pupil. The additional funding is allocated initially for three years and if after this period the school considers that a pupil still requires additional support, an assessment against the Common European Framework of Reference should be carried out to provide evidence that the child still meets the criteria to be classified as a Newcomer. The school should complete this assessment on an annual basis and it should be available for validation by the Education Authority.

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many special schools were given poor inspection reports; and (ii) what help did Education Authority officers provide before each inspection, in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 6799/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:**

- i) Over the past five academic years from 2011/12 to 2015/16, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) have carried out 25 inspections of special schools. Of these, three were evaluated overall as needing to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified; all three schools were subsequently placed in the formal intervention process by the Department of Education, and are currently involved at various stages of the ETI follow-up inspection process.
- ii) The School Development Service (formally CASS) differentiates support to meet the specific needs of schools. Support is planned and provided taking into account the following spectrum of schools, listed in order of priority:
  - i schools in the Formal Intervention process;
  - ii. schools found to be 'Satisfactory'/ 'needs to address important areas for improvement' in inspection by ETI;
  - iii. schools who have recently appointed first time/acting principals;
  - iv. recently amalgamated schools;
  - v schools where performance improvement will have most effect in closing the gap between highest and lowest achieving pupils;
  - vi. other schools in support of their self-evaluation and school improvement plans.

This support is provided in order of priority to all schools, including special schools. The School Development Service does not provide intensive support to schools in the period after notification of inspection has been received and prior to the date of inspection.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Education whether he has rural proofed all decisions regarding rural schools.

**(AQW 6811/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** My decisions on statutory Development Proposals (DPs) are first and foremost based on ensuring that the educational experience of pupils is enhanced within a school setting that is educationally sustainable and financially viable. Each DP is assessed on its own particular circumstances against the criteria and indicators set out in the Sustainable Schools Policy (SSP), which itself has been rural proofed. These criteria and indicators frame the characteristics of a sustainable school.

The SSP recognises the needs of rural communities and this is reflected in a lower enrolment threshold for rural primary schools, an accessibility criterion which provides guidance on home to school travel times and a 'strong links with the community' criterion which recognises the central place a school has for many communities, both urban and rural.

To date I have taken decisions on 18 DPs for schools. Thirteen of these decisions were in respect of rural schools.

My Department will continue to meet its obligations to give due regard to rural needs.

**Mr Logan** asked the Minister of Education how much his Department has spent on translating documentation into Irish since May 2016.

**(AQW 6824/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** My Department has spent £415.85 on translating documentation into Irish since May 2016.

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Education when he will answer AQW 4545/16-21.

**(AQW 6864/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Statutory responsibility for the issue of statements of special educational needs lies with the Education Authority (EA). As such, it is the EA that holds the information requested in AQW 4545/16-21.

The Department is awaiting receipt of the necessary information from the EA in order to provide you with an answer.

I can assure you that every effort is being made to have the answer to your original question issued as soon as possible.

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Education why there is no Building Manual for Special Schools.

**(AQW 6866/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The design of special schools requires consideration of a range of sometimes complex accommodation requirements.

While there is not a specific Building Handbook for Special Schools in Northern Ireland, the Department uses Building Bulletin 102 – “Designing for Disabled Children and Children with Special Educational Needs (Guidance for mainstream and special schools)” in planning and designing accommodation.

This bulletin serves as the briefing document for planning building projects for children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities in mainstream schools; resourced provision and designated units within mainstream schools; special schools; as well as outreach, support and training accommodation.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Education to detail how many (i) informal; and (ii) formal cases of (a) threats; (b) harassment; (c) sexual harassment; and (d) stalking have been lodged by his staff over the last three years; and to detail (iii) the internal procedures taken; and (iv) how the victims were supported.

**(AQW 6881/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** For the calendar years 2014, 2015 and for 2016 up to the current date:

- (i) The Department does not hold a record of informal cases lodged by staff of (a) threats; (b) harassment; (c) sexual harassment; and (d) stalking; and
- (ii) (iii) and (iv) As the total number of formal cases lodged in the above categories is fewer than five, the information is withheld as it is personal information and the release of the information would be in breach of the first principle of the Data Protection Act 1998, in that it would be unfair.

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Education how many teachers took sickness absence, in each year since 2011.

**(AQW 6884/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The following table details the number of teachers having a period of sickness absence in each financial year since 2011/12.

**Table 1. Number of teachers taking a period of sickness absence, 2011/12 – 2015/16.**

Financial year	Number of teachers taking a period of sickness absence
2011/12	9,544
2012/13	9,891
2013/14	9,670
2014/15	9,591
2015/16	9,306

**Source:** Teachers' Pay and Pensions Administration System

- 1 Teachers at Voluntary Grammar schools and their respective preparatory departments are excluded.
- 2 The following types of teacher are included in the teacher sickness absence:
  - full-time permanent teachers;

- part-time permanent teachers;
- teachers paid on a 1/365th basis; and
- peripatetic teachers.

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many schools were closed in each of the last five years; and (ii) how many are planned to close in 2016.

**(AQW 6885/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Over the last five school years 76 schools have closed. This figure includes schools that have closed to facilitate a planned amalgamation.

2011/12	-	17	
2012/13	-	18	
2013/14	-	9	
2014/15	-	21	
2015/16	-	11	No further closures are planned to take effect during 2016.

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Education to detail the time allocation formula used by the Education Authority to calculate the time in hours for the use of an educational psychologist for (i) a primary school; and (ii) a post-primary school.

**(AQW 6886/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority (EA) has confirmed that the time allocation formula used by its Educational Psychology Service takes into account three factors for each school: School Enrolment, Social Deprivation (based on free school meals) and Attainment (based on Key Stage Two literacy and numeracy results at primary school level, and GCSE results at post-primary school level). An index is calculated for each factor, resulting in a combined needs index for each school.

(i) At primary school, time allocated is weighted as follows:

- 50% on school enrolment
- 25% on social deprivation
- 25% on educational attainment

Primary schools with higher levels of free school meals and lower Key Stage Two results should receive more psychology time than other schools with similar school enrolments.

(ii) At post-primary school, time allocated is weighted as follows:

- 25% on school enrolment
- 50% on social deprivation
- 25% on educational attainment

The EA has advised that the weighting for school enrolment and social deprivation was reversed at post-primary level in an attempt to target more psychology time towards post-primary schools with higher levels of social deprivation.

The EA has further advised that the time allocation formula has been applied consistently and equitably throughout the EA to promote commonality for all schools.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Strule Campus in Omagh.

**(AQW 6924/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Department is making significant progress on the delivery of the Campus which remains on track for planned opening in September 2020.

The first school on site, Arvalee School and Resource Centre, was completed in the summer with the school opening on 6 September 2016. In terms of the remainder of the Campus, which includes the other five schools and the shared facilities, site wide demolition has been completed and designs will reach developed design stage before the end of this year.

The procurement exercise for a Site Preparation Works contract is currently being completed, with work due to commence early 2017. The procurement of an Integrated Supply Team to further develop and construct the campus began at the start of November, with construction of the campus due to commence in autumn 2017 and complete by summer 2020.

Alongside the design and construction workstreams, a Memorandum of Agreement, setting out arrangements for ownership, governance and management of the campus, has been agreed with managing authorities and work has started to develop an education model and funding arrangements for the campus.

Further details on the background to the Programme and current progress are available at [Strule.org](http://Strule.org).

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister of Education pursuant to AQW 5356/16-21, to detail the urgent works.

**(AQW 6928/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Urgent works to remove asbestos from the boiler house at Blackwater Integrated College were completed in June 2015. A scheme to re-insulate the boiler house was completed in September 2016.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister of Education how many schools have not yet achieved capital viability.  
(AQW 6929/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** Five schools have not yet reached capital viability. These schools are:

- Gaelscoil na Speiríní (Draperstown),
- Gaelscoil an Lonnáin (Belfast),
- Gaelscoil na Daróige (Londonderry),
- Gaelcholáiste Dhoire (Dungiven) and;
- Blackwater Integrated College (Downpatrick).

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister of Education to outline for how many years is a school classified as a new school.  
(AQW 6930/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** My Department does not have a classification for “new schools”.

When a school is newly established it is done so through the approval of a Development Proposal to establish a grant-aided school of a specific management type and size in an identified location.

For a school to be newly established it must meet certain requirements to become a grant-aided school and initially be eligible for recurrent funding and in time to be eligible for capital funding. I refer the Member to my answer to her earlier question (AQW5356/16-21 refers) published on 28 October 2016 which set out the requirements under the Sustainable Schools Policy (SSP) for minimum Year 8 intakes for newly established post – primary schools.

For a newly established primary school to be eligible for recurrent funding it must have 15 Year 1 pupils in the first year and 20 pupils Year 1 pupils in all subsequent years to reach a total of 140 for urban areas and for rural areas a school must have 12 Year 1 pupils in the first year and 15 Year 1 pupils in subsequent years to reach a total of 105. To become eligible for capital funding a school must demonstrate stable enrolment trends at or above the SSP minimum over a period of 3 consecutive years following its establishment.

During the development phase a recently established school is expected to grow in line with the minimum requirement set out in the SSP from Year 1 for Primary schools or Year 8 for Post-primary schools. This phased growth will be considered during the Area Planning process against the SSP criteria.

However, should a recently established school be unable to demonstrate sustained pupil growth I expect the relevant school planning authorities to review the situation and take appropriate action to address sustainability. The overriding consideration must always be the pupils involved.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) why Grant Maintained Integrated schools pay VAT on free school meals; and (ii) why this cost cannot be recovered from the school budget.  
(AQW 6931/16-21)

**Mr Weir:**

- (i) The rules in relation to how VAT is charged and the rates applied are determined by HM Revenue and Customs. Where a Grant Maintained Integrated school chooses to contract out its school meals service (including free school meals) to a third party, such as the EA or another commercial organisation, we understand that the service may be subject to VAT depending on the service supplier VAT status.
- (ii) From 2014-15, as a result of the Independent Review of the Common Funding Scheme, VG and GMI schools are now able to submit VAT in Grant claims to the Department for the amount of VAT incurred on allowable expenditure. VAT reimbursement incurred on canteen expenditure, including free schools meals, is not allowable and DE does not provide VAT in Grant funding for this.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education to outline the rationale for the definition of a rural area as defined in the Sustainable Schools Policy, in that an urban areas comprise of Belfast and Londonderry and all other areas are regarded as rural.

(AQW 6943/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** The Department’s Sustainable Schools Policy defines urban and rural areas in a manner consistent with a 2005 recommendation from the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group that government departments and other users should consider defining urban and rural areas in ways which are appropriate for different programmes and projects.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education when he plans to announce the outcome of the curriculum review.  
(AQW 6944/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** I have stated that I intend to progress a review of the statutory curriculum during this mandate.

The timing of such a review has yet to be determined.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education whether there are any circumstances where a school considered unsustainable would remain open.

**(AQW 6945/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Sustainable Schools Policy (SSP) aims to ensure that all schools are sustainable in terms of the quality of educational experience of children, enrolment trends, financial position, school leadership and management, accessibility and the strength of their links to the community.

When a Development Proposal is received each school is assessed on the basis of its own particular circumstances against the six criteria before any decision is made.

In exceptional circumstances a school that is considered 'unsustainable' when assessed against some of the SSP criteria may still be of strategic importance to provide pupils with access to education provision in an area. In line with the policy I take a range of issues into consideration before making a decision on a case by case basis. The unique circumstances of each case determine the important factors in those considerations.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education what processes are currently in place for identifying the need for a school closure.  
**(AQW 6946/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** My Department's Sustainable Schools Policy (SSP) is the framework for schools and managing authorities to use in accessing the sustainability of primary and post-primary schools. The six criteria and supporting indicators clearly illustrate what a sustainable educational experience should look like.

The Sustainable Schools Policy is implemented through the Area Planning process. My Department has published clear guidance on the Area Planning process for the school planning and managing authorities which references the policy context and the outcomes expected for children and young people. This can be accessed via the following link <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/revised-area-planning-guidance-27-september-2016.pdf>

The draft Strategic Area Plan "Providing Pathways" for the three year period from April 2017 to March 2020 recently published by the Education Authority confirms that in some areas there are too many school places for the number of children and young people available to fill them. In other areas it highlights that there is a sufficient number of places but they are not in the right place.

Any decision I take regarding the future of a school is made in the context of Area planning and Departmental policies taking account of all relevant local circumstances. Significant changes to a school must be dealt with through the statutory Development Proposal process.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister of Education (i) for an outline of the funding model being considered for the Childcare Strategy 2015-25; and (ii) whether the Childcare Strategy will have a long term budget attached to it or will it be funded via monitoring rounds.

**(AQW 7026/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** I hope to bring forward the final version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken account of the many consultation responses received, the Programme for Government and the new opportunities that now exist to align childcare and Early Years initiatives.

The budget for the final Childcare Strategy will be determined in the context of this process, along with the Executive's agreement of the overall 2017-18 Budget. When agreed by the Executive, the Strategy may include further funding opportunities for a range of childcare provision to be supported.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education when his Department became aware that the incorrect storage of the chemical 2, 4-dinitrophenylhydrazine posed a safety risk in schools.

**(AQW 7031/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** 2,4-dinitrophenylhydrazine (2,4-DNPH) is on the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) legacy and revised A Level Chemistry specification and will have been used by schools continuously. It is also on the revised specifications for OCR, Edexcel and WJEC. Schools were already aware of the storage requirements.

Following notification of several incidents in schools in England involving 2,4-DNPH, the Home Office contacted the Department of Justice, who contacted my Department on Friday 28 October 2016.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education to detail what procedures are currently in place to ensure that the use of chemicals for educational purposes in schools does not become a safety risk.

**(AQW 7032/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority (EA) is a member of the Consortium of Local Education Authorities for the Provision of Science Services (CLEAPSS) and pays an annual subscription to enable schools to access CLEAPSS resources.

CLEAPSS gives comprehensive, proactive advice to schools regarding storage, preparation, use and disposal of chemicals. Schools are advised to use the specific, detailed guidance provided by CLEAPSS and they can also contact the CLEAPSS dedicated helpline if they have any queries regarding the safe use of chemicals.

The EA employs an Executive Technician, who can provide advice to schools in relation to generic health and safety issues, including work with chemicals.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the steps he has taken to ensure the safety of young people in light of the recent health and safety risks relating to chemicals being stored for educational use in schools; and (ii) the date he took those steps.

**(AQW 7033/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** There are hazards with all chemicals and schools should be following the Consortium of Local Education Authorities for the Provision of Science Services (CLEAPSS) guidelines. If a school has any additional queries or concerns about the safe use of chemicals, they should contact the CLEAPSS dedicated helpline.

In relation to the most recent coverage relating to the storage of 2,4-dinitrophenylhydrazine (2,4-DNPH) the following steps have been taken:

Date	Action
31 October 2016	Department of Education asked the Education Authority (EA) to contact schools to identify those with stocks of 2,4-DNPH and to also issue a reminder to schools as to the correct storage of this powdered chemical.
1 November 2016	The EA emailed all schools asking, as a matter of urgency, that they notify the EA if they hold 2,4-DNPH. The CLEAPSS Hazcard was provided, which contains a risk assessment and storage instructions for the chemical.  This audit circular also asked schools to identify any stock of picric acid and benzaldehyde they held. The CLEAPSS Hazcards for these chemicals were also provided to schools.
2 November 2016	The EA issued further advice to schools explaining that they should contact CLEAPSS if they had stocks of 2,4-DNPH which had not been correctly stored.  CLEAPSS also issued a special note asking schools to check their storage arrangements of 2,4-DNPH.
3 November 2016	CCEA updated its Chemistry microsites regarding storage of 2,4-DNPH.
7 November 2016	The EA issued a reminder to schools asking them to respond as soon as possible to the audit circular relating to stocks of 2,4-DNPH, picric acid and benzaldehyde.
8 November 2016	A further reminder was issued by the EA asking schools to check all stores for stocks of picric acid.

The EA has been engaged with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to ensure the efficient and safe disposal of 2,4-DNPH and picric acid from schools, where required.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education what date did his Department contact the Education Authority regarding the chemical 2, 4-dinitrophenylhydrazine.

**(AQW 7034/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Department was alerted to the incidents in England by the Department of Justice on Friday 28 October 2016. Officials contacted the Education Authority on the next working day, Monday 31 October 2016.

**Ms Bunting** asked the Minister of Education (i) to list each Outdoor Education Centre; (ii) where each centre is located; (iii) what activities are on offer in each centre; (iv) how many people can be accommodated in each centre, broken down by pupils and accompanying staff; (v) the number of weeks per year that each centre is not in use; and (vi) how far in advance each centre is fully booked.

**(AQW 7164/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority has provided the following information that you have requested in relation to Statutory Outdoor Education Centres.

(i) Outdoor Education Centre	(ii) Location	(iii) Activities on Offer	(iv) Number Accommo- dated* (YP/ Staff)	(v) Number of Weeks Not in Use	(vi) Advance Bookings (date of booking)
Ardnabannon OEC	3Ardnabannon Road Castlewellan BT31 9EN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Environmental awareness</li> <li>■ Fieldwork/Studies</li> <li>■ Personal and social development</li> <li>■ GCSE PE Modules</li> <li>■ Year 8 induction</li> <li>■ Leadership training</li> <li>■ DofE Award expedition training</li> <li>■ Learning for Life and Work</li> <li>■ Indoor climbing</li> <li>■ Bush craft</li> <li>■ Hillwalking</li> <li>■ High ropes</li> <li>■ Orienteering</li> <li>■ Scrambling</li> <li>■ Bouldering</li> <li>■ Canoeing</li> <li>■ Kayaking</li> <li>■ Rock climbing</li> <li>■ Camping</li> <li>■ Mountain biking</li> <li>■ Zip line</li> </ul>	100 (91/9)	4	21-25 Aug 2017
Bushmills OEC	7 Priestland Road Bushmills County Antrim BT57 8QP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Environmental awareness</li> <li>■ Field studies</li> <li>■ Learning for life and work</li> <li>■ Thinking skills and personal capabilities</li> <li>■ Personal and social development</li> <li>■ DofE Award expedition training</li> <li>■ High ropes</li> <li>■ Low ropes</li> <li>■ Climbing</li> <li>■ Mountain biking</li> <li>■ Tunnel complex</li> <li>■ Football</li> <li>■ Volleyball</li> <li>■ Orienteering</li> <li>■ Boating</li> <li>■ Canoeing</li> </ul>	77(70/7)	4	21-25 Aug 2017

(i) Outdoor Education Centre	(ii) Location	(iii) Activities on Offer	(iv) Number Accommo- dated* (YP/ Staff)	(v) Number of Weeks Not in Use	(vi) Advance Bookings (date of booking)
Delamont OEC	88 Downpatrick Road Killyleagh Downpatrick  BT30 9TZ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Field studies</li> <li>■ Thinking skills and personal capabilities</li> <li>■ Learning for life and work</li> <li>■ Leadership training</li> <li>■ DofE Award expedition training</li> <li>■ Archery</li> <li>■ Banana boating</li> <li>■ Biking</li> <li>■ Canoeing</li> <li>■ Climbing</li> <li>■ Bouldering</li> <li>■ Kayaking</li> <li>■ Low ropes</li> <li>■ Orienteering</li> <li>■ Sea safari</li> <li>■ Team exercises</li> <li>■ Abseiling</li> <li>■ Walking</li> </ul>	35(32/3)	4	3-7 April 2017
Gortatole OEC	147 Marble Arch Florencecourt Enniskillen  BT92 1ED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Environmental awareness</li> <li>■ Field studies</li> <li>■ Thinking skills and personal capabilities</li> <li>■ Learning for life and work</li> <li>■ DofE Award expedition training</li> <li>■ High ropes</li> <li>■ Canoeing</li> <li>■ Kayaking</li> <li>■ Sailing</li> <li>■ Team building</li> <li>■ Football</li> <li>■ Volleyball</li> <li>■ Basketball</li> <li>■ Caving</li> </ul>	50(46/4)	6	Bookings currently until end June 2017

(i) Outdoor Education Centre	(ii) Location	(iii) Activities on Offer	(iv) Number Accommo- dated* (YP/ Staff)	(v) Number of Weeks Not in Use	(vi) Advance Bookings (date of booking)
Killowen OEC	Killowen Road Rostrevor  Newry  BT34 3AG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Field studies</li> <li>■ Environmental awareness</li> <li>■ Leadership development</li> <li>■ DofE Award expedition training</li> <li>■ Thinking skills and personal capabilities</li> <li>■ Learning for life and work</li> <li>■ Low ropes</li> <li>■ Climbing</li> <li>■ Kayaking</li> <li>■ Orienteering</li> <li>■ Raft building</li> <li>■ Sailing</li> <li>■ Team building</li> <li>■ Canoeing</li> </ul>	56(51/5)	6	Bookings currently until end June 2017
Killyleagh OEC	Shore Road Killyleagh BT30 9UE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Personal and social development</li> <li>■ Fieldwork/studies</li> <li>■ Year 8 induction</li> <li>■ Learning for life and work</li> <li>■ DofE Award expedition training</li> <li>■ Leadership training</li> <li>■ Sailing</li> <li>■ Orienteering</li> <li>■ Canoeing</li> <li>■ Kayaking</li> <li>■ Climbing</li> <li>■ Hill walking</li> <li>■ Mountain biking</li> <li>■ Bush craft</li> <li>■ Bouldering</li> </ul>	40 (37/3)	4	26-29 June 2017

(i) Outdoor Education Centre	(ii) Location	(iii) Activities on Offer	(iv) Number Accommo- dated* (YP/ Staff)	(v) Number of Weeks Not in Use	(vi) Advance Bookings (date of booking)
Shannaghmore OEC	The Ballagh Kilkeel Road Newcastle BT33 0LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Environmental awareness</li> <li>■ Field studies</li> <li>■ Leadership development</li> <li>■ Thinking skills and personal capabilities</li> <li>■ Learning for life and work</li> <li>■ DofE Award expedition training</li> <li>■ Hill walking</li> <li>■ Climbing</li> <li>■ Low ropes</li> <li>■ Orienteering</li> <li>■ Team building</li> <li>■ High ropes</li> <li>■ Canoeing</li> <li>■ Zip line</li> <li>■ Mountain biking</li> <li>■ Kayaking</li> <li>■ Raft building</li> <li>■ Woodland</li> <li>■ Archery</li> </ul>	60(55/5)		7-12 August 2017
Woodhall OEC	27 Moneygran Road Kilrea Co Londonderry BT51 5SJ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Personal and social education</li> <li>■ Education for mutual</li> <li>■ Understanding Thinking skills and personal capabilities</li> <li>■ Learning for life and work</li> <li>■ Environmental awareness</li> <li>■ Field studies</li> <li>■ DofE Award expedition training</li> <li>■ Leadership development</li> <li>■ High ropes</li> <li>■ Low ropes</li> <li>■ Climbing</li> <li>■ Archery</li> <li>■ Zip lines</li> <li>■ Surfing</li> <li>■ Bush craft</li> <li>■ Canoeing</li> <li>■ Kayaking</li> <li>■ Raft building</li> <li>■ Banana boating</li> <li>■ Hill walking</li> <li>■ Orienteering</li> </ul>	40(37/3)	4	14–18 Aug 2017

(i) Outdoor Education Centre	(ii) Location	(iii) Activities on Offer	(iv) Number Accommo- dated* (YP/ Staff)	(v) Number of Weeks Not in Use	(vi) Advance Bookings (date of booking)
Ballyhome	51 Ballyhome Road Coleraine  BT52 2LX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ No activities or outdoor equipment are provided.</li> <li>■ Personal and social development</li> <li>■ Team development</li> <li>■ Leadership development</li> <li>■ Themed topics e.g. Health education</li> </ul>	34(31/3)	4	5–12 Aug 2017
Corick	3 Corickbeg Road Newtown- stewart  Co Tyrone  BT78 4DN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Personal and social development</li> <li>■ Leadership development</li> <li>■ Health education</li> <li>■ Team building</li> <li>■ Canoeing</li> <li>■ Climbing</li> <li>■ Orienteering</li> <li>■ Hill walking</li> </ul>	24(22/2)	17	3-4 December 2016
Derganagh House	33 Rathlin Road Ballycastle  BT54 6LD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ No activities are provided. Equipment is available by qualified instructors Social development</li> <li>■ Leadership development</li> <li>■ Team development</li> <li>■ Outdoor activities</li> <li>■ Themed topics e.g. Health</li> <li>■ education</li> </ul>	34 (31/3)	4	6–12 Aug 2017

\* A normal ratio of accompanying staff to young people is 1:10 dependent on the activity undertaken.

**Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Education whether he intends to re-engage with the trade unions prior to the impending strike action on 30 November.

**(AQW 7217/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Industrial action by teachers has been ongoing since 2011. The most recent escalation of this industrial action can be linked to a recommendation by the management side of the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC) regarding teachers pay for 2015 and 2016. The total pay deal is 2.61%.

This pay deal followed intense negotiations, over more than 15 months, between representatives of the Northern Ireland Teaching Council (NITC), comprised of the five recognised teaching unions, and the management side of the TNC, where earlier and better offers were made by the management side and rejected by the NITC.

As Minister of Education I must work within the parameters of Executive Pay Policy and in doing so ensure that a balance is struck between, rightly acknowledging the contribution that individual teachers make to our education system, protecting as many jobs as possible and addressing the considerable financial pressures being faced by schools.

The TNC is the recognised negotiating machinery for teachers' terms and conditions, and it is therefore through this forum that the matter will be addressed; I am represented on this forum.

I urge the teaching unions to suspend their industrial action and instead move forward in discussions regarding 2017 and beyond.

**Mr Lyons** asked the Minister of Education to detail the total number of pupils in East Antrim enrolled in (i) controlled schools; (ii) maintained schools; and (iii) integrated schools.

**(AQW 7222/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** In 2015/16, the breakdown of pupils resident in East Antrim by management type is as follows:

(i) Controlled schools	9,277
(ii) Maintained schools	2,243
(iii) Integrated schools	1,072

There are a further 2,157 pupils resident in East Antrim who attended voluntary schools.

**Source:** NI school census

**Notes:**

- 1 Figures include funded children in nursery schools, primary (including nursery, reception and year 1-7 classes), post primary and special schools.
- 2 Maintained schools includes Catholic maintained and other maintained schools
- 3 Enrolments in controlled integrated schools have been included in the integrated total only

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) what other funding streams does the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools have other than his Department; and (ii) to what value.

**(AQW 7239/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** CCMS have confirmed that the Department of Education is its only funding body.

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) all outstanding back payments that are due to classroom assistants by the Education Authority; (ii) the reasons for the delay; and (iii) the timescale for when such payments will be made.

**(AQW 7245/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Department of Education is not the employer of staff in the Education Authority (EA). The EA has advised that:-

- (i) Outstanding back payments are due on the pay arrears of the April 2016 Pay Award and Job evaluation arrears.
- (ii) For operational reasons there is always likely to be a delay in making back payments e.g. appeals being lodged by individuals; delays in receiving outstanding information and in the case of Job Evaluation arrears individuals not having signed up to the variation of contract.
- (iii) The EA is working to make all back payments to eligible staff as soon as possible. It is hoped that the back payments related to the 2016/17 cost of living award will be paid by January 2017. In relation to the job evaluation arrears, the majority of these have been paid, any owing payments are being dealt with as outstanding information is received.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Education whether he can give an assurance that all post-primary schools are open to career promotions for the armed forces.

**(AQW 7263/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Many schools decide to hold careers events to provide their young people with the opportunity to engage with a range of employers and find out more about different career options. It is Beneficial for pupils when schools are holding careers events, for the school to be open to the greatest range of employers and different career options. Decisions about whether to host such events and which employers to invite are a matter for individual schools.

**Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of departmentally funded pre-school provision in Newry and Armagh.

**(AQO 719/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Department of Education aims to provide a funded pre-school place to every child in their immediate pre-school year whose parents want it. In each of the last five years, at least 99.8% of children whose parents stayed with the pre-school admissions process to the end have received the offer of a funded pre-school place.

This aim is reflected in the delivery plan for the draft Programme for Government currently out for consultation.

The Pre-School Education Advisory Groups in the Education Authority are responsible for ensuring that there is adequate pre-school provision in local areas, and make allocations of funded places to voluntary and private providers on an annual basis, based on an assessment of local need.

The Education Authority has advised that there were sufficient places in the Newry and Armagh constituency to provide a place for every child whose parents wanted it, and places remained available at the end of the pre-school admissions process which parents could apply for by contacting those settings directly.

**Mr Smith** asked the Minister of Education, given it is now six months into the financial year, why schools have not received a response to their three-year budget proposals.

**(AQO 720/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The delay in agreeing three-year budget proposals should be considered in the context of the challenging financial circumstances facing the education sector.

The Education Authority (EA), as the funding authority for controlled and maintained schools, has advised that schools' three-budget plans have not been approved due to the increasing number of schools projecting a deteriorating financial position. The EA is working with these schools to ensure that all possible actions have been considered to help improve their financial position.

I recognise the challenging financial position facing schools in the current financial year. It is in this context that I recently provided £14 million of additional spending power to schools.

My announcement will inevitably impact on schools' three year budget plans and the EA is presently considering this in the overall approval process.

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Education for an update on computer-based assessments.  
**(AQO 721/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The computer based assessments funded by my Department, namely the Northern Ireland Literacy Assessment (NILA) and the Northern Ireland Numeracy Assessment (NINA), are provided on a voluntary basis to schools. However, schools are free to use other assessment tools from commercial providers, and many do.

This is the last year of the existing contracts for NILA and NINA so it is an opportune time to review the position on Computer Based Assessments. Over the coming months I will be considering the way forward.

My Department expects schools to continue to carry out diagnostic assessment using an assessment or assessments of their own choice.

The results of this assessment should be used as the basis of engagement with pupils' parents or guardians.

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Education whether the provision of music lessons in schools is a Departmental priority.  
**(AQO 722/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** All schools are required by law to teach music as it is a statutory part of the curriculum from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 3. Pupils may also choose to study music as an exam choice at Key Stage 4.

In addition, the Education Authority's (EA) Music Service enables learners from all backgrounds to receive musical education of the highest quality. As the service is a non-statutory one, it will be required to consider how it might reach challenging savings targets. It is the responsibility of the EA to prioritise its resources accordingly and schools also have a key role to play in ensuring that our young people access music education.

**Ms Archibald** asked the Minister of Education for an update on his Department's efforts to reduce the statutory timescale for completing Special Education Needs statements.  
**(AQO 723/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** It is in the interests of children and their parents that statutory assessments and statements are made as quickly as possible, having regard to the need for thorough consideration of the issues in each individual case.

My Department works closely with the Education Authority (EA), which is responsible for the statutory assessments for children with special educational needs (SEN), on ways to improve this process.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 received Royal Assent in March 2016 and is the first building block of the new SEN Framework.

Section 6 of the Act commenced on the 30 September contributes to reducing the statutory timescales within the statutory assessment process. The new provision allows the EA to proceed with the consideration of statutory assessment in 22 days, or earlier with the consent of the parent rather than 29 days.

I propose that a reduction in the existing timescales will be achieved through new SEN regulations. The draft SEN Regulations, which were subject to consultation earlier in the year, proposed a reduction from 26 weeks to 20 weeks in the timescales for the statutory assessment process through to the issue of a final statement.

I will shortly give consideration to the recommendations which have emerged from the consultation on the draft SEN regulations including the statutory timescales.

My Department has already commenced engagement with the Assembly Education Committee on the responses to the consultation on the draft SEN Regulations and another meeting to discuss the detail within the regulations, including the proposed timescales, is scheduled for January.

As the draft SEN Regulations are subject to draft affirmative resolution it will be the Assembly which will determine, in due course, whether to run with the suggested reduction in the timescales.

**Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Education to outline his Department's strategy for further improving levels of educational attainment in non-selective post-primary schools with a high percentage of children receiving free school meals.

**(AQO 724/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Firstly, it is important to acknowledge the improvement in outcomes being achieved by pupils in our non grammar post-primary schools. This group of schools has demonstrated a year on year increase in the proportion of their young people achieving key attainment thresholds and going on to positive destinations. I give full credit to the pupils, their teachers and the school leaders.

We know from our own and international evidence that there is a strong link between social disadvantage and educational underachievement. It is recognised and reflected in my policy that schools, and in particular the teachers in the classroom, are best placed to identify those children at risk of underachievement and to identify the most appropriate strategies to address that.

To support schools, I have maintained the level of funding for Targeting Social Need and in this financial year some £77.5m has been allocated directly to schools to target the learning of socially disadvantaged pupils at risk of educational underachievement.

I am also funding a number of programmes which non grammars are participating in. This includes the Key Stage 2/3 CPD project related to literacy and numeracy and transition; the Extended Schools Programme; Full Service Programmes in north and west Belfast; and the West Belfast Community Project.

I am also keen to ensure that good practice, that has demonstrated positive impact, is widely shared. I am supporting this through resources such as ESAGS.tv, Fronter, NISPLAN, as well as the 'Sharing the Learning' Programme and the Tackling Underachievement conferences at which an online communication and learning platform was launched that educators can use to share good practice.

**Mr T Buchanan** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the development of the five schools to be commenced at Strule Shared Education Campus site.

**(AQO 725/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Department is making significant progress on the delivery of the Campus which remains on track for planned opening in September 2020.

Construction of the first school on site, Arvalee School and Resource Centre, was completed in the summer with the school opening on 6 September 2016. I was delighted to join with the First Minister and the deputy First Minister recently to celebrate the opening of the school which is a significant moment for both Arvalee School and the Strule Shared Education Campus.

In terms of the remainder of the Campus, which includes the other five schools and the shared facilities, site wide demolition has been completed and designs will reach developed design stage before the end of this year.

The procurement exercise for a Site Preparation Works contract is currently being completed, with construction works due to commence early 2017.

The procurement of an Integrated Supply Team to further develop and construct the campus began at the start of November, with construction of the campus due to commence in autumn 2017 and complete by summer 2020.

Alongside the design and construction workstreams, a Memorandum of Agreement, setting out arrangements for ownership, governance and management of the campus, has been agreed with managing authorities and work has started to develop an education model and funding arrangements for the campus.

The Strule Shared Education Campus is at the forefront of shared education facilities and will be a vibrant place where those from different backgrounds can learn together in an environment that will encourage respect for all.

Further details on the background to the Programme and current progress are available at [Strule.org](http://Strule.org).

**Ms Dillon** asked the Minister of Education whether his Department has commissioned research or gathered data on the costs for parents associated with the preparation for unregulated or regulated transfer tests, in particular the cost of paying for private tutors.

**(AQO 726/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** My Department has not commissioned any research into this area.

However, I am aware that the demand for private tuition has increased since the 11+ was abolished and since schools were prohibited from coaching or supporting children for the transfer tests.

I recognise that primary schools are best placed to meet and respond to the needs of their pupils and communities.

The guidance issued by my Department on 7 September this year provides increased flexibility and removes any perceived threat to schools who wish to help and support their pupils to prepare for the transfer process.

Making this preparation possible in schools should help to reduce the need for parents to pay private tutors for coaching outside of school as has been the case in the past.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister of Education, in light of the recommendations made in the Independent Review of Home to School Transport 2014, what plans he, or any of his Department's arm's-length bodies, have for reforming the delivery of home to school transport.

**(AQO 727/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** I am currently considering the policy recommendations contained in the Independent Review of Home to School Transport published in December 2014.

Any decision to review or amend the current policy would be subject to full public consultation. Following this I will decide if, and to what extent, the current policy needs revised.

In the meantime many of the operational recommendations contained in the Review are being taken forward by relevant organisations including the Education Authority.

**Mr O'Dowd** asked the Minister of Education whether his Department plans to reverse the decision of the Education Authority to convert six special schools from full-time to part-time provision.

**(AQO 728/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** It is a matter for the Education Authority (EA) to determine the nature and duration of provision needed to meet the needs of children with special educational needs (SEN).

Consequently, it is the EA's responsibility to determine whether part-time early years' provision for a child will facilitate access to the appropriate level of support required and that the children are appropriately placed in a setting that meets their individual requirements as identified in their Statement of SEN.

The interim arrangements put in place by the EA for the 2016/17 academic year were necessary to enable the Authority to meet its statutory obligations to ensure adequate provision for those children with SEN for whom a special school placement is required, and to increase the accessibility of special school provision for children in the early years closer to the communities in which they reside. This included interim arrangements to six special schools where increased pressures were identified in relation to the number of nursery places required.

The EA formally launched its Strategic Review of Nursery Provision in Special Schools on 25 October 2016. Further to engagement and consultation with stakeholders, including special schools, a way forward for nursery provision in special schools will be agreed.

No long-term changes to existing arrangements will be implemented in advance of the outcome of the EA's Strategic Review.

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister of Education what action he is taking to address the concerns raised by teachers' unions that have resulted in industrial action and picketing.

**(AQO 729/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Industrial action by teachers has been ongoing since 2011. The most recent escalation of this industrial action can be linked directly to a recommendation by the management side of the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC) regarding teachers pay for 2015 and 2016. The total pay deal is 2.61%.

This pay deal followed intense negotiations, over more than 15 months, between representatives of the Northern Ireland Teaching Council (NITC), comprised of the five recognised teaching unions, and the management side of the TNC, where earlier and better offers were made by the management side and rejected by the NITC.

As Minister of Education I must work within the parameters of Executive Pay Policy and in doing so ensure that a balance is struck between, rightly acknowledging the contribution that individual teachers make to our education system, protecting as many jobs as possible and addressing the considerable financial pressures being faced by schools.

The TNC is the recognised negotiating machinery for teachers' terms and conditions, and it is therefore through this forum that the matter will be addressed; I am represented on this forum.

I urge the teaching unions to suspend their industrial action and instead move forward in discussions regarding 2017 and beyond.

## Department for the Economy

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the financial benefits of free trade across the border.

**(AQW 2468/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy):** My Department's strategy for exports, 'Export Matters', recognises the importance of building a larger and more outward-facing private sector in Northern Ireland in order to secure more prosperity and employment for our people. In that regard, it recognises the importance of maximising our external sales while Invest NI's newly launched Trade Accelerator Plan has a clear priority of helping early stage exporters take greater advantage of the opportunities in those markets closest to us in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister for the Economy to detail how much has been spent on hospitality by his Department since May 2016; and to provide a breakdown.

**(AQW 3701/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** In this Department with 1,055 employees the total spend was £5,568.

**Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister for the Economy how much higher education institutions and further education colleges have benefitted financially from EU funding programmes in each of the past three years, including Horizon2020, Erasmus and the European Social Fund.

**(AQW 4581/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** The Department does not hold this collective information in respect of higher education institutions.

With regard to further education colleges, the following information is sourced from the latest available data and provides the total amount of funding received by the six colleges:

	2014 €	2015 €	2016 €
Horizon 2020	0	0	86,436
Erasmus +	741,026	776,038	1,523,283
European Social Fund	29,641,693	28,627,155	19,594,036
Other EU programmes	2,004,124	1,804,353	489,164

These figures have been converted to Euro using the conversion rate £1.00 = €1.11.

**Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister for the Economy for a geographical breakdown of the 11,400 properties that have been selected to have direct fibre broadband brought directly to the premises.

**(AQW 4639/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** My Department is managing the delivery of the Superfast Roll-out Programme. It is expected that, by 31 December 2017, this will provide access to superfast broadband, with speeds of at least 24 Megabits per second, to around 39,000 premises, primarily in rural areas.

The intervention areas for my Department's projects are identified through complex engineering models prepared by BT under their contracts with the Department. The aim is always to ensure value for money, while maximising the number of premises that benefit from the funding available.

The geographical locations of premises forecast to benefit from fibre to the premise technology will be determined by BT's detailed planning, design and survey process. This information will become available once services have been deployed and checks undertaken to assess the services that can be delivered. Details are subsequently made available by BT and in turn made available on the Internet.

It is important to recognise that there are alternative technologies that can be used to deliver broadband services. For those premises that continue to have access to services of less than 2Mbps, the Department offers assistance with the cost of installing a basic broadband service (using satellite or wireless technology), from a list of registered suppliers. No household or business, which meets the eligibility criteria, need pay more than £400 to access a basic broadband scheme over 12 months.

The NI Executive's draft Programme for Government (PfG) includes an Indicator to improve internet connectivity. The outcome of the PfG and related budget discussions will dictate the nature and scale of the Department's future telecommunications intervention.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for the Economy how the Omagh Campus of the South West Regional College is developing its specialist focus in key areas of the local economy; and how it is developing networks of experts to enable the sharing of emerging best practice and the latest developments.

**Mr Hamilton:** South West College provides support to the economy in Omagh and the wider region across a range of specialist areas including engineering and advanced manufacturing, ICT, creative technologies and renewable energy. As established by the Education and Training Inspectorate, South West College is a Grade 1/ outstanding training provider and offers a high quality portfolio of professional and technical provision, tailored to the needs of industry and economic stakeholders. This includes a modern suite of over 20 foundation degree courses which are also designed to support new and emerging industries such as big data, 3D printing, additive manufacturing and virtual commerce.

The College directly supports the local economy through the Department for the Economy's InnovateUs and Skills Focus programmes and in the last 18 months, 31 companies in the Omagh area have benefitted from skills development programmes in ICT, sustainable construction, hydraulics and leadership and management.

The College has a particular focus on SME innovation, and through its award winning InnoTech Centre, has delivered 18 innovation voucher projects for companies in the Omagh area in the past two years covering topics such as waste handling, construction and energy products.

Economic Development is also an integral strand of the ongoing implementation of the Further Education Strategy, Further Education Means Success. The Strategy will help to develop world class professional and technical education and strengthen the economy through employer up-skilling and innovation and will also work to identify college specialisms.

**Mr Chambers** asked the Minister for the Economy how many non-domestic projects were awarded grants under the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme in (i) 2012/13; (ii) 2013/14; (iii) 2014/15; and (iv) 2015/16.

**(AQW 5097/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** The numbers of non domestic projects awarded Renewable Heat Incentive grants are as follows:-

Year	Number of projects
2012/13	5
2013/14	82
2014/15	315
2015/16	856*

\* Applications were received for a further 870 projects that were not accredited during 2015/16

**Mr Chambers** asked the Minister for the Economy how many domestic projects were awarded grants under the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme in (i) 2014/15; and (ii) 2015/16.

**(AQW 5113/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** The number of domestic projects supported under the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme are as follows:-

Year	Number of Projects Supported
2014/15	62*
2015/16	1530

\* This figure does not include the interim domestic Renewable Heat Premium Payment (RHPP) scheme, which closed in November 2014.

**Dr Farry** asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the economic contribution made by local universities.

**(AQW 5458/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** Our higher education system, and the highly skilled workforce which it supports, is an important part of Northern Ireland's economic infrastructure. It makes a significant impact on our economy in terms of the core provision of higher level skills, research and knowledge exchange which contributes to driving growth in a wide range of sectors and through the generation of spin-out companies.

Local universities are also businesses in their own right and, as such, they play an important role in creating jobs, and generating spending which stimulates other areas of our economy.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for the Economy (i) how many candidates were considered for the post of Ministerial Special Adviser; (ii) what account was taken of any potential imbalance in religious background or gender in the pool from which he selected his Special Adviser; (iii) how wide was the trawl for candidates; (iv) how did he ensure that it was broadly based as required by the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers; and (v) to publish the job description and person specification drawn up before the Special Adviser was appointed.

**(AQW 5464/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** The appointment of my Special Adviser was done in accordance with the Code Governing the Appointment of Special Advisers.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for the Economy whether his Department outlined concerns over mechanical failure of the aircraft used for the Belfast to Newark route when agreeing a subsidy package for the airline.

**(AQW 6123/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** Aircraft maintenance and safety is the responsibility of the airline, regulated by the Civil Aviation Authority.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for the Economy pursuant to AQW3874/16-21, (i) what evidence exists that a direct transatlantic route from Belfast to North America has been important for Northern Ireland's economy; (ii) whether a formal business case was produced prior to the funding decision; and (iii) to publish the business case or place a copy in the Assembly Library.  
(AQW 6512/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** A direct transatlantic route from Belfast to North America has been important for Northern Ireland's economy over the past decade in terms of increasing our tourism, enhancing our prospects in attracting US based investors and helping our local companies to export their products and services.

The United States is the largest source of Foreign Direct Investment into Northern Ireland and our largest exports market outside of the EU. Over the past decade of the United Airlines service over 1 million passengers travelled on the flight, with significant benefits for local tourism.

It was not possible to produce a formal business case in the tight timescales required by United for a decision. It is regrettable that in spite of all the efforts that were made that United are terminating the service.

**Mr Dickson** asked the Minister for the Economy what reasons United Airlines has given for cancelling the Belfast to Newark flight; and why his Department was unable to secure the necessary funding.

(AQW 6637/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** United Airlines has stated that it took the decision to cancel the Belfast to Newark service due to the poor financial performance of the route. The decision was prompted by the views of European Commission officials that the support being provided by the Northern Ireland Executive to maintain the service was State aid.

The necessary funding from both my Department and Belfast International Airport had already been secured.

**Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister for the Economy who represented the Executive in the recent meeting between United Airlines, the European Commission and the Executive.

(AQO 705/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** My Department had sought a meeting with the European Commission for the purposes of getting their views on the agreement with United to secure our only trans-Atlantic route. The agreement included a commitment to engage with the Commission.

The meeting with Commission officials took place on 27 October 2016 and involved two officials from my Department and a legal adviser from the Departmental Solicitor's Office. United Airlines was also represented. The Commission officials gave their view that the agreement contained State aid and that they had received a complaint about it. United terminated the agreement on 4 November.

**Mr Lyons** asked the Minister for the Economy how he intends to increase international trade.

(AQO 706/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** I have been encouraged by the recent HMRC Regional Trade Statistics, showing Northern Ireland's manufacturing exports increased by 9.5 per cent in the year to June 2016. This is particularly pleasing as we were the only part of the United Kingdom to record an increase in exports during that period.

Building on this strong performance, my Department launched the Trade Accelerator Plan in early September, which is being delivered by Invest Northern Ireland. The Trade Accelerator Plan is gaining traction on the ground as companies realise they can access enhanced support and financial assistance to target and enter export markets and grow their sales, particularly in Great Britain.

In conjunction with the Trade Accelerator Plan, I recently announced the development of an International Trade Plan for Northern Ireland. This is an exciting initiative, whereby a Trade Advisory Board will be appointed, along with a number of Northern Ireland Trade Ambassadors, and Invest NI's international presence will be expanded, with up to ten more locations around the world by the end of 2017.

I understand the importance of having resources in the market to help companies, as I witnessed for myself, during my recent visits to the Middle East and Chicago.

Invest Northern Ireland is implementing a comprehensive overseas events programme for companies. Since April, they have organised and delivered 11 trade missions and 25 market visits, including participation at 15 trade exhibitions, on behalf of our local businesses. A further 19 overseas market visits are planned, including 5 trade missions, up to the end of March 2017.

Indeed, within the last few weeks, two of our well-known local companies, Irwin's Bakery and Tayto, secured significant export sales at a major Food exhibition in Shanghai in China.

**Mr Chambers** asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the performance of Tourism Ireland in promoting Northern Ireland as a holiday destination in overseas markets.

(AQO 707/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** I consider that Tourism Ireland plays a pivotal role in marketing Northern Ireland in its key markets – Great Britain, Germany, France and North America.

Tourism Ireland works closely with Tourism NI to ensure that its promotional themes overseas align with Tourism NI's development priorities for tourism in Northern Ireland – an integrated, collaborative approach, in conjunction with industry partners.

Tourism Ireland also provides co-operative marketing support to maximise the inbound tourism potential of existing and new air services and, notwithstanding the regrettable loss of United Airlines' direct route from the United States, Northern Ireland will benefit from improvements taking place in air access routes from other markets including Spain, Poland, Germany, Italy and Brussels.

I have recently attended Tourism Ireland events in Dubai and Germany, allowing me to experience at first hand the efforts being made by Tourism Ireland to market Northern Ireland as a leading tourism destination.

2015 was a record year for overseas tourism to Northern Ireland. GB and overseas visitors increased by 10 per cent, to almost 2 million, with growth from all of our key markets. This trend is continuing with the first six months of 2016 showing an increase of 10% in GB visitors and a rise of 8% in overseas visitors compared to the first six months of 2015. Industry feedback points to growth having continued through the summer.

My officials are continuing to work on bringing forward a new Tourism Strategy through to 2025 with a view to going out to public consultation later this year. The Strategy's key focus will be on developing NI tourism as an export business, thereby placing Tourism Ireland at the heart of the Strategy's delivery.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister for the Economy to outline each individual act of Ministerial oversight of the Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme since it commenced.

**(AQO 708/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** Ministers have been involved in each stage of the Renewable Heat Incentive schemes, including policy and business cases, changes to the Non Domestic Scheme and the suspension of both schemes.

Responsibility for the detailed design and ongoing oversight of the Renewable Heat Incentive schemes rests with Departmental officials.

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the development of an economic strategy.

**(AQO 709/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** A new Economic Strategy, which sets out our ambitious, long-term vision to transform Northern Ireland into a globally competitive economy that works for everyone, will be issued for public consultation shortly.

Together, with the Programme for Government and a new Social Strategy, the Economic Strategy will provide the basis for the Executive's work for this Assembly mandate. The Executive aims to finalise each of the documents and have them agreed in the Assembly around the turn of the year.

**Ms Bunting** asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the latest Northern Ireland Labour Market statistics.

**(AQO 711/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** I welcome the latest labour market statistics which again illustrate the positive progress being made by the Northern Ireland economy.

The statistics, published on 16th November 2016, show that the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey unemployment rate was 5.6% for the quarter July – September 2016, which is a decrease of 0.4 percentage points over the quarter and 0.3 percentage points over the year.

This is our lowest unemployment rate since October - December 2008. The rate is also well below the European Union rate of 8.6% for August and the Republic of Ireland rate of 7.9% for September 2016.

In addition, the figures in relation to the number of claimants in receipt of unemployment related benefits for October 2016 stand at 34,000. This is another positive decrease of 700 over the month and a fall of 5,900 over the year.

I also welcome the increase in the employment rate to 69.9%, up over the year by 2.1 percentage points to July - September 2016.

This is the highest rate recorded since the quarterly series began in 1995. Northern Ireland economic inactivity, at a rate of 25.8%, is at its lowest level since the series began and down 1.9 percentage points over the year.

**Mr Girvan** asked the Minister for the Economy how he is developing the local technology sector.

**(AQO 712/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** The Technology sector is of great importance to the Northern Ireland's economy and is an area where Government, industry and academia has had a focus on working collaboratively for many years.

Over the past decade Northern Ireland has built up an international reputation as a place to start-up, locate and grow technology focused businesses. The mix of highly capable talent, good advanced network infrastructure and supportive, focused Government investment have combined to create a truly world class technology sector.

Strategically important research infrastructure investment has also been made by my Department including Invest NI's position as an investment partner in world leading facilities at the Centre for Secure Information Technologies based in the Titanic Quarter and Catalyst Inc, the Northern Ireland Science Park.

Specifically, Northern Ireland is a recognised area of excellence for the utilisation of Financial Technology with local companies such as First Derivatives in Newry illustrating top class levels of sophistication with regards to technology and real time analytics working alongside the large successful inward investments that have been made by companies such as Liberty Insurance, Citi, Allstate and Chicago Mercantile Exchange.

An emerging area of technology development is in legal tech where my Department and Invest NI recently supported a major trade mission for companies, based in Northern Ireland, involved in the growing legal technology sector to visit The International Bar Association conference in Washington and Legal Innovation breakfast in New York.

The technology sector remains a key area of focus for my Department and its agencies, both in supporting the growth of new and existing local businesses and continuing to build on our strong reputation as a major global investment location for mobile, technology focused inward investment.

**Ms Ní Chuilín** asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the activities carried out by Northern Ireland Co-operation Overseas Ltd.

**(AQO 713/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** NI-CO's purpose is to market, sell and share the distinct expertise and knowledge of Northern Ireland Government departments and public bodies developed as a result of our unique history and experience.

NI-CO is a not for profit organisation which receives no funding from the Northern Ireland Government. Revenue is derived from the implementation of projects on behalf of the international donor community.

These awarding bodies include the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the European Union, the United Nations and the World Bank.

NI-CO has been particularly successful in EU Accession States and developing countries and has become one of the leading technical assistance providers in Europe in a broad range of sectors including governance, policing, civil society and healthcare.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for the Economy, given recent comments by his Department's Permanent Secretary that he cannot recall anything on this scale in relation to both the opportunity costs to public services and poor value for money, to outline the lessons learned from the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme.

**(AQO 714/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** My Department has learned a number of lessons from the development and implementation of the Non Domestic Renewable Heating Incentive Scheme.

The recent Internal Audit review of the scheme made nine recommendations.

- 1 That all schemes have cost controls built in and all changes to the amounts paid considered in light of current and future funding available.
- 2 That all assumptions underlying the operation of schemes are rigorously tested to ensure incentives are not over-generous
- 3 That all schemes have a means to control demand including a means to close them in the face of unsustainable demand.
- 4 That all major programmes have appropriate oversight arrangements in place.
- 5 That significant programmes and projects have a robust formal Risk Management Strategy.
- 6 When agreeing annual budgets, business areas confirm that they have the necessary approvals in place to cover expenditure.
- 7 That handover arrangements require the need to capture and retain organisational knowledge including current issues and risks
- 8 That where an external organisation is used to deliver services, appropriate arrangements are made to ensure that assurances are provided on a regular basis.
- 9 That all major schemes are regularly monitored to ensure that they remain affordable and value for money. Schemes will also be monitored to ensure that participants continue to meet all conditions of approval and that the scheme operates in line with the agreed Business Case. Any specific assurance provided in the Business Case or separately as part of the approval process must be captured and action taken as planned

These recommendations have been brought to the attention of all appropriate staff within the Department.

## Department of Finance

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Finance whether he will consider the erection of a memorial in the Stormont Estate to remember all those who died in An Gorta Mór / The Great Famine throughout the island of Ireland between 1845 and 1849. (AQW 2941/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance):** There are a number of sites and sculptures dedicated to people, events and ideals located within the grounds of the Stormont Estate, including the Somme Memorial, the Statue of Lord Carson, the Gleaner Sculpture, the Reconciliation Sculpture and the Mo Mowlam Play Park.

I am supportive of your proposal and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to explore in more depth your thoughts on how we might progress an appropriate memorial to those who died in An Gorta Mór / The Great Famine.

I have written to the Irish Government's National Famine Commemoration Committee to ask for their advice and assistance.

**Mr Smith** asked the Minister of Finance what rate of inflation his Department is using for its budget projections. (AQW 6398/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** The rate of inflation for Budget projections is based on the Gross Domestic Product deflators produced by the Treasury.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Finance how many people in Fermanagh and South Tyrone died by suicide in each of the last five years. (AQW 6631/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** The attached table details the number of deaths registered due to suicide<sup>1</sup> in Fermanagh and South Tyrone between 2011 and 2015, the latest year for which finalised figures are available.

**Table 1: Number of Deaths from Suicide<sup>1</sup> in Fermanagh and South Tyrone Constituency, Registered by Year (2011-2015)**

Parliamentary Constituency	Registration Year				
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	16	17	18	24	17
Overall NI Total	289	278	303	268	318

1 In considering suicide events it is conventional to include cases where the cause of death is classified as either 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'Undetermined intent'. Since 2001, the ICD10 codes used for 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury' are X60-X84 and Y87.0 and the ICD10 codes used for 'Undetermined intent' are Y10-Y34 and Y87.2 Unpaid Rates

**Mr K Buchanan** asked the Minister of Finance to detail the total amount of unpaid rates in each of the last three years. (AQW 6732/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** The total amount of unpaid rates at the end of each of the last three years for which information is available is shown in the table below.

Rating Year	End of Year Debt relating to unpaid rates
2015/16	£142.7M*
2014/15	£156.6M
2013/14	£162.1M

\* 2015/16 figure is subject to audit assurance.

Debt arises because ratepayers have not paid their rate bills. We must also accept that we are in a challenging economic environment and many people are struggling to pay their bills. LPS continues to see large numbers of individuals and businesses facing bankruptcy, administration and liquidation.

I can assure you that LPS takes a serious view of non-payment of rates and rigorously pursues all debt. However, this must be balanced against assisting ratepayers who are genuinely struggling and require some additional flexibility to help pay their rate bills. LPS continues to provide significant support in the form of exemptions, reliefs and allowances paid both to domestic and non-domestic ratepayers. In addition, LPS will engage with ratepayers allowing them to pay smaller amounts, over a longer period of time. However this inevitably increases the level of rating debt at the end of the rating year.

While LPS will make efforts to support those who are struggling to pay, they must, and will, rigorously pursue those who don't pay. Where ratepayers fail to pay or do not enter into payment arrangements or break those arrangements, LPS will

take Court action and seek to recover the debt through the Enforcement of Judgements Office or will instigate bankruptcy proceedings.

It is worth noting that the 2013/14 debt figure of £162.1 million has reduced to £142.7 million\* at the end of the 2015/16 rating year. This has provided additional income that can be invested in critical front line services such as health and education.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Finance what impact the Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme has had on the (i) 2016-17; and (ii) projected 2017/18 budget.

**(AQW 6749/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I understand that the Department for the Economy has projected a funding deficit of circa £30 million for the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme in this financial year.

The Minister for the Economy is best placed to advise on the future cost of the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Finance to detail how many (i) informal; and (ii) formal cases of (a) threats; (b) harassment; (c) sexual harassment; and (d) stalking have been lodged by his staff over the last three years; and to detail (iii) the internal procedures taken; and (iv) how the victims were supported.

**(AQW 6882/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Please see the attached table of Dignity At Work Case Information held by Departmental HR/HRConnect.

Informal -	(i) All informal cases have been raised via the Welfare Officer contact to the Departmental Equal Opportunities Officer, DHR.	
a) Threats	0	No complaint category held
b) Harassment (On Grounds other than sex)	4	2 cases required no further action as the individual did not proceed with a complaint. 1 case was resolved informally. 1 case ongoing.
c) Sexual Harassment	0	
d) Stalking	0	No complaint category held

Formal -	(ii) All formal complaints made under the DAW policy are sent to the Departmental Equal Opportunities Officer and progressed in line with the procedures - options include informal resolution or formal investigation.	
a) Threats	0	No complaint category held
b) Harassment (On Grounds other than sex)	4	(iii) 1 case under investigation. 2 cases investigated and not upheld. 1 case not accepted under time limits.
c) Sexual Harassment	3	(iii) 1 case investigated under discipline policy – not upheld. 1 case withdrawn. 1 case investigated and complaint upheld.
d) Stalking	0	No complaint category held

(iv) In line with the DAW policy, complainants are advised that they may seek support from the Employment Support Services (Welfare Service and Carecall), a Harassment Contact Officer, Trade Union representative or work colleague.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Finance to detail his legislative programme for this mandate.

**(AQW 7037/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I refer the Member to the Deputy First Minister's response to AQO 6/16-21 on 13 June 2016.

**Mr Milne** asked the Minister of Finance for a breakdown of the number of deaths from suicide by (i) gender; and (ii) age, for each deprivation quintile in each year since 2006.

**(AQW 7061/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** The attached tables detail the number of deaths registered due to suicide<sup>1</sup> by i) gender and ii) age, for each deprivation quintile between 2006 and 2015, the latest year for which finalised figures are available.

**Table 1a: Number of Male Deaths from Suicide<sup>1</sup> by Registration Year and NI Multiple Deprivation Measure Quintile<sup>2</sup>, 2006-2015**

Registration Year	NI Multiple Deprivation Measure Quintile					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
2006	77	51	41	36	22	227

Registration Year	NI Multiple Deprivation Measure Quintile					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
2007	59	46	31	23	16	175
2008	81	45	43	30	19	218
2009	62	55	46	26	16	205
2010	83	41	47	43	26	240
2011	79	50	28	39	20	216
2012	80	45	35	31	24	215
2013	77	49	36	42	25	229
2014	64	49	32	37	25	207
2015	91	46	41	43	24	245
<b>Total</b>	<b>753</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>2,177</b>

- 1 In considering suicide events it is conventional to include cases where the cause of death is classified as either 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'Undetermined intent'. Since 2001, the ICD10 codes used for 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury' are X60-X84 and Y87.0 and the ICD10 codes used for 'Undetermined intent' are Y10-Y34 and Y87.2
- 2 Based on Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) 2010, where quintile 1 is the 20% most deprived Super Output Areas (SOAs) in NI and quintile 5 is the 20 % least deprived.

**Table 1b: Number of Female Deaths from Suicide<sup>1</sup> by Registration Year and NI Multiple Deprivation Measure Quintile<sup>2</sup>, 2006-2015**

Registration Year	NI Multiple Deprivation Measure Quintile					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
2006	20	12	11	14	7	64
2007	24	19	8	10	6	67
2008	17	18	6	12	11	64
2009	25	10	10	9	1	55
2010	26	16	8	10	13	73
2011	28	11	16	8	10	73
2012	20	13	8	13	9	63
2013	26	18	13	11	6	74
2014	17	20	13	6	5	61
2015	24	13	13	16	7	73
<b>Total</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>667</b>

- 1 In considering suicide events it is conventional to include cases where the cause of death is classified as either 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'Undetermined intent'. Since 2001, the ICD10 codes used for 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury' are X60-X84 and Y87.0 and the ICD10 codes used for 'Undetermined intent' are Y10-Y34 and Y87.2
- 2 Based on Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) 2010, where quintile 1 is the 20% most deprived Super Output Areas (SOAs) in NI and quintile 5 is the 20 % least deprived.

**Table 2: Number of Deaths from Suicide<sup>1</sup> by Registration Year, Age Band and NI Multiple Deprivation Measure Quintile<sup>2</sup>, 2006-2015**

	Age Band	NI Multiple Deprivation Measure Quintile					All
		1	2	3	4	5	
2006	19 or less	10	5	3	6	2	26
	20 to 34	34	22	14	14	5	89
	35 to 49	30	19	15	25	12	101
	50 to 64	21	16	15	4	5	61
	65 plus	2	1	5	1	5	14
	<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>291</b>
2007	19 or less	8	2	5	2	0	17
	20 to 34	32	16	10	8	1	67
	35 to 49	25	26	12	12	7	82
	50 to 64	12	15	6	7	11	51
	65 plus	6	6	6	4	3	25
	<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>242</b>
2008	19 or less	14	6	5	3	4	32
	20 to 34	33	10	16	9	8	76
	35 to 49	38	23	12	17	13	103
	50 to 64	12	15	9	9	4	49
	65 plus	1	9	7	4	1	22
	<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>282</b>
2009	19 or less	6	3	4	2	0	15
	20 to 34	31	23	16	10	6	86
	35 to 49	31	25	20	14	5	95
	50 to 64	14	10	12	5	3	44
	65 plus	5	4	4	4	3	20
	<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>260</b>
2010	19 or less	7	3	3	4	4	21
	20 to 34	46	16	16	19	10	107
	35 to 49	33	23	18	18	14	106
	50 to 64	18	13	10	6	6	53
	65 plus	5	2	8	6	5	26
	<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>313</b>

1 In considering suicide events it is conventional to include cases where the cause of death is classified as either 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'Undetermined intent'. Since 2001, the ICD10 codes used for 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury' are X60-X84 and Y87.0 and the ICD10 codes used for 'Undetermined intent' are Y10-Y34 and Y87.2

2 Based on Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) 2010, where quintile 1 is the 20% most deprived Super Output Areas (SOAs) in NI and quintile 5 is the 20% least deprived.

**Table 2 (continued): Number of Deaths from Suicide<sup>1</sup> by Registration Year, Age Band and NI Multiple Deprivation Measure Quintile<sup>2</sup>, 2006-2015**

	Age Band	NI Multiple Deprivation Measure Quintile					All
		1	2	3	4	5	
2011	19 or less	13	3	5	4	0	25
	20 to 34	52	20	10	12	13	107
	35 to 49	25	15	14	13	7	74
	50 to 64	13	16	11	11	6	57
	65 plus	4	7	4	7	4	26
	<b>Total</b>		<b>107</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>30</b>
2012	19 or less	11	2	2	3	1	19
	20 to 34	38	19	12	15	9	93
	35 to 49	28	15	14	8	10	75
	50 to 64	20	16	11	14	7	68
	65 plus	3	6	4	4	6	23
	<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>33</b>
2013	19 or less	4	6	1	2	2	15
	20 to 34	32	19	12	8	6	77
	35 to 49	39	28	21	20	9	117
	50 to 64	20	12	10	20	10	72
	65 plus	8	2	5	3	4	22
	<b>Total</b>		<b>103</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>31</b>
2014	19 or less	6	5	2	4	1	18
	20 to 34	39	24	15	8	6	92
	35 to 49	22	21	14	18	9	84
	50 to 64	12	13	8	9	11	53
	65 plus	2	6	6	4	3	21
	<b>Total</b>		<b>81</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>30</b>
2015	19 or less	8	4	0	3	2	17
	20 to 34	48	15	22	21	9	115
	35 to 49	32	20	14	15	12	93
	50 to 64	19	15	15	13	5	67
	65 plus	8	5	3	7	3	26
	<b>Total</b>		<b>115</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>31</b>

1 In considering suicide events it is conventional to include cases where the cause of death is classified as either 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'Undetermined intent'. Since 2001, the ICD10 codes used for 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury' are X60-X84 and Y87.0 and the ICD10 codes used for 'Undetermined intent' are Y10-Y34 and Y87.2

2 Based on Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) 2010, where quintile 1 is the 20% most deprived Super Output Areas (SOAs) in NI and quintile 5 is the 20% least deprived.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister of Finance whether his Department, alone or in concert with the Department for Infrastructure, has carried out any work to support the Lagan Navigation Trust to redevelop the waterway between Belfast and Craigavon, as well as cross-border routes.

**(AQW 7096/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Responsibility for Inland Waterways is primarily a matter for the Infrastructure Minister and while I am very supportive of the work of the Lagan Navigation Trust, my Department has not carried out any work with the Trust.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Finance what talks have taken place between his Department and representatives of the quarry industry about the reintroduction of an Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme.

**(AQW 7102/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I met with the Quarry Products Association in August of this year and my officials have been in regular contact with industry representatives to discuss how we respond to the challenges facing the industry, including the suspension of the Aggregate Levy Credit Scheme that applied here previously.

The Aggregate Levy and the Credit Scheme have been the subject of legal challenges and clearly we will need to see the outworking of those before we can determine an appropriate way forward.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Finance what is the definition of most deprived and marginalised communities used for the Community Regeneration Fund.

**(AQW 7208/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I expect the business cases for projects seeking funding under the Community Regeneration Fund to demonstrate how the project benefits deprived and marginalised communities.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Finance to list each Ministerial Direction he has issued since May 2016, including (i) the date; (ii) its purpose (iii) whether he was overruling any concerns of officials either before or after the Direction; and (iv) whether each Direction was accompanied by a full business case.

**(AQW 7291/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I have issued no Ministerial Directions since May 2016.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Finance whether the Executive remains committed to making £250m available to support the agri-food sector; and if so, why the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs has only been notified of £40m to spend on the Farm Business Improvement Scheme - Capital.

**(AQW 7443/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** It is for the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to consider the funding requirements of the agri-food sector and make recommendations to the Executive as part of the ongoing budget process.

**Ms Hanna** asked the Minister of Finance what considerations have been given to ensuring that the additional workload generated by a proposed Brexit will not effect detrimentally the Civil Service's ongoing work, particularly in light of the recent reduction of the Civil Service workforce by almost 3000.

**(AQW 7539/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** An Interdepartmental Coordination Group of senior officials has been set up under the direction of the Permanent Secretary in my Department and in the Department for the Economy to coordinate the Executive's response to the EU Referendum vote. A unit has been established within The Executive Office to coordinate this work. As the process develops and negotiations get underway, resource requirements will be carefully considered.

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Finance to outline the preparations being made for the reduction of corporation tax.

**(AQO 737/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Comprehensive preparations are being made to pave the way for the devolution of Corporation Tax and I met recently with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to discuss how we continue to take forward this important work.

In particular, my Department is working alongside HMRC to ensure that IT and other operational systems are in place for the successful delivery of a reduced Corporation Tax rate.

My officials have also been liaising with their counterparts in the British Treasury and Revenue & Customs to examine the basis of the estimated costs that will be applied when we devolve Corporation Tax.

And following the very positive engagements I had with influential allies in the US, I have every confidence that the reduced rate will help boost investment, drive economic growth and deliver more jobs and higher wages for our people.

**Ms Dillon** asked the Minister of Finance for an update on his visit to West Tyrone on the 9 November 2016.

**(AQO 738/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** On 9 November, I addressed a cross-community breakfast meeting at the Loughmacrory GAA clubrooms, in the village of Loughmacrory, Co Tyrone. Those attending were mainly community organisations from the area and representatives from rural community groups including the GAA. The main items of discussion were around my recent

announcement on rates for Community Amateur Sports groups and the implications of any change in relations with the EU for rural organisations.

I was particularly impressed with the clubrooms which are a multiuse community site owned jointly by the local GAA club and Community Development Association. The importance of such community facilities to rural communities cannot be emphasised enough.

The work done by the GAA, not just in terms of sport but also the broader benefits within and across the community and cross-community providing a focal point for social, educational, well-being, economic and community activity, cannot be ignored. Their contribution is to be commended and an area which we should look to utilise as we move forward.

I have encouraged officials from Loughmacrory to investigate the relevance of my recent announcement on rates relief for Community Amateur Sports groups. I would like to see them avail of this opportunity and I hope that other such groups, across the GAA family and beyond, would be equally enthusiastic to tap into this positive opportunity.

Unfortunately despite this positive development it is clear that the recent Referendum result and the potential change in our relationship with the EU will have a detrimental effect on rural communities. The need to maintain access to EU funding particularly for rural groups is vitally important. I am determined to, and will persist in pressing for, continued access to future EU funding streams for all our community.

**Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Finance for an update on his roundtable discussions with banks on 9 November 2016. (AQO 739/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I had a useful meeting with the banks last week where we discussed the crucial role the banks need to play in supporting and accelerating economic growth here.

In particular, we explored how the banks, working in consort with Government and others, can help identify and finance investment and business opportunities locally. And in doing so, help in revitalising our towns and cities, and capitalise on the Executive's decision to cut Corporation Tax to 12.5% from April 2018.

We agreed to maintain this engagement going forward.

**Mr O'Dowd** asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the development of a social impact bond. (AQO 740/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** When I last addressed the Assembly in October on this matter, I stated my intention to introduce the first Social Impact Bond in Ireland. Since then, my officials have been engaging extensively on this and are making good progress. They've been liaising with other jurisdictions, including the South of Ireland and Scotland, as well as organisations like Roca in the United States who deliver Social Impact Bonds there, with a view to understanding how this methodology can be applied here.

We still have to work through a range of matters, such as what area is most suited to piloting a Social Impact Bond, as well as who the potential investors might be and how best to procure a Social Impact Bond, and I am still reflecting on the financial implications of introducing a Social Impact Bond. However, there is a new readiness among departments to consider the use of Social Impact Bonds and I plan to meet with Ministerial colleagues in the coming weeks to identify areas to pilot this approach. This is a very important part in the process for introducing a Social Impact Bond. My officials are also making arrangements for me to meet officials from the British Social Impact Bond Unit to hear first hand their experience of developing the Social Impact Bond approach to service delivery.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Finance to detail the budgetary pressures currently facing the Executive. (AQO 741/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Executive departments continually face a number of evolving budgetary pressures. The Executive seeks to address priority pressures as part of its budget and monitoring round exercises. For 2016-17 I recently announced funding for Executive pressures as part of my October Monitoring statement to the Assembly.

**Ms Bailey** asked the Minister of Finance to outline the differences between civil partnership and marriage, in relation to survivor pension entitlements. (AQO 742/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** The Civil Partnership Act 2004 created a union for same sex couples which is very similar, but not identical to, opposite sex marriage. Civil partners have the same rights and responsibilities as married couples in many areas, including welfare benefits and inheritance. However, there are some differences, particularly with regard to pension entitlement. Pensions policy does not fall within my remit and I am by no means an expert in that field, but, as I understand it, the difference relates to the guaranteed minimum pension that pension schemes contracted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme before 1997 are required to pay. A widower's survivor's pension rights are based on contributions from 1988, whereas a widow's pension rights are based on contributions from 1978. The difference in treatment of widows and widowers is related to historical social attitudes and to past decisions about restructuring to maintain affordability. On the introduction of civil partnerships, the Westminster Government considered it was fair to treat civil partners the same as widowers.

With regard to occupational pension schemes generally, employers and pension funds can exclude civil partners from spousal benefits attributable to service prior to 5 December 2005, which was the date when the 2004 Act came into force. The practical reason for this is that pension schemes can only plan for any increased potential liability at the time the member's benefits accrue; which they could only do from the date it was possible for same sex partners to form a legal union. However, pension schemes can choose to treat all members – whether in a civil partnership or opposite sex marriage – exactly the same and, when the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill was making its way through the Westminster Parliament, the Westminster Government estimated that some two-thirds of pension schemes do treat people in civil partnerships and opposite sex marriages exactly the same.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the budgetary consequences and future cost of the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme.

**(AQO 743/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** As outlined in my response to AQO 487/16-21, I understand that the Department for the Economy has projected a funding deficit of circa £30 million for the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme in this financial year.

The Minister for the Economy would be best placed to advise on the future cost of the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme.

## Department of Health

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health (i) to outline the changes being made to core funding grants provided to sixty nine charities; (ii) for her assessment of the potential impact of these changes on the services each provide.

**(AQW 1845/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health):** Over the next two years there will be a phased reduction in the amount of core grant funding provided by my Department to 66 voluntary and community organisations from a total of £3.4m this year to £2.2m in 2017/18. This phased reduction in funding is intended to help support groups to plan financially. The current core funding scheme will end in March 2018.

Work by my department in 2015 highlighted that core funded organisations received an additional £28.6m in funding from other organisations within the HSC. Funding for innovative initiatives will also be available from a new Innovation Scheme, which will be open to all voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations. The Scheme is expected to open for applications in 2016/17.

I am also considering options for a revised core grant scheme for the voluntary and community sectors, which would run in tandem with the new Innovation Scheme.

**Ms Bradshaw** asked the Minister of Health to outline the timescale for consultation on and introduction of the Adoption Bill.

**(AQW 3419/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I intend to seek Executive agreement to consult on a draft Adoption and Children Bill, with a view to introducing the Bill in the Assembly as soon as possible in the current mandate. Exact timescales will be subject to Executive approval to public consultation and the outcome of the consultation.

My Department established an Adoption and Children Bill Stakeholder Group, made up of key stakeholders in the field of adoption and fostering from both statutory and voluntary agencies. This Group has assisted my officials in the drafting of the consultation document on the draft Bill. As part of the consultation process, my Department will seek views on a wide range of policy issues relating to adoption and children. Respondents will also be free to provide any additional comments.

**Ms Bradshaw** asked the Minister of Health what advice she will take on the framing of questions in the consultation for the Adoption Bill.

**(AQW 3420/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I intend to seek Executive agreement to consult on a draft Adoption and Children Bill, with a view to introducing the Bill in the Assembly as soon as possible in the current mandate. Exact timescales will be subject to Executive approval to public consultation and the outcome of the consultation.

My Department established an Adoption and Children Bill Stakeholder Group, made up of key stakeholders in the field of adoption and fostering from both statutory and voluntary agencies. This Group has assisted my officials in the drafting of the consultation document on the draft Bill. As part of the consultation process, my Department will seek views on a wide range of policy issues relating to adoption and children. Respondents will also be free to provide any additional comments.

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Health whether the reports made by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority on services provided for adults with learning disabilities in the Western Health and Social Care Trust will be made public.

**(AQW 3468/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** In the Western Trust learning disability services are provided at Lakewood Hospital. The most recent inspection of these services took place in September 2015. RQIA's inspection reports are published on its website at [www.rqia.org.uk](http://www.rqia.org.uk)

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Health (i) whether her departmental officials have met with the Chief Executive of the Western Health and Social Care or the with the director with responsibility for adults with learning disability services in relation to the underspend; (ii) on what dates these meetings took place; and (iii) what was the outcome of these meetings.  
(AQW 3470/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:**

- (i) I can confirm that my officials have had meetings with both the Trust's Chief Executive and Director with responsibility for adults with learning disability services to discuss the potential under spend in adult learning disability.
- (ii) An initial meeting was held with senior Board and Trust officials on 18 May 2016. Following this, my Departments Permanent Secretary, considered this issue with the Trust Chair and Chief Executive at the Trusts end of year accountability meeting on 19 July. A further meeting was also held between my Departmental officials and the Director with responsibility for adults with learning disability services on 5 September.
- (iii) The outcome of these meetings is attached.

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Health what information officials from the Western Health and Social Care Trust have given to patients of adult learning disability services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust, and their families, on (i) the underspend in adult learning disability services; (ii) the rationale for the underspend; (iii) those responsible for the underspend; (iv) corrective actions that will be implemented; and (v) the results of the underspend.  
(AQW 3471/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Western Health and Social Care Trust has had a range of engagements with families on the issue of capitation variance in adult learning disability services. I am aware that this relationship recently broke down. I have made clear to the Chief Executive of the Trust that I expect Trust officials to engage openly and transparently with families.

Following a recent meeting with the families and carers during which I listened carefully to their continuing concerns, I have taken the further step of asking for an independent facilitator to be appointed. This person will be tasked with supporting the families and the Trust to work together on the development of further plans for investment in adult learning disability services in the area. This follows confirmation from the Trust that it is planning to increase its resourcing of these services by £8m. Plans to deliver investments totalling £3m of this new funding have already been detailed by the Trust.

A senior official in the Department has been appointed to oversee this process and to act as a contact point in the Department for the families. The Trust has also been asked to draw up a wider communications and engagement plan to ensure that transparency underpins the urgent work now needed to resume dialogue between the Trust and families and develop future investment plans.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Health (i) how many Freedom of Information requests has he received since coming to office; (ii) how many of these have been answered; (iii) how many of these were read by his Special Adviser; and (iv) how many were altered or amended either by, or at the request of, his Special Adviser.  
(AQW 3473/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:**

- i. Since coming to office on 25th May 2016, there have been 59 FOI requests received by the Department of Health (DoH).
- ii. As of 8 November 2016, DoH has responded to 51 of the requests received and the remaining 8 requests are still being processed.
- iii. The Department of Health progresses all FOI requests received in line with its stated FOI Policy Statement and by applying the appropriate procedures and practices.
- iv. Please see iii above.

**Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of community pharmacy provision.  
(AQW 3655/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Community pharmacies have an important role to play in supporting reform of the health and social care system. In addition to dispensing approximately 40 million prescription items a year, they provide advice and information about medicines and a healthy lifestyle, offer services to improve the safe and effective use of medicines and support self-care and prevention.

The Health & Social Care Board has contractual arrangements with 533 community pharmacies to provide community pharmaceutical services. I want to ensure that we make much more use of those valuable community pharmacies to improve patient outcomes and help reduce demand on GP and other acute services.

It is therefore planned to develop a new framework for how we work with community pharmacy to fully realise their potential.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health to detail how much has been spent on hospitality by her Department since May 2016; and to provide a breakdown.

**(AQW 3700/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The total expenditure on hospitality by the Department of Health since May 2016 to the end of 31 August 2016 was £10,879, as set out in the table below.

A comprehensive breakdown of these costs is not readily available and can only be provided at a disproportionate cost. Expenditure in June and July 2016 is significantly higher due to hospitality costs relating to the Expert Panel led by Professor Bengoa. My Department's hospitality expenditure has been reducing significantly since 2007/08.

May 2016 £	June 2016 £	July 2016 £	August 2016 £	Total £
960	5,370	2,997	1,552	10,879

**Ms Bradshaw** asked the Minister of Health when the report of the Working Group on Fatal Foetal Abnormality will be published.

**(AQW 3761/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Justice Minister and I received the Working Group's report on 11 October 2016. We are actively considering its proposals.

Once we have considered and agreed the report, it will be submitted to the Executive for their agreement. It is not intended to publish the report or its recommendations until the Executive has concluded its deliberations.

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Health when the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service will complete the business case for the Helicopter Emergency Medical service.

**(AQW 3766/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The business case for the implementation of the Helicopter Emergency Medical service (HEMS) is on schedule for completion by the Ambulance Service in the coming weeks, and will then be submitted to my Department for consideration.

**Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Health how ministerial time for party business is accounted for on departmental funded trips.

**(AQW 3839/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I keep my duties carried out as the Minister of Health separate from Party business. At all times I act in accordance with the provisions of the Ministerial Code.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health what guidelines or protocols exist in her Department governing Ministers holding meetings with third parties in the absence of officials; and whether any record is kept of such meetings having been held.

**(AQW 3864/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department has no guidelines or protocols governing Ministers holding meetings with third parties in the absence of officials. Ministers as part of their role can meet with a variety of people and organisations including third parties. At all times I act in accordance with the provisions of the Ministerial Code.

**Mr K Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health what extra resources she is putting into respite care for parents of children with special needs.

**(AQW 3989/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I have been advised that your reference to children with special needs relates to those with a learning disability. Investment is provided to Children with Disability, Complex Needs or Challenging behaviour and is therefore not broken down for those with a learning disability. The HSC Board provided regional allocations of £7.5m in 2014/15 and 2015/16 to support children with disabilities and their carers, which included the funding of short breaks and respite care. Additional in-year funding was also provided for summer holiday schemes, and training for child care staff/carers in relation to specific needs and to provide additional community-based short breaks for Children with Disabilities via Self-Directed Support and Direct Payments. My Department also provided funding of £1.57m in 2016/17 to the Family Fund, which provides a wide range of goods and services including short breaks focused on supporting the needs of children with a disability and their families in the north of Ireland.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health to detail the current health promotion projects, including the objectives of each project, that are led or supported by the Public Health Agency in West Tyrone.

(AQW 4121/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Public Health Agency works with local organisations on a cross sectoral basis to promote health and wellbeing and address health inequalities. With regards to the West Tyrone area, extensive investment and partnership work is currently underway through a range of programmes and initiatives:

Area/Theme	Programme
<b>Drugs + Alcohol</b>	
<b>Low Threshold Service</b> (across the WHSCT area)	Low threshold support, care, facilitation and harm reduction services, for people who are misusing substances.
<b>Voices Hidden Harm Service</b> (across the WHSCT area)	Service for children and young people who are affected by their parent or carers' substance misuse
<b>Strengthening Families</b> (across the WHSCT area)	Evidence based family skills programme
<b>DAISY Youth Treatment Service</b> (across the WHSCT area)	Direct support to young people who are experiencing difficulties because of alcohol or drug use.
<b>ADULT STEP 2</b> (across the WHSCT area)	Support for adults concerned about their drug use. Also supports family members concerned about another adult family member's drug use.
<b>CAMHS Alcohol Service</b> (across the WHSCT area)	WHSCT Service for young people aged 11-17 who are affected by substance misuse and alcohol misuse to a level that impairs daily functioning and who also have mental health issues.
<b>Targeted Prevention</b> (across the WHSCT area)	Services provide age-appropriate and evidence-based programmes for groups of young people aimed at giving them the skills to deal with the challenges of substance misuse.
<b>The Edge / Lifeskills Programme</b> (across the WHSCT area /based in Fermanagh)	Fund, support and monitor 2 day centres for long term Chronic drinkers
<b>Local One Stop Shop</b>	
FUEL/FIND One Stop Shop	Provides information and signposting service for vulnerable young people. Increase numbers accessing age appropriate, alcohol free services/ activities.
<b>Accident Prevention</b>	
<b>Western Home Environmental Assessment Project (WHEAP)</b> (across the WHSCT area)	Home safety -provides households with home based assessments focusing on falls prevention, and prevention of accidental injury and or death in the home.
<b>Community Falls Service - Stepping On</b> (across the WHSCT area)	Falls Prevention Programmes, providing evidence based messages and exercise. Programme of healthy eating relating to bone health and referral pathways to Falls Prevention services.
<b>Sustainable Communities</b>	
WHSCT Health and Well-being plans and signposting service for older people. (the WHSCT area)	Social Inclusion project for Older People run through Dennett Interchange.
Health Promoting Homes across the WHSCT area)	L.A.S.T SureStart, Omagh and Barnardos in Strabane run health initiatives for families with pre-school children to reduce obesity.
Healthy Living Centre	Core Costs of Derg Valley Care funding as part of the Healthy Living Centre Programme.
Let the Dance Begin	Range of Arts based workshops to improve health and social well-being targeting the Strabane district.
Maximising Access in Rural Areas (MARA)	Improve health and wellbeing of vulnerable rural dwellers by making them aware of/ helping them access services, grants or benefits.

<b>Local Government</b>	
Age Friendly Communities	Derry Healthy Cities and Fermanagh/Omagh District Council leading projects to target the 8 themes of Age Friendly
Derry/Strabane and Fermanagh/Omagh Access and Inclusion Officers	One Officer per council district to improve access to arts and culture initiatives for those with disabilities.
Workplace Health Initiative	Regional project, led by Derry Healthy Cities, to improve health and social well-being in the workplace.

<b>Mental Health and Well-Being/Suicide Prevention</b>	
SHIP Project provided by ZEST (Healing the Hurt) Regional Project with delivery in the WHSCT area	Provides people who self-harm with quick access to support and counselling to help deal with the issues that are causing distress. SHIP is provided at a range of locations within each of the five Trusts areas
Mental Health Training & Support provided by Western Health and Social Care Trust	Including MHFA, SafeTalk & ASIST, promote mental health and wellbeing of looked after children, older people's mental health.
Suicide Prevention – Health Improvement Training	MHFA, SafeTalk & ASIST, Resilience Seminars, Internet safety, Men's Health.
Lifeskills Programme	Spans both mental health promotion and suicide prevention, using both a population and targeted approach. Focuses on promoting good mental and emotional wellbeing and moves to more targeted interventions for those at increased risk and bereaved. Emphasises improving knowledge and understanding of evidence.
Self Harm Acute Staff	Service accesses individuals who attend hospital with self-harm. Includes an assessment and onward referral to further support as appropriate to both tier 2 - tier 4 services.
CLEAR Project small grants scheme provided by Derry Healthy Cities across the western area	Community-based programme promoting mental health and suicide prevention through small grants schemes, reaches rural and urban communities, carers, older people, people with mental health problems, youth, church and sports groups, disability groups, others.
CLEAR Small Grants programme	Local PHA programme to build resilience and capacity, promote early interventions, promote suicide prevention in local communities – includes a number of initiatives being delivered within the West Tyrone area, e.g. targets sports coaches as gatekeepers
AWARE Defeat Depression	Build resilience and promote well being among targeted communities i.e. LGBT, Young People and Disadvantaged Communities through the delivery of Mood Matters in Schools.

<b>Obesity</b>	
WHSCT Dietician Nutritionist Post	0.5WTE Community & Food Team Dietician takes forward obesity/nutrition related activities.
WHSCT Physical Activity Coordinator	1 WTE post to take forward physical activity related activities.
WHSCT Community Food & Nutrition Team	Support for training programmes, workshops and related activities
BMI Measuring	BMI measurement of Year 8 students.
Physical Activity Referral Schemes	Physical Activity Referral Schemes delivered across all council areas by local council staff
Healthy Towns Programme	Physical activity & nutrition related activities. Programmes delivered by council staff within local community facilities.
WHSCT Peer Support Link Workers	2 posts (18hrs) support development of peer support for women across the Trust area.
Breastfeeding activities	Includes community support, education, campaigns promoting breastfeeding support
Old Library Trust SWEET Programme	Delivery of the SWEET Prevention (2) & Management Programmes 2) for children and young people & their families across west Tyrone.

<b>Obesity</b>	
Leading the Way with Active Travel	Workplace travel behaviour change activities in the Strabane area
<b>Sexual Health</b>	
Sexual Health Training	Training for Professionals, parents, carers & young people.
Relationship & Sexuality Education RSE in the Community	3 x 2hr Programmes delivered to vulnerable young people
WHSCT Sexual Health Activities	Sexual health activities and programmes to develop population knowledge and skills.
Young People Contraceptive and Sexual Health Services (across WHSCT area)	Accessible clinics to enable young people to access sexual health services.
GUM services	Increase access to STI testing
<b>Making Life Better</b>	
TCV NI Western Area Green Gym	Western Area Green Gym enabling opportunities for local people to engage with the outdoors & nature.
Solihull Training	Promoting and supporting the development of positive parenting strategies
Early Years Post & Programmes and Incredible Years programme	Coordination and support for the rapidly developing early interventions agenda across sectors and organisations.
Neighbourhood Renewal Project	Aims to add value to existing work by addressing health improvement in NRAs through a collaborative and integrated approach.
Living Well with Dementia Programme	Mental health needs of people with dementia and their carers.
PALS HEAL	Health & Wellbeing Programme delivered in Omagh with Looked after Children.
<b>Smoking Cessation</b>	
Smoking Cessation Posts and Programmes/ Community Pharmacy & GP Cessation Services.	Provides western area population with access to services to stop smoking.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health how her Department is holding both the Western Health and Social Care Trust and the Health and Social Care Board to account for the reallocation resources for adults with a learning disability to other areas of Trust responsibility; and to detail the spending gap and level of underfunding for adult learning disability services within the Trust.  
(AQW 4122/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Since taking up post in May this year, I have been very clear that this issue must be resolved quickly and, crucially, with and for the people in the Western Trust who avail of community learning disability services. This must remain the focus of the collective efforts of the HSC and is why, now that the HSC Board has confirmed the capitation variance to be an average of around £7m per year over the past six years, my clear expectation is that the Trust will prioritise the development of its plans for further investment in community learning disability services in the area. This has been conveyed directly to the Trust by my Department. The Trust has also been asked to develop a communication and engagement strategy to ensure that clear and consistent information is being provided to all stakeholders going forward. I will continue to monitor this issue closely.

**Ms Hanna** asked the Minister of Health to outline the work his Department has done following Royal Assent of the Mental Capacity (Northern Ireland) Act 2016.  
(AQW 4132/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Mental Capacity Bill received Royal Assent on 9 May 2016, to become the Mental Capacity Act (NI) 2016. My Department is focusing on implementation planning for the Act.

Engagement has begun with key stakeholders and professionals, under the auspices of an implementation reference group consisting of over 120 representatives from the statutory, non-statutory, and voluntary and community sectors. Four draft chapters of the statutory Code of Practice, and a draft Regulation on key concepts in the Act such as capacity, supporting people, and best interests, were issued for comment in September.

Further material will be issued to the reference group in the coming weeks seeking views on topics such as serious interventions under the Act, and the role of Independent Mental Capacity Advocates. This engagement will continue well into 2017 as we work towards preparing drafts of the Code of Practice and Regulations for public consultation.

Consideration is also being given to other work streams associated with the Act's implementation, such as:

- drafting and enactment of over 150 consequential amendments;
- jurisdictional issues, including patient transfers;
- design and delivery of training for the health and justice workforces, and for others with a role in the legislation;
- consideration of resource implications; and
- delivery issues, including awareness raising, development of IT solutions and establishment of Trust Panels and the Office of the Public Guardian.

A date for commencement of the Act has yet to be agreed. However, due to the scale of the task ahead it is anticipated that implementation will take a number of years, dependent upon the availability of funding and resources. This is a cross-cutting piece of legislation which will require collaboration between a number of Departments.

**Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Health to outline how her Department promotes nursing as a career choice.  
(AQW 4141/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Career planning is carried out by individual schools and colleges in association with the Department for the Economy. A Nursing and Midwifery Career Pathway, which provides information on nursing as a career choice, is available online.

My Department currently invests £27m annually in funding nursing and midwifery students at our local universities; in 2016/17 almost 700 places were commissioned through Queens and the Ulster University. These courses are heavily over-subscribed, with in excess of eight applications per place, demonstrating the popularity of nursing as a career choice in the north of Ireland.

In addition, 50 student nursing places were made available in 2016/17 through the Open University to enable existing health and social care support staff to pursue a career in nursing. This route into nursing is also in great demand.

**Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Health to detail the improvement required to the helipad at the Royal Victoria Hospital to facilitate the proposed air ambulance.  
(AQW 4185/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Work required to the helipad to facilitate the proposed air ambulance includes electronics / communications equipment, helipad markings, a fully functional control room and fire fighting equipment that meets current standards.

The Trust and the Design Team will continue to liaise with aviation specialists to identify what is required to meet Civil Aviation Authority standards and regulatory compliance.

**Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Health what assurances she can give that the delivery of urgent paediatric cardiac surgery in Dublin will meet the 2017 target.  
(AQW 4186/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The £42m investment that I and Minister Simon Harris announced in July 2016 will allow the all-island Congenital Heart Disease Network Board to proceed with its implementation plan, which includes the phased transfer of all urgent surgical cases from the north to Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin (OLCHC) by the end of 2017, and all elective surgical cases by the end of 2018. Whilst a number of essential developments are required to facilitate this, including the expansion of Intensive Care capacity in OLCHC, and the associated requirement for additional medical and nursing staff, I am confident that the appropriate plans, structures and funds are in place to achieve it. This will remain high on my agenda for future meetings with Minister Harris. The Network is also on course to move to a single waiting list for cardiac catheterisations, which will benefit children across the island, by spring 2017.

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health how many residential nursing care places in the Derry city area are for people diagnosed with dementia.  
(AQW 4189/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) holds information on all registered residential and nursing care homes. The RQIA publish a register of these services, including the maximum approved places and categories of care, online.

The latest available information (as at 15 September 2016) can be found at the web link below.

<https://www.rqia.org.uk/what-we-do/register/services-registered-with-rqia/>

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health what residential nursing care provision for people diagnosed with dementia exists in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.  
(AQW 4190/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Western Health and Social Care Trust has a statutory residential home with 26 beds in Derry/Londonderry for people with dementia. They will also purchase places in Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority approved nursing homes from the private sector.

**Ms Ní Chuilín** asked the Minister of Health how many people in prison have been identified as having mental health problems.

**(AQW 4192/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Given the turnover in the prison population, especially with short term remand, it is difficult to accurately state the number of people in prison with mental health problems at a given point.

The most recent annual Health Needs Assessment report identified 240 individuals were accessing Mental Health Services in October 2015.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health whether there will be any change in hospital car parking charges.

**(AQW 4208/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department's policy document for 'Car Parking Provision and Management in the Health and Social Care Sector' published in June 2012 sets out the principles relating to car parking and charging across Health and Social Care, including hospital sites, and provides regional direction. It allows Health and Social Care Trusts to ensure that car parking charging reflects a reasonable balance between the needs of legitimate car park users and the costs of providing and maintaining car parking facilities, including the cost of car park patrols, equipment and grounds maintenance. It also gives cognisance to wider issues such as traffic management on sites, transport plans and unauthorised parking. The policy sets out a number of key principles relating to car parking charges patients, visitors and staff, and requires that the Trusts consult where they:

- propose the introduction of charges to new or previously free spaces or
- propose an increase in charges on any site ( if the proposed increase is broadly in line with inflation consultation is not required).

No increases in car parking charges are planned by the Northern, Southern or South Eastern Health and Social Care Trusts. The Western Health and Social Care Trust intend to apply an inflationary uplift to Altnagelvin and South West Acute sites from £0.70p an hour to £0.80p an hour from April 2017. The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has no plans to increase car parking rates on the Mater or Belfast City Hospital sites. Car parking rates on the Royal Victoria site will be reviewed in March in line with indexation and any increase applied in April 2017 by Car Parking Services who manage and run the car parks on the RVH site.

Charges are not set to make a profit but to recover the costs associated with car parking provision, with any surplus re-invested into patient care.

**Mr Carroll** asked the Minister of Health whether there is a disparity in waiting times for hypodontia operations in West Belfast and the waiting times in other constituencies.

**(AQW 4259/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** There is no specific clinical coding guidance to identify hypodontia operations within the north, as such it is not possible to provide information on the number of patients who have undergone these procedures.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health , pursuant to AQW 2792/16-21, to provide the number of staff grievances submitted in 2016 in each Health and Social Care Trust; and how many have been found to have no evidence and required a report to senior management.

**(AQW 4283/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The number of staff grievances submitted since January 2016 to date in each Health and Social Care Trust is set out in the table below:

HSC Trust	No: of staff grievances
BHSCT	68
NHSCT	26
NIASCT	15
SEHSCT	11
SHSCT	24
WHSCT	60

There were no staff grievances that were subsequently found to have no evidence and required a report to senior management.

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister of Health when the 1 per cent payrise will start being paid to staff; and which Health and Social Care staff will receive this increase.

**(AQW 4478/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** It is anticipated that Health and Social Care staff will start to see the 1 per cent uplift, effective from 1 April 2016, in their November 2016 salary.

This pay award affects the pay rates of all Agenda for Change staff and those of hospital medical and dental staff, doctors and dentists in public health, the community health service, salaried primary dental care and salaried general practitioners. Staff Vacancies in each HSCT

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of staff vacancies in each work area of each Health and Social Care Trust

**(AQW 4501/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Information on the number of permanent and temporary staff vacancies in each work area of each Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust is detailed in the tables below. This information will include posts offered to candidates who have not yet taken up post.

#### **Belfast HSC Trust**

<b>Staff Group</b>	<b>Vacancies</b>
Administrative & Clerical	167
Estates	12
Medical & Dental	66
Nursing & Midwifery (including Nurse Support)	626
Professional & Technical	280
Social Services	198
Support Services/User Experience	124
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,473</b>

#### **Northern HSC Trust**

<b>Staff Group</b>	<b>Vacancies</b>
Administrative & Clerical	77
Estates	4
Generic	1
Medical & Dental	28
Nursing & Midwifery (including Nurse Support)	327
Professional & Technical	112
Social Services	150
Support Services/User Experience	34
Senior Executive	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>735</b>

#### **South Eastern HSC Trust**

<b>Staff Group</b>	<b>Vacancies</b>
Administrative & Clerical	56
Estates	13
Medical & Dental	9
Nursing & Midwifery (including Nurse Support)	170
Professional & Technical	34
Social Services	59

Staff Group	Vacancies
Support Services/User Experience	81
<b>Total</b>	<b>422</b>

**Southern HSC Trust**

Staff Group	Vacancies
Administrative & Clerical	96
Estates	20
Medical & Dental	93
Nursing & Midwifery (including Nurse Support)	382
Professional & Technical	183
Social Services	194
Support Services/User Experience	52
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1,020</b>

**Western HSC Trust**

Staff Group	Vacancies	
	Headcount	WTE
Administrative & Clerical	48	40.5
Estates	7	7.0
Medical	134	131.0
Nursing & Midwifery (including Nurse Support)	160	151.14
AHP	52	49.17
Social Care	31	27.91
Support Services	48	26.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>432.72</b>

**NI Ambulance Service**

Staff Group	Vacancies (WTE)
Chief Executive	1.00
Administrative & Clerical	10.49
Ambulance *	96.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>107.79</b>

\* Includes Paramedics, Emergency Medical Technicians, Control personnel, Ambulance Care Attendants, Clinical Training Officers etc

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health for a breakdown of the total cost of the Hyponatraemic Inquiry to date. (AQW 4517/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** From its inception in 2004 until September 2016 the Inquiry into Hyponatraemia-Related Deaths has spent a total of some £13m. In addition, my Department and the Health and Social Care Board incurred legal costs of approximately £0.7m, while Belfast, Southern and Western HSC Trusts collectively incurred legal costs of just under £1.0m.

The IHRD has been subject to a number of delays which have impacted on lifetime cost: work was suspended between July 2005 and May 2008 while related police investigations were being conducted; another more recent delaying factor has been the substantial volume of evidence submitted.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health to detail the investment in specialist ME services in each of the last five years. (AQW 4567/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The investment in specialist ME services in each of the last five years is shown in the table below.

Year	
2011-12	Nil
2012-13	Nil
2013-14	£33,000 was invested non-recurrently in Northern Trust in a pilot specialist service for ME-CFS
2014-15	The above funding was continued.
2015-16	£50,000 was invested recurrently in a ME-CFS Clinical Lead to establish the pilot service on a permanent footing

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health whether it is her intention to set a standard for all medical responses made by helicopters.

**(AQW 4568/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Standards for the Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) will be guided by best practice guidance as outlined within the Association of Air Ambulance's (AAA) Framework for a High Performing Air Ambulance Service. The vast majority of respondents to my Department's HEMS consultation supported this proposal. HEMS will be activated based on Ambulance Service tasking protocols and standard operating procedures in response to 999 calls. Standards for clinical protocols and clinical operating procedures will be overseen by the HEMS Clinical lead and the HEMS Clinical Advisory group as part of the NIAS clinical governance arrangements.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister of Health when a resuscitation manager will be recruited to ensure a co-ordinated approach to resuscitation.

**(AQW 4590/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Ambulance Service anticipate that the recruitment of a regional Community Resuscitation Co-ordinator will commence later this month, subject to the outcome of ongoing discussions with Trade Union representatives regarding job evaluation.

**Ms Bradshaw** asked the Minister of Health what was the cost of the production of the Bengoa report.

**(AQW 4596/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** It is not possible to provide total expenditure as costs are still being incurred on this project. Costs were originally anticipated to be in the region of £120,000, however the final total is now expected to be less than this amount. None of the panel members has taken a fee for this work.

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Health, in relation to EUR criteria for abdominoplasty, whether the requirement for disabled patients to have the same BMI targets as able bodied patients impacts adversely on disabled patients; and whether there are any plans to review these criteria.

**(AQW 4640/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Equality Screening Section of the EUR Policy states that "some people with a disability or a particular medical condition may not be able to achieve or maintain a stable BMI to be eligible for breast reduction or abdominoplasty. However, the policy allows that, if the GP agrees that this is a factor, the GP has the flexibility to refer the patient as an exceptional case."

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health how many patients were on the waiting list for (i) a hip replacement; and (b) a knee replacement in (a) October 2012; (b) October 2014; and (c) October 2016.

**(AQW 4661/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Information on the number of patients awaiting hip and knee replacement operations as at 30th June 2016, the most recent quarter for which official statistics are available, is shown in the following table along with figures for 30th June 2012 and 30th June 2014.

	Number waiting for inpatient treatment	
	Hip replacement	Knee replacement
30th June 2016	2,406	2,550
30th June 2014	1,199	1,026
30th June 2012	1,310	1,110

**Source:** DoH Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

Hip replacement procedures were identified using the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys tabular list of operations and procedures (OPCS – 4.7) codes W37, W38, W39, W46, W47, W48, W93, W94 and W95. Knee replacement procedures were identified using codes W40, W41 and W42.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health to outline the reason for the delay in producing the report arising from the Hyponatraemic Inquiry.  
(AQW 4662/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** I am advised by the Inquiry as follows:

*“The Chairman has made significant progress in drafting his lengthy and detailed report. In order to be fair to all parties, he has had to analyse extensive information and evidence, both written and oral. The Inquiry received almost 13,000 documents, and took evidence from 179 witnesses over 148 days of oral hearings. While the Chair had hoped to complete the report by now, that has not been possible because of the complexity of the issues raised on both clinical and governance aspects of the Inquiry. Furthermore, up-to-date information has been gathered about current governance arrangements so that meaningful recommendations can be made to secure future improvements and reform.”*

Over its lifetime, the Inquiry has been delayed by other factors, in particular the conclusion of a police investigation.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health to detail the average number of (i) hip replacement; and (ii) knee replacement operations performed weekly (a) by the National Health Service; and (b) privately, broken down by each quarter since October 2015.

(AQW 4664/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:**

- (a) The average number of hip and knee replacements performed each week within Health and Social Care Trusts is provided in the table below.

Quarter Ending	Hip	Knee
Jun-15	60	25
Sep-15	52	21
Dec-15	59	27
Mar-16	67	28

**Source:** Hospital Inpatient System

**Note:** Figures provided in the table above include primary, conversion and revisions of prosthetic hip and knee replacements.

- (b) The average number of hip and knee replacements performed weekly within the independent sector is not collected centrally.

**Mr McGrath** asked the Minister of Health to detail the quality indicators used for each Emergency Department.  
(AQW 4676/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department's clinical quality indicators relating to emergency departments are listed below.

- Number of GP Referrals to emergency departments.
- Percentage of new and unplanned review attendances at emergency care departments waiting: less than 30 minutes, 30 minutes to 1 hour, 1 to 2 hours, 2 to 3 hours, 3 to 4 hours, 4 hours to 6 hours, 6 to 8 hours, 8 to 10 hours, 10 to 12 hours and 12 hours or more, before being treated and discharged or admitted.
- Total time spent in emergency departments including the median, 95th percentile and single longest time spent by patients in the emergency department, for admitted and non-admitted patients.
- Number and percentage of attendances at emergency care departments triaged within 15 minutes.
- Time from arrival to initial assessment for ambulances at emergency departments.
- Time from arrival to initial assessment for all arrivals at emergency departments.
- Time from initial assessment to start of treatment in emergency departments.
- Percentage of patients triaged at levels 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the Manchester Triage Scale at Type 1 or 2 emergency departments.
- Time waited in emergency departments between decision to admit and admission including the median, 95th percentile and single longest time.
- Percentage of people who leave the emergency department before their treatment is complete.
- Percentage of unplanned re-attendances at emergency departments within seven days of original attendance.

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 2075/16-21, for an update on the Detox Crisis Unit in Omagh.  
(AQW 4708/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The planned refurbishment work for the proposed Omagh Complex Detox Unit has been completed. The Ward Manager has now been recruited and a fully staffed nursing team will be in place week beginning 24 October 2016, when two-week staff training will commence.

Accordingly the full complement of staff will be in place from 24 October 2016 and admissions to the Unit will commence from 07 November 2016.

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health to outline what counselling services are available for children and young people.  
(AQW 4709/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Counselling is one of a number of therapeutic interventions provided to children and young people who are referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), and may be provided in a very wide range of settings delivered by statutory, community and voluntary sector services.

The treatment interventions provided to children and young people presenting with emotional, behavioural and mental health difficulties will be based on their assessed needs and delivered in line with NICE guidelines. They can range from pharmacological treatment, to therapeutic interventions such as counselling, through to specialist psychotherapeutic interventions such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, psychotherapy, psychodynamic therapy and family therapy.

The Family Support website ([www.familysupportni.gov.uk](http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk)) provides an extensive list of a wide range of services provided by statutory, community and voluntary organisations available for children and their families across the region. The range of support services provided include group based interventions, family support, parenting programmes, befriending, counselling, group activities, etc.

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health to detail how many people, broken down by gender, have received treatment for eating disorders in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4710/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The information requested is not available broken down by gender. The table below contains figures on the number of non inpatient mental health service contacts that are newly seen by Eating Disorder Services in Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts.

**Table 1. Number of new contacts seen by Eating Disorder Services**

Year ending 31 March	New Contacts Seen
2011/12	348
2012/13	327
2013/14	386
2014/15	452
2015/16	505

**Source:** Non Inpatient Mental Health Return (NIMH)

**Note:** The statistics provided are experimental and in the process of development. HSC Trusts have been working to improve the quality and coverage of the services being reported on the NIMH return.

**Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the new Acute Mental Health Inpatient Unit at the City Hospital, Belfast.  
(AQW 4727/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Work on the construction of the new acute mental health inpatient unit at the Belfast City Hospital commenced on 1 August 2016. The construction is planned for completion in November 2018. Once complete the building will provide 74 acute mental health inpatient beds and six psychiatric intensive care beds for the population of Belfast.

**Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the provision of safe spaces for people dealing with substance misuse issues.

(AQW 4728/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Health & Social Care Board commissions generic and specialist support for people experiencing issues with drug and alcohol misuse across all five HSC Trust areas. These substance misuse services can be accessed by referral through primary and secondary care practitioners.

Following a review of Tier 4 inpatient addiction services, a Regional Addiction Treatment Network is in place, providing access to inpatient units at Downshire Hospital in Downpatrick and at Holywell Hospital in Antrim. Furthermore, the recently re-furbished inpatient unit at the Tyrone & Fermanagh Hospital in Omagh will re-open on 07 November 2016. These

statutory facilities provide specialist addiction treatment and detoxification under 24-hour medical supervision. As part of this regional network, the five HSC Trusts also have contracts with two independent sector providers of residential rehabilitation programmes (Northlands in Derry and Carlisle House in Belfast).

Belfast HSC Trust is currently piloting an Alcohol Recovery Centre in Belfast City Centre providing a safe space for people experiencing difficulties due to alcohol and/or drugs. When the effectiveness of this innovative service has been fully evaluated, consideration will be given to extending and rolling it out across other Trust areas.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health to detail the (i) longest; and (ii) average time patients are waiting for urgent heart surgery in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

**(AQW 4739/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** There is no cardiac surgery service within Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Health what measures she is taking to ensure that people diagnosed with mental illness have proper access to counselling and psychotherapy services, especially for those who are in full time employment and are reluctant to take time off work to go to appointments.

**(AQW 4740/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** People diagnosed with a mental illness are offered care and treatment options based on their assessed needs. Mental health services recognise that accessing and/or maintaining employment is a very important element in enhancing mental health and well-being, and whilst they strive to support people to maintain training and employment opportunities, out-of-hours of provision varies across Trust areas. My Department is considering three potential developments that may help to address this issue.

First, I am aware that more investment in psychological therapies is required, particularly to complete the rollout of talking therapies hubs across the region, which would help to make access to services easier. Second, extending hours of provision does have significant workforce implications, and my officials are at an early stage in considering a review of the workforce across the mental health programme of care. Third, the Health and Social Care Board is developing an integrated services model which, if realised, would reorganise services into a more coherent system to enable better integration of care across primary, secondary and specialist mental health and psychological services. The intention would be to promote earlier intervention, streamlined access points, and co-working across Trust areas.

All of these developments will have to be prioritised among the very wide range of pressures across the Health and Social Care Service, and will take time to be fully realised. I am, however, committed to improving mental health services.

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health when staff will receive the pay award recommended by the pay review body for 2016-17.

**(AQW 4741/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Business Services Organisation is working with suppliers to ensure that the 1% uplift and arrears are included in pay packets by the end of the calendar year.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health to detail all meetings which she has attended regarding the work of the Expert Panel on the Transformation of Health and Social Care (i) prior to 21 July 2016; and (ii) since 21 July 2016.

**(AQW 4770/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I met with the Expert Panel on 14th June 2016 and again on 21st July 2016 to take receipt of their report. I subsequently met with Professor Bengoa on 29th September 2016. I also briefed the Chair and Vice Chair of the Health Committee on 24th October and presented my response to the Panel's report to the Health Committee on 27th October. In this period I have also held meetings with my officials to discuss the report.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health to provide the total spend on hospitality by (i) her Department; and (ii) each of its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 4771/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The total expenditure on hospitality by (i) the Department of Health and (ii) each of its arms-length bodies, in each of the last three years, is set out in the table below.

	2015/16 £k	2014/15 £k	2013/14 £k
DOH	24.2	22.0	62.8
Health and Social Care Board	69.1	76.6	53.7
Belfast HSC Trust	62.5	33.8	25.8
Northern HSC Trust	10.9	16.0	22.8

	2015/16 £k	2014/15 £k	2013/14 £k
Southern HSC Trust	5.8	19.8	26.0
South Eastern HSC Trust	61.3	80.8	51.0
Western HSC Trust	14.1	13.9	13.1
NI Ambulance Service	1.5	1.2	2.8
Business Services Organisation	21.8	22.7	18.8
Public Health Agency	30.2	51.3	53.6
Patient Client Council	13.0	11.0	12.3
NI Fire & Rescue Service	6.1	14.2	16.7
NI Social Care Council	11.0	9.4	7.8
NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency	3.6	4.1	3.9
NI Medical & Dental Training Agency	3.5	4.2	5.9
NI Blood Transfusion Service	1.0	1.0	1.0
NI Practice & Education Council	0.1	3.0	-
Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority	5.5	6.5	8.0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>345.2</b>	<b>391.5</b>	<b>385.9</b>

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health on how many occasions each out-of-hours base in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust has been operated by (i) 1; (ii) 2; (iii) 3; and (iv) more GPs, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4772/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

**Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 3992/16-21, since April 2016 how many (i) urgent breast cancer referrals were seen within 14 days; (ii) what percentage of 98 per cent of patients diagnosed with cancer received their first definitive treatment within 31 days of a decision to treat; and (iii) what percentage of 95 per cent of patients urgently referred with a suspected cancer begin their first definitive treatment within 62 days.

(AQW 4777/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:**

- (i) Number of patients seen by a breast cancer specialist following an urgent referral for suspect cancer in the Northern HSC Trust (April – June 2016)

Total seen			Waited 14 days or less			% seen within 14 days		
Apr 2016	May 2016	Jun 2016	Apr 2016	May 2016	Jun 2016	Apr 2016	May 2016	Jun 2016
309	322	349	285	322	337	92.2%	100.0%	96.6%

**Source:** Departmental Return SDR2

- (ii) Number of patients who commenced first treatment, for all cancers in the Northern HSC Trust (April – June 2016)

Total treated			Treated within 31 days of a decision to treat			% treated within 31 days		
Apr 2016	May 2016	Jun 2016	Apr 2016	May 2016	Jun 2016	Apr 2016	May 2016	Jun 2016
114	87	114	96	79	99	84.2%	90.8%	86.8%

**Source:** Cancer Patient Pathway System (CaPPS)

- (iii) Number of patients who commenced first treatment following an urgent GP referral for suspect cancer, in the Northern HSC Trust (April – June 2016)

Commenced Treatment			Commenced within 62 days of Referral			% within 62 days		
Apr 2016	May 2016	Jun 2016	Apr 2016	May 2016	Jun 2016	Apr 2016	May 2016	Jun 2016
65.5	62.5	69.0	45.5	39.0	54.0	69.5%	62.4%	78.3%

**Source:** Cancer Patient Pathway System (CaPPS)

Information on waiting times for cancer services in relation to the Ministerial target is published quarterly on the Department's website: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/cancer-waiting-times>

**Mr Carroll** asked the Minister of Health how much private finance initiatives cost the Health Service budget each year. (AQW 4792/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The cost of private finance initiatives to the Health Service in the current financial year is £35.9m.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the review of the Families Matter Strategy. (AQW 4794/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Families Matter Strategy was published in 2009. It recognises that supporting parents in their primary role as care givers helps improve long term health and wellbeing outcomes for children. The strategy focuses on areas such as availability of information on services, access to those services and collaborative working. Early intervention and prevention are recognised as important to addressing issues before they require statutory involvement.

A website, Family Support NI, was set up following the launch of the strategy to direct families and professionals to services available in their local area. Last month it had almost 50,000 hits. There are now 29 Family Support Hubs across the whole of the North, involving approximately 664 statutory and non statutory organisations which work collaboratively to help families reach services that meet their needs.

I am committed to bringing forward a new Family Support Strategy, building on the success of Families Matter. Work is underway and it is intended to publish a draft strategy for consultation in 2017.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Health to detail (i) the total number of looked after children; and (ii) the length of time they have been in (a) foster care; (b) residential care; (c) placed with parents; and (d) other placements. (AQW 4804/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:**

- (i) The number of looked after children in the north of Ireland is set out in Table 1.

**Table 1 Number of Children in Care in the north of Ireland (provisional figures)**

Looked after children in the north of Ireland	
Number of children	2,966 (provisional)

This figure relates to 30 September 2016 for the Belfast, South Eastern and Western HSC Trusts, 31 August 2016 for the Southern HSC Trust and 17 October 2016 for the Northern HSC Trust.

- (ii) Figures in Table 2 detail the length of time that these looked after children have been in their current placement. Please note the caveats listed below.

**Table 2 Length of time in current placement (provisional figures)**

	Placement				Total
	Foster Care	Residential Care	Placed with Family	Other	
< 3 months	546	50	92	51	739
3 months to < 1 year	553	73	112	74	812
1 to < 3 years	555	42	138	19	754
3 to < 5 years	271	8	62	8	349
5 to < 10 years	234	-	26	-	268
>10 Years	38	-	4	-	44
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,197</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>2,966</b>

- 1 '-' figures suppressed to avoid personal disclosure.
- 2 Source: Health and Social Care Trusts
- 3 The information is not routinely collected in this format within the HSC Trusts and it may therefore be some differences in the way each Trust has extracted the information.
- 4 Figures relate to 30 September 2016 for the Belfast, South Eastern and Western HSC Trusts, 31 August 2016 for the Southern HSC Trust and 17 October 2016 for the Northern HSC Trust.
- 5 The South Eastern HSC Trust figures include children looked after under a supervisory order; Northern HSC Trusts figures exclude those children.
- 6 Children in care for respite purposes have been excluded.
- 7 The time of the placement will reset every time a child goes into/returns from a period of Respite or Short Break. Therefore, data for Foster Care in particular will be significantly affected in terms of overall length of placement where a child has been moved for this purpose.

The annual publications 'Children's Social Care Statistics for NI' and 'Children in Care in NI', detail statistics on looked after children in the north of Ireland. These can be found on the Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/looked-after-children>

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Health whether she has plans to reform adoption and foster care legislation.  
(AQW 4805/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** I intend to seek Executive agreement to consult on a draft Adoption and Children Bill, with a view to introducing the Bill in the Assembly as soon as possible in the current mandate. I also intend to seek Health Committee scrutiny of draft Fostering Regulations within a short timeframe.

**Ms Bailey** asked the Minister of Health how many people who died by suicide in each of the last ten years in each Health and Social Care Trust (i) had contact with mental health services; (ii) had attended accident and emergency as a result of self-harm or suicide ideation; (iii) were on a waiting list for mental health services following general practitioner referral; and (iv) had attended their general practitioner as a result of self-harm or suicidal ideation.  
(AQW 4806/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Information on the number of people who died by suicide in each of the last ten years in each Health and Social Care Trust that (i) had contact with mental health services is not held by the Department. However, the 2015 National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide by People with Mental Illness found that during 2003-2013, 741 suicides were identified as patient suicides, i.e. the person had been in contact with mental health services in the 12 months prior to death. This represents 27% of general population suicides, compared with 23% in Wales, 28% in England, and 30% in Scotland.

Information on the number of people who died by suicide in each of the last ten years in each Health and Social Care Trust that (ii) had attended accident and emergency as a result of self-harm or suicide ideation; (iii) were on a waiting list for mental health services following general practitioner referral; and (iv) had attended their general practitioner as a result of self-harm or suicidal ideation, is not available centrally.

**Ms Bailey** asked the Minister of Health how many people have been (i) assessed for post-exposure prophylaxis; and (ii) refused access to post-exposure prophylaxis in each Health and Social Care Trust since its introduction.  
(AQW 4810/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** This information is not collected centrally by the Department.

**Ms Bailey** asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the recently published National Institute for Health and Care Excellence evidence summary Pre-exposure prophylaxis of HIV in adults at high risk; and whether she intends to make pre-exposure prophylaxis available.  
(AQW 4811/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The evidence summary considers the available evidence for the efficacy and safety of Truvada for pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV (PrEP); it is not NICE guidance and does not make recommendations. The review reports that Truvada is effective in reducing HIV acquisition in high-risk people who do not have the virus. However, it also advises that issues relating to uptake, adherence, sexual behaviour, drug resistance, safety, prioritisation for prophylaxis and cost-effectiveness are also important to consider, especially at a population level.

I have asked my officials to engage with key stakeholders in the HSC to consider this matter further. Any decision on the commissioning of PrEP will be based on the best available clinical evidence to achieve optimal public health outcomes and subject to prioritisation within the resources available.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the use of STORM assessments and their usage; and whether these assessments are now standard in all Health and Social Care Trusts.

**(AQW 4825/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** HSC Trusts employ a range of suicide prevention and self harm training programmes including STORM, ASIST and in house mental health training. STORM assessment tools are not part of the standard suite of documents used by mental health staff in Health and Social Care Trusts but can be used where deemed appropriate.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health how many prisoners have been transferred to The State Hospital, Carstairs since 2011.

**(AQW 4837/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Since 2011 one prisoner has been transferred to the State Hospital, Carstairs to receive treatment in a high security setting. Prisoners are defined as people who have been sentenced to a custodial setting.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health to detail the percentage of her budget spent on elective care; and how this compares to other UK jurisdictions and to the Republic of Ireland.

**(AQW 4847/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Elective care is normally defined as appointment-based care. The HSC Trusts spent approximately 25% of their current expenditure budgets on elective care in 2013/14 (latest year for which this data is available). That represented approximately 19% of my Department's total revenue budget for the year. In addition there will be elements of expenditure within Primary Care, such as GPs and community pharmacists that is in relation to Elective Care and which is not separately identifiable and readily available.

A like-with-like comparison with the other jurisdictions mentioned is not available.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health to detail the amount of money spent at the South West Acute Hospital on (i) locum staff; and (ii) agency staff in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 4848/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The table below shows the expenditure on "Medical and Dental" and "Other" Agency staff for the last five financial years for the South West Acute Hospital. Other Agency Spend includes expenditure against the following categories; Nursing and Midwifery, Professional and Technical, Admin and Clerical, Support Services, Estates Management and Social Services.

South West Acute Hospital	2011-2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
Medical and Dental	£3.0m	£2.5m	£3.1m	£4.25m	£4.3m
Other Agency Spend	£0.1m	£0.7m	£0.7m	£0.7m	£0.8m

**Source:** Western Health and Social Care Trust

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of vacant consultant posts broken down by (i) Health and Social Care Trust; and (ii) speciality.

**(AQW 4851/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Information on the number of vacant consultant posts in each Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust, broken down by speciality is detailed below.

#### Belfast HSC Trust

Specialty	Consultant Vacancies	
	Headcount	WTE
Care of the Elderly	1	1.00
Stroke Medicine	1	1.00
Occupational Medicine	1	1.00
Clinical Genetics	1	1.00
Clinical Oncology	1	1.00
Anaesthetics (Cardiac)	2	2.00
Radiology (Interventional)	1	1.00
Intensive Care	5	5.00

Specialty	Consultant Vacancies		
	Headcount	WTE	
Emergency Medicine	2	2.00	
Locum Consultant in Psychiatry	1	1.00	
Paediatrics	ENT	1	1.00
	Allergy	1	1.00
	Emergency Medicine	1	1.00
	Community and General	1	1.00
	Gastroenterology	1	1.00
	Radiology	3	2.75
Obstetrics & Gynaecology	Neonatology	2	1.60
	Urogynaecology	1	1.00
	Gynae Oncology	1	1.00
	GUM & HIV	1	1.00
Dentistry	Oral Medicine	1	1.00
	Restorative Dentistry	1	1.00
Surgery	Vascular	1	1.00
	Thoracic	1	1.00
Pathology	Cellular	1	0.50
	Histopathology	1	1.00
Medicine	Acute and General	3	3.00
	Neurology	1	1.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>37.85</b>	

## Northern HSC Trust

Specialty	Consultant Vacancies	
	Headcount	WTE
Care of the Elderly/Geriatrics	3	3.00
Respiratory	3	3.00
Palliative Care	1	1.00
Cardiologist	1	1.00
Emergency Medicine	3	3.00
General Medicine with interest in Diabetes/Endocrine	1	1.00
Histopathology/Cytopathology	1	1.00
Medicine and Unscheduled Care	1	1.00
General Medicine	1	1.00
Radiology	5	4.92
Psychiatry	1	1.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>20.92</b>

**South Eastern HSC Trust**

Specialty	Consultant Vacancies	
	Headcount	WTE
Radiology	1	1.00
Urology	1	1.00
Neurologist	1	1.00
Rheumatologist	1	1.00
Cardiologist	2	2.00
Geriatrician	2	2.00
Locum Consultant Oncologist	1	1.00
Locum Urology	1	1.00
Locum Forensic Psychiatry	1	1.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11.00</b>

**Southern HSC Trust**

Specialty	Consultant Vacancies
Radiology	7
Emergency Medicine	4
Acute Medicine	2
Trauma & Orthopaedics	3
Geriatrics	2
Medical Microbiology	1
Anaesthetics	6
Paediatrics	4
Neurology	1
Psychiatry	1
Gastroenterology	1
Oncoplastic Breast Surgeon	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>

**Western HSC Trust**

Specialty	Consultant Vacancies	
	Headcount	WTE
Acute Medicine	2	2.00
Addictions Psychiatry Part-time	1	0.50
Anaesthetics	4	4.00
Care of Elderly	3	3.00
Dermatology	1	1.00
Diabetes & Endocrinology	1	1.00
Emergency Medicine	2	2.00
Gastroenterology	2	2.00
General Adult Psychiatry	1	1.00
Haematology	2	2.00

Specialty	Consultant Vacancies	
	Headcount	WTE
LD Psychiatry	1	1.00
Old Age Psychiatry	3	3.00
Oncology Medical/Clinical	2	2.00
Orthogeriatrician	1	1.00
Paediatrics	1	1.00
Paediatrics Acute/Community	1	1.00
Paediatrics Community Part-time	1	0.60
Palliative Medicine	1	1.00
Radiology	6	6.00
Rehabilitation Medicine	1	1.00
Respiratory Medicine	2	2.00
Surgery	1	1.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>39.10</b>

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister of Health to detail the amount of money spent at the Causeway Hospital on (i) locum staff; and (ii) agency staff in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 4855/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The table below shows the expenditure on Medical & Dental Staff and Agency Staff for the last five financial years for the Causeway Hospital. Other Agency Spend includes expenditure against the following categories; Nursing and Midwifery, Professional and Technical, Admin and Clerical, Support Services, Estates Management and Social Services

Causeway Hospital	2011-2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
Medical and Dental	£1.0m	£2.4m	£3.0m	£3.6m	£3.7m
Other Agency Spend	£0.2m	£0.3m	£0.4m	£0.6m	£1.0m

**Source:** Northern Health and Social Care Trust Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs

**Ms Bailey** asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 799/16-21, to outline the timeframes of correspondence between her Department and the expert group on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs; and when the panel advised her Department on the new evidence that indicates that the change to a 12-month deferral for men who have sex with men has not increased the risk of human immunodeficiency virus transmission.

**(AQW 4857/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The expert group on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs (SaBTO) completed the Donor Selection Criteria Review in April 2011. This review examined the criteria for exclusion from blood donation based on sexual behaviour on the part of MSM and commercial sex workers. My Department received the report of this review on 18 April 2011. In May 2011, SaBTO concluded that the evidence no longer supported a lifetime ban on blood donation by MSM.

On 31 December 2015 my Department received papers for a meeting of SaBTO. These included a paper on the UK Blood Donor Survey. This was the largest and most comprehensive survey of blood donors to date. The survey was distributed to all eligible new, and a sample of repeat, blood donors who donated between October 2013 and September 2014.

On 27 April 2016 the secretariat of SaBTO sent my Department a link to the 2014 annual review from the joint NHS Blood and Transplant/Public Health England Epidemiology Unit, published by Public Health England in October 2015. This report included surveillance data based on the testing of all blood donations in England, Scotland and Wales.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health the services available in North Down to deal with substance misuse.

**(AQW 4899/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Under the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2, the Public Health Agency commissions a range of substance misuse services which cover the North Down area. These services include prevention, information and awareness raising; community support; early intervention and harm reduction; counselling for family members; and treatment and support including the Community Addiction Team and access to inpatient services as required.

The full detail of the service available can be accessed online at: <http://www.drugsandalcohol.ni.info/services-near-you/>.

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health what steps are being taken to audit the number of vacant social work posts in the Health and Social Care sector.

**(AQW 4919/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The number of Social Work vacancies is monitored by each individual HSC employer on a regular basis and recruitment exercises carried out as and when required.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Health how many staff in each Health and Social Care Trust provide support to day opportunity provision.

**(AQW 4923/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The information is not readily available and can only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Health how much funding was allocated for evidence-based talking therapy to address mental ill health in each of the last three years; and what plans there are to increase funding in this area.

**(AQW 4933/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The annual allocation for evidence-based psychological therapies in each of the last three years is detailed below:

- 2013/14: £8.15m
- 2014/15: £9.88m
- 2015/16: £10m

Early investment in the development of a Mental Trauma Service, which would be based on the Psychological Therapies Stepped Care model, brings the allocation for the current year (2016/17) to £10.37m.

For 2017/18 and beyond, I am considering a range of potential service developments across mental health, including the need for considerable further investment in psychological therapies, as part of efforts to improve mental health under the forthcoming Programme for Government. All service developments will have to be affordable, and whilst mental health is one of my top priorities, I will need to take account of pressures right across health and social care, as well as the overall Executive budgetary position.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health what support is provided to Health and Social Care Trusts to enable them to fill vacant consultant and nursing positions.

**(AQW 4948/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department is leading several initiatives to support HSC Trusts to fill consultant and nursing vacancies.

The Business Services Organisation (BSO) has been commissioned by my Department to coordinate an international nurse recruitment campaign on behalf of all of the Trusts across the North. Six recruitment campaigns have already taken place during 2016, in The Philippines, Italy Greece and Romania.

Similarly, BSO has been commissioned to develop international recruitment campaigns on behalf of all the Trusts for medical specialities in which there are recognised shortages. In addition, the Public Health Agency, on behalf of the HSC, is leading efforts to recruit from overseas Radiologists, a speciality in which there is a worldwide shortage.

My Department, through its Regional Workforce Planning Group, coordinates longer-term workforce planning on a regional basis across HSC. The Nursing and Midwifery workforce plan recommends a strategic approach to the future recruitment and retention of nurses and informs the commissioning of pre-registration nurse training from the local universities.

Similarly, medical specialty workforce plans provide recommendations on the numbers of training places required to, over a period of time, address existing or potential future gaps in the availability of doctors, in particular at Consultant level.

Looking forward, in the document Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together outworking the recommendations of the Expert Panel Report, 'Systems, not structures: Changing Health & Social Care', I have given a commitment to the development by May 2017 of a Workforce Strategy covering all aspects of the HSC workforce, including workforce planning.

**Mr Carroll** asked the Minister of Health to detail the expenditure for drug rehabilitation programmes in prisons for 2015.

**(AQW 5019/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The South Eastern Health and Social Trust provides Healthcare for our prisons and their expenditure annually on drug rehabilitation services totals £1,721,351. This includes core mental health and addictions teams and specialist addictions psychosocial programmes.

**Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister of Health what checks and measures are in place to ensure security systems in hospitals are effective and fit for purpose.

**(AQW 5034/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The need for security systems in hospitals is based on individual HSC Trust risk assessments of the potential security risks to Trust property, staff and service users. Risk assessments are regularly reviewed and updated as required to take account of any change in use for the building or area.

Where building security systems have been installed to help manage identified risks, these are maintained by the individual Trust Estates Departments in line with published standards utilising approved and accredited security industry contractors.

**Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister of Health how many security staff are employed in each hospital; and how many are employed (i) directly by a Health and Social Care Trust; and (ii) via an external agency.

**(AQW 5035/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Information on the number of security staff employed in each hospital is detailed below.

#### Belfast HSC Trust

Hospital	Employed by HSC Trust		Employed by External Agency
	Headcount	WTE	
Belfast City Hospital	19	19.00	0
Mater Hospital	20	20.00	0
Musgrave Park Hospital	29	27.62	0
Royal Victoria Hospital	54	53.29	0

#### Northern HSC Trust

The Northern HSC Trust has a contract with Noonan Security to provide security guards on the Acute Hospital Sites. These guards are not Trust employees.

On Antrim Hospital Site one guard is employed from 3pm – 6am. On Causeway Site one guard is employed from 10pm – 6am. Outside of these hours, some support staff have had formal frontline training which enables them to deploy techniques in specific circumstances.

#### South Eastern HSC Trust

Hospital	Employed by HSC Trust	Employed by External Agency
Ulster Hospital	20	0
Lagan Valley Hospital	11	0
Downe/Downshire Hospitals	6	0

#### Southern HSC Trust

Hospital	Employed by HSC Trust		Employed by External Agency	
	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE
Craigavon Area Hospital	17	15.80	12	11.20
Daisy Hill Hospital	8	8.00	3	3.00

In addition, the Southern HSC Trust engages security guards from an external contractor at Lurgan Hospital (1 WTE) and Daisy Hill Emergency Department (1.5 WTE).

#### Western HSC Trust

Hospital	Employed by HSC Trust		Employed by External Agency
	Headcount	WTE	
Altnagelvin	50	41.20	0
South West Acute	35	26.00	0
Tyrone County/ Tyrone & Fermanagh	12	10.30	0

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health to detail the costs associated with the Take Home Naloxone Scheme since its inception in 2013.

**(AQW 5076/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The following table shows the costs associated with the Take Home Naloxone Scheme since 2013:

	<b>Training &amp; Development etc (£)</b>	<b>Cost of Medicine (£)</b>	<b>Total (£)</b>
2013/14	15,939.00	3,015.50	18,954.50
2014/15	10,498.00	3,478.00	13,976.00
2015/16	127.00	5,622.00	5,749.00
	26,564.00	12,115.50	38,679.50

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Health for an update on medical staffing levels at the South Tyrone Hospital.  
(AQW 5077/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The medical staffing at Loane House, South Tyrone Hospital is as follows:

- 8 sessions (4 days) of consultant geriatrician cover per week
- 1.7 whole time equivalent (wte) Specialty Doctor in Geriatric Medicine
- 1wte Associate Specialist in Geriatric Medicine
- 1 wte Core Trainee in Geriatric Medicine
- Out of hours cover is provided by on-call GPs.

A range of outpatient clinics and day surgery is also provided at South Tyrone Hospital by medical staff from across the Southern HSC Trust.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health to detail the annual medicines bill for each Health and Social Care Trust in the last three years, broken down by type of medicine.  
(AQW 5087/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The annual medicines spend for the last three years as provided by each Health and Social Care Trust is set out in the tables below. Annual spend is broken down by the main medicine types within the BNF as well as a category for expenditure on other medicines.

#### **Belfast HSC Trust**

<b>Medicine type</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
Gastro-intestinal system	£425,450	£401,461	£420,593
Cardiovascular system	£3,240,192	£3,192,152	£3,311,751
Respiratory system	£1,586,515	£5,224,215	£5,440,865
Central nervous system	£3,306,080	£3,160,531	£3,401,476
Infections	£10,462,588	£11,132,982	£11,816,059
Endocrine system	£2,019,497	£2,128,637	£2,287,379
Obstetrics, gynaecology & urinary-tract disorders	£644,220	£633,085	£622,824
Malignant disease and immunosuppression	£22,516,768	£24,328,152	£26,911,013
Nutrition and blood	£4,251,558	£5,668,822	£6,927,404
Musculoskeletal and joint diseases	£15,083,423	£17,272,600	£18,696,808
Eye	£5,070,789	£4,699,720	£6,584,848
Ear, nose and oropharynx	£141,197	£153,729	£169,426
Skin	£1,261,831	£1,257,696	£1,413,304
Immunological products and vaccines	£2,477,658	£2,558,780	£2,425,581
Anaesthesia	£1,598,900	£1,778,846	£1,611,610
Other	£7,314,252	£7,958,333	£8,648,700
<b>Total</b>	<b>£81,400,918</b>	<b>£91,549,740</b>	<b>£100,689,641</b>

**Northern HSC Trust**

<b>Medicine type</b>	<b>2012/13†</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
Gastro-intestinal system	£125,312	£171,305	£172,125
Cardiovascular system	£534,033	£734,732	£781,113
Respiratory system	£548,382	£698,181	£689,205
Central nervous system	£1,288,055	£1,614,396	£1,582,735
Infections	£1,496,512	£1,860,525	£1,961,613
Endocrine system	£319,309	£422,341	£438,652
Obstetrics, gynaecology & urinary-tract disorders	£258,873	£368,400	£346,465
Malignant disease and immunosuppression	£2,264,794	£3,026,048	£3,707,449
Nutrition and blood	£854,184	£1,261,923	£1,358,765
Musculoskeletal and joint diseases	£2,343,420	£3,939,048	£4,755,461
Eye	£36,885	£52,311	£50,715
Ear, nose and oropharynx	£24,654	£39,556	£40,319
Skin	£1,493,714	£2,259,124	£3,031,487
Immunological products and vaccines	£1,046,973	£1,402,071	£1,309,744
Anaesthesia	£374,516	£512,766	£464,041
Emergency treatment of poisoning	£3,637	£6,846	£6,765
Other	£6,507,234	£8,513,780	8,199,624
<b>Total</b>	<b>£19,520,486</b>	<b>£26,883,352</b>	<b>£28,896,278</b>

† It has not been possible to obtain a full year's date for the categories listed. The information shown is for approximately nine months' data.

**South Eastern HSC Trust**

<b>Medicine type</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
Gastro-intestinal system	£143,445	£146,695	£144,469
Cardiovascular system	£739,759	£811,977	£809,718
Respiratory system	£519,497	£556,315	£615,619
Central nervous system	£960,071	£997,722	£1,052,571
Infections	£1,514,552	£1,789,734	£1,732,070
Endocrine system	£374,178	£433,253	£501,135
Obstetrics, gynaecology & urinary-tract disorders	£180,710	£188,441	£211,457
Malignant disease and immunosuppression	£2,138,734	£2,628,812	£3,171,337
Nutrition and blood	£1,312,066	£1,473,693	£1,430,537
Musculoskeletal and joint diseases	£2,000,448	£2,506,255	£2,824,816
Eye	£76,700	£81,677	£81,552
Ear, nose and oropharynx	£29,394	£31,392	£36,820
Skin	£1,081,999	£1,250,138	£1,417,133
Immunological products and vaccines	£573,763	£964,041	£906,952
Anaesthesia	£460,840	£422,641	£440,217
Emergency treatment of poisoning	£4,238	£4,593	£6,915
Other	£1,786,121	£2,033,888	£2,000,532
<b>Total</b>	<b>£13,896,516</b>	<b>£16,321,267</b>	<b>£17,383,850</b>

**Southern HSC Trust**

<b>Medicine type</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
Gastro-intestinal system	£161,963	£138,995	£151,443
Cardiovascular system	£885,507	£932,798	£1,051,985
Respiratory system	£570,482	£570,358	£611,883
Central nervous system	£1,075,573	£1,037,442	£1,060,947
Infections	£1,384,068	£1,573,269	£1,586,122
Endocrine system	£411,740	£456,556	£535,616
Obstetrics, gynaecology & urinary-tract disorders	£314,507	£328,875	£339,454
Malignant disease and immunosuppression	£2,302,434	£2,951,888	£3,181,453
Nutrition and blood	£1,140,299	£1,134,447	£1,196,700
Musculoskeletal and joint diseases	£2,049,512	£2,478,630	£2,951,785
Eye	£47,728	£54,006	£44,817
Ear, nose and oropharynx	£30,464	£33,796	£43,618
Skin	£1,423,077	£1,636,688	£1,721,429
Immunological products and vaccines	£1,292,484	£1,377,550	£1,332,968
Anaesthesia	£603,677	£584,310	£590,123
Emergency treatment of poisoning	£4,037	£4,906	£5,410
Other	£2,511,369	£2,617,255	£2,584,414
<b>Total</b>	<b>£16,208,917</b>	<b>£17,911,767</b>	<b>£18,990,167</b>

**Western HSC Trust**

<b>Medicine type</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
Gastro-intestinal system	£133,017	£133,560	£128,831
Cardiovascular system	£765,742	£836,119	£843,927
Respiratory system	£541,470	£596,127	£718,625
Central nervous system	£955,921	£942,448	£966,993
Infections	£1,436,973	£1,447,905	£1,368,384
Endocrine system	£310,045	£325,267	£383,189
Obstetrics, gynaecology & urinary-tract disorders	£320,715	£326,253	£341,833
Malignant disease and immunosuppression	£2,431,008	£2,944,292	£2,993,688
Nutrition and blood	£1,162,623	£1,304,185	£1,322,883
Musculoskeletal and joint diseases	£2,376,664	£3,266,319	£3,970,126
Eye	£917,286	£1,079,624	£1,092,937
Ear, nose and oropharynx	£32,818	£34,550	£40,339
Skin	£731,836	£914,669	£1,149,867
Immunological products and vaccines	£1,023,008	£1,053,405	£1,010,309
Anaesthesia	£446,637	£482,933	£469,827
Emergency treatment of poisoning	£3,050	£4,709	£3,960
Other	£231,989	£285,414	£286,649
<b>Total</b>	<b>£13,820,803</b>	<b>£15,977,778</b>	<b>£17,092,367</b>

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health to detail the amount spent on antidepressant medicines by each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 5088/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The amount spent on antidepressant medicines by each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last five years is not available. The ingredient costs before discount and excluding dispensing fees of antidepressant drugs dispensed by a community pharmacist, dispensing doctor or appliance supplier, and presented for payment in each of the last 5 financial years are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Gross Ingredient Cost<sup>3</sup> (millions of pounds) of anti-depressant<sup>1</sup> items dispensed, 2011/12 – 2015/16**

Trust <sup>2</sup>	Gross Ingredient Cost (millions of pounds) <sup>3</sup>				
	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016
Belfast	2.97	2.27	2.70	2.43	2.33
Northern	3.97	3.13	3.63	3.06	2.87
South Eastern	2.64	2.02	2.41	2.22	2.10
Southern	3.15	2.33	2.74	2.48	2.37
Western	2.04	1.67	2.15	1.83	1.83
Not available <sup>4</sup>	1.93	1.67	1.61	1.78	2.08
Northern Ireland	16.71	13.10	15.24	13.79	13.59

**Source:** Family Practitioner Services, Information and Registration Unit, BSO.

- 1 Anti-depressant items are those listed under Chapter 4 Section 3 of the British National Formulary
- 2 Trust has been defined as the Trust in which a patient lives, based on their postcode
- 3 Gross Ingredient costs are costs before discounts are applied and exclude dispensing fees
- 4 Some items and costs cannot be assigned to a Trust, due to missing patient details or exclusions

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health what was the reduction in the budget for Public Health Services in June 2016; and what were the reasons for the reduction.

**(AQW 5091/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** There was no reduction in the budget for Public Health Services in June 2016.

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health how many patients in the Western Health and Social Care Trust are awaiting a gall bladder operation.

**(AQW 5092/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** At 30th June 2016, the most recent quarter for which official statistics are available, 500 people were waiting for a gall bladder operation in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health how many gall bladder operations have taken place in the Western Health and Social Care Trust in 2016 to date.

**(AQW 5093/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The latest available information shows that during 2015/16, there were 284 gall bladder operations carried out in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

**Mr Allen** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the Fatal Foetal Abnormality working group; and when she expects to receive its report.

**(AQW 5095/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Justice Minister and I received the Working Group's report on 11 October 2016 and the work of the Group is now complete. We are actively considering its proposals.

When both the Justice Minister and I are content, the report will be submitted to the Executive for its consideration and approval. It is not intended to publish the report nor its recommendations until the Executive has concluded its deliberations.

**Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Health what action her Department is taking in conjunction with key agencies to advance suicide prevention efforts.

**(AQW 5102/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department works in conjunction with the Public Health Agency, other government Departments, the Health and Social Care sector, charities, and community and voluntary bodies in order to advance suicide prevention efforts.

Multi-agency suicide prevention efforts include: "Flourish" churches suicide prevention initiative; iMatter programme in schools; mental health and suicide prevention training for sports coaches; work with the arts sector; community response planning; joint working on the Healthcare in Justice strategy; and provision of a wide range of suicide prevention initiatives through the community and voluntary sector.

In addition, I personally chair the Ministerial Coordination Group on Suicide Prevention which provides oversight, leadership and impetus for cross-departmental collaboration and coordination on suicide prevention.

Protect Life 2: a draft strategy for suicide prevention in the north of Ireland is currently out for public consultation and contains actions for a number of our partner agencies.

**Mr Poots** asked the Minister of Health how much each Health and Social Care Trust spent on interpreters in each of the last three financial years.

**(AQW 5123/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The total expenditure on interpreters by each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three financial years is set out in the table below.

<b>Health &amp; Social Care Trust</b>	<b>2015/16 £k</b>	<b>2014/15 £k</b>	<b>2013/14 £k</b>
Southern Health & Social Care Trust	1,567	1,360	1,310
Belfast Health & Social Care Trust	960	914	755
Northern Health & Social Care Trust	451	417	436
Western Health & Social Care Trust	253	219	247
South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust	172	159	159
NI Ambulance Service Health & Social Care Trust	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,404</b>	<b>3,069</b>	<b>2,908</b>

**Source:** Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Interpreting Service (NIHSCIS) and N I Ambulance Service HSC Trust.

**Ms Bailey** asked the Minister of Health what resource her Department has allocated to sexual health services compared to counterpart Departments in the rest of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

**(AQW 5126/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** An additional recurring investment of £3,907,099 has been allocated during the four year period 2013/14 to 2016/17 into sexual health services.

My Department does not hold information on the health budget allocation in other administrations.

**Ms Bailey** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the human papilloma virus vaccination campaign targeted at men that have sex with men, including her engagement with relevant representative groups and their role in the campaign; and how the allocated £100,000 will be spent.

**(AQW 5127/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department is working closely with the Public Health Agency to ensure the HPV vaccine will begin to be offered to eligible men attending GUM clinics within the next few weeks.

The Public Health Agency leads on the operational implementation of this programme and they have met with Rainbow, Brooke and Positive Life to discuss the details if it.

The funding for the programme will be used to meet the cost of the vaccine itself; the cost of administering the vaccine, and the cost of information leaflets to support the programme.

**Ms Bailey** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the uptake rates of the human papilloma virus vaccination for young women.

**(AQW 5129/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The uptake rate for the academic year 2014/15 shows that almost 92% of girls in year 9 received the first dose of the HPV vaccine while nearly 87% received the second dose. The uptake rate for year 9 during the academic year 2015/16 will be available in December 2016.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health whether she will halt plans to close Pine Lodge Care Home.

**(AQW 5130/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I have not yet made final decisions on proposals for any of the residential care homes under review, including Pine Lodge.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health what is the total number of care home places required to meet demand; and what analysis her Department undertakes to determine the number of available places in care homes for people who are reliant on state support.

**(AQW 5131/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Health and Social Care Board undertakes a survey of residential, nursing, and dual registered (residential & nursing) care home provision on a six monthly basis. The latest report, at March 2016, indicated there was a total of 700 vacancies out of a complement of 15,927 places.

As part of the Reform of Adult Care and Support project, the Health and Social Care Board is currently considering how best to undertake a more in depth market analysis to assess the stability of the sector.

**Ms Bailey** asked the Minister of Health what input other Departments have had in the development of the suicide prevention strategy.

**(AQW 5132/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Other Departments have contributed actions to the draft Protect Life 2 Strategy and will continue to report against these at the Ministerial Coordination Group on Suicide Prevention once the final Strategy is published. The draft Strategy was discussed by the Group at recent meetings including the meeting held on 10 October 2016.

Departments also contributed through pre-consultation engagement and through their representation on the Suicide Strategy Implementation Body. There are close linkages with other strategies and policies including Healthcare in Justice Strategy, and schools Imatter programme.

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister of Health how her Department is supporting the delivery of music therapy to older people.

**(AQW 5190/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department does not provide funding specifically for music therapy for older people. However, the Health and Social Care Board and Public Health Agency fund a number of initiatives within the arts field, which includes activities involving music for older people. The Health and Social Care Board fund Arts Care NI (£240k) to deliver a wide range of art activities and interventions for all groups, including performance and participation in music. These services are delivered across the five Health and Social Care Trusts in a range of health and social care settings, and clients include older people and people living with dementia.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of appointments undertaken by each service offered at the Banbridge Health and Care Centre in each month since it opened.

**(AQW 5191/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The information requested is not available and could only be obtained through a manual trawl of records at a disproportionate cost.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health to detail (i) the number; (ii) grade; and (iii) function of staff in the Banbridge Health and Care Centre.

**(AQW 5192/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Information on the number of staff in Banbridge Health and Care Centre is detailed in the table below.

Personnel Area	Job Description	Headcount	WTE
Administrative & Clerical	Administrative & Clerical	33	26.53
Medical & Dental	Dental Officer	1	1.00
Nursing & Midwifery	Acute Nurse	12	10.39
	District Nurse	11	10.37
	District Nurse Support	1	1.00
	Health Visitor	9	8.25
	Midwife	7	6.60
	Nurse Manager	1	1.00

Personnel Area	Job Description	Headcount	WTE
	School Nurse	2	1.49
	Specialist Nurse	1	0.80
	Teacher/Trainer	1	0.60
	Treatment Room/Practice Nurse	2	1.55
Professional & Technical	Dentistry	2	1.31
	Occupational Therapist	8	5.76
	Occupational Therapy Support	2	1.39
	Podiatrist	6	3.89
	Speech & Language Therapist	2	1.60
Social Services	Child & Family Social Work Support	1	0.40
	Child & Family Social Worker	12	10.31
	Elderly Social Work Support	16	15.10
	Elderly Social Worker	6	6.00
	Reablement Support Worker	5	4.80
	Social Work Manager	2	1.60
Support Services	Caretaker	1	1.00
	Domestic Services	3	2.52
<b>Total</b>		<b>147</b>	<b>125.26</b>

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health what arrangements have been made with her Department to promote co-operation as required by Section 2(2) of the Children's Co-operation Act.

**(AQW 5220/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Executive's new Children and Young People's Strategy, currently under development, will set out how Government will improve the well being of children and young people. My Department has been part of the Project Team established to oversee the development of the Strategy and we will work with other Departments to implement the Strategy. The Department is also represented on the cross-departmental Children's Champion Group.

**Ms Bailey** asked the Minister of Health when she will answer AQW 2876/16-21.

**(AQW 5222/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My response to AQW 2876 16-21 was issued on 19 October 2016.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health to detail (i) the number of patients that attended the Emergency Department in the South West Acute Hospital in the last three years; and (ii) the number that were admitted.

**(AQW 5223/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** It is assumed this question refers to the number of attendances at the South West Acute emergency care department (ED).

Information on the number of new, unplanned and planned review attendances at the South West Acute ED, including those who were subsequently admitted to hospital, is detailed in the table below, for each of the last 3 years.

Year	Attendances <sup>1</sup>	Emergency Admissions <sup>2</sup>
2013/14	30,042	6,943
2014/15	30,740	7,247
2015/16	32,240	7,870

<sup>1</sup> The number of attendances does not equal the number of individuals, as an individual can present to ED more than once.

<sup>2</sup> Emergency Admissions (admissions via ED) information is sourced from the ED Administrative Systems and will, therefore, differ slightly from the information included in the Hospital Statistics: Inpatients and Day Case Statistics, which are sourced from the Hospital Inpatient System.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of patients who attended the South West Acute Hospital for emergency services in the last twelve months and were subsequently transferred to other hospital sites.

**(AQW 5224/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The latest available data shows that during 2015/16, there were 666 emergency admissions to the South West Acute Hospital which were subsequently transferred to other hospital sites.

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the Cancer Drugs Fund.

**(AQW 5225/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Cancer Drugs Fund applies only to England.

All cancer drugs that have been recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) for routine use in the NHS are available in the North. However, those drugs which have not been recommended by NICE may be accessed, where clinical exceptionalism can be established, via the current Individual Funding Request (IFR) process.

My predecessor established a clinically-led task and finish group to reform the IFR process following public consultation on proposals to improve access to all specialist drugs, including cancer drugs, and introduce greater transparency in the decision making process. The group will report to me shortly and I aim to introduce the new arrangements during 2016/17 on a phased basis subject to available funding.

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the adoption of a cancer strategy.

**(AQW 5226/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I would refer the member to my answer to AQW 3769/16-21

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister of Health to detail the amount of money received from the Pharmacy Price Regulation Scheme in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 5227/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Receipts from the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme (PPRS) go directly from the Department of Health (London) to the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB). The total amount of receipts received by the HSCB in the last three financial years is as follows:

Financial year	PPRS receipts
2013/14	£2.85m
2014/15	£16.7m
2015/16	£37.0m

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Health for a breakdown of the expenditure on mental health service provision in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 5250/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The table below outlines a breakdown of the expenditure on mental health service provision in Health and Social Care Trusts from 2010/2011 to 2014/2015. This information is taken from Trust Financial Returns and does not include spending on items such as extra contractual referrals, or grant funding of voluntary sector organisations. Final figures for 2015/2016 are not yet available.

Hospital:	Category of Hospital Care	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Mental illness	Day Case and Outpatient	£11,090,551	£9,699,721	£13,033,728	£13,597,021	£14,044,197
Mental illness - Acute care	In-patient and Day Care	£41,517,926	£42,310,449	£43,147,828	£37,320,166	£38,489,186
Mental illness - Addictions	In-patient and Day Care	£3,286,093	£3,298,213	£3,700,766	£3,829,469	£3,608,087
Mental illness - ITU	In-patient	£5,914,661	£6,149,885	£5,176,194	£7,678,121	£9,944,344
Mental illness - Other	In-patient	£3,252,827	£2,383,806	£2,492,059	£2,537,442	£2,822,010

<b>Hospital:</b>	<b>Category of Hospital Care</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
Mental illness - Rehabilitation / continuing care	In-patient and Day Care	£15,353,691	£13,460,697	£14,227,039	£13,166,763	£10,778,400
Mental illness - Secure Units	In-patient	£10,229,158	£11,620,862	£9,408,075	£9,601,171	£8,549,401
Child & Adolescent Psychiatry	In-patient, Outpatient and Day Care	£10,502,436	£9,616,505	£11,116,057	£12,960,005	£13,501,901
Forensic Psychiatry	In-patient and Outpatient	£281,297	£281,828	£235,396	£295,113	£292,164
Psychotherapy	Outpatient	£2,028,285	£3,079,103	£2,212,252	£3,197,798	£3,377,549
<b>Hospital Total</b>		<b>£103,456,925</b>	<b>£101,901,067</b>	<b>£104,749,393</b>	<b>£104,183,070</b>	<b>£105,407,239</b>
<b>Community</b>						
AHP Expenditure		£4,219,500	£4,173,792	£6,351,501	£6,241,455	£5,848,265
Community addictions teams		£6,744,820	£7,043,657	£7,682,491	£7,807,334	£8,476,998
Community medical / dental expenditure		£9,650,736	£9,206,101	£8,324,653	£9,812,468	£9,514,759
Consultant led Outreach teams		£11,738,477	£14,321,629	£14,681,863	£15,549,657	£17,423,800
Grants, Goods and Services		£8,358,403	£6,399,919	£5,912,017	£5,307,914	£6,194,926
Incontinence Products		£1,837	£4,457	£26,482	£4,806	£3,355
Intensive care Treatment teams		£2,092,976	£1,379,970	£1,584,823	£1,494,003	£1,325,715
Community Nursing Costs		£20,669,344	£20,063,831	£21,267,741	£22,079,253	£22,786,557
Step up / step down facilities		£403,849	£2,658,267	£1,224,434	£864,530	£987,781
<b>Community Total</b>		<b>£63,879,942</b>	<b>£65,251,623</b>	<b>£67,056,006</b>	<b>£69,161,420</b>	<b>£72,562,156</b>
<b>Personal Social Services</b>						
Daycare Facilities		£8,357,216	£8,088,970	£9,364,269	£9,323,441	£8,844,396
Domiciliary Care		£5,009,398	£6,307,290	£4,948,341	£6,765,997	£7,266,450
Grants, Goods and Services		£7,082,487	£7,505,445	£3,448,083	£3,732,193	£3,577,835
Meals delivered to clients' homes		£148,669	£164,862	£88,843	£107,997	£101,136
Nursing Homes		£9,887,476	£10,436,257	£10,735,179	£10,519,916	£13,009,974

Hospital:	Category of Hospital Care	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Residential Homes		£7,086,196	£5,796,953	£5,673,372	£6,366,154	£7,023,487
Social Work		£10,592,804	£10,461,801	£10,454,884	£10,298,872	£10,495,341
Supported and other accommodation		£12,496,623	£11,538,869	£13,327,280	£13,319,762	£15,348,841
Personal Social Services Total		£60,660,871	£60,300,446	£58,040,251	£60,434,332	£65,667,461
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>£227,997,738</b>	<b>£227,453,136</b>	<b>£229,845,649</b>	<b>£233,778,822</b>	<b>£243,636,856</b>

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health whether she can give an assurance that the operation of the Marie Stopes clinic in Belfast is closely monitored to ensure there are no infringements of the law on abortion.

**(AQW 5276/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Marie Stopes NI is registered with RQIA as an independent clinic under the category of care "private doctor". Independent clinics are regulated in accordance with the Independent Healthcare Regulations (NI) 2005. My Department's Minimum Care Standards for Healthcare Establishments set out the requirements for the registration and inspection of independent clinics.

RQIA's function in regulating any establishment or agency is not to monitor its operations. In its inspections RQIA looks for evidence to show that care is safe, effective and compassionate and that the service is well-led. The reports of care inspections carried out at the clinic in 2014 and 2015 are published on the RQIA website (<https://www.rqia.org.uk/inspections/view-inspections-as/map/marie-stopes-northern-ireland/>). No areas for improvement were identified at either inspection.

There is no requirement for an independent clinic to demonstrate publicly that it is operating within the law. Every regulated service is required to operate in line with all relevant legislation.

In its inspections of Marie Stopes NI, RQIA focuses on and examines governance arrangements for the private doctor service. The doctor's clinical activities are subject to professional regulation through the GMC, and not RQIA regulation.

It is for the registered provider to ensure that the service is run in accordance with all relevant legislation. Where it is alleged or suspected that a criminal offence has been committed, it is a matter for investigation by the PSNI.

My Department does not collect information on the numbers of procedures carried out by Marie Stopes NI.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority's ability to monitor the operation of the Marie Stopes clinic in Belfast.

**(AQW 5277/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Marie Stopes NI is registered with RQIA as an independent clinic under the category of care "private doctor". Independent clinics are regulated in accordance with the Independent Healthcare Regulations (NI) 2005. My Department's Minimum Care Standards for Healthcare Establishments set out the requirements for the registration and inspection of independent clinics.

RQIA's function in regulating any establishment or agency is not to monitor its operations. In its inspections RQIA looks for evidence to show that care is safe, effective and compassionate and that the service is well-led. The reports of care inspections carried out at the clinic in 2014 and 2015 are published on the RQIA website (<https://www.rqia.org.uk/inspections/view-inspections-as/map/marie-stopes-northern-ireland/>). No areas for improvement were identified at either inspection.

There is no requirement for an independent clinic to demonstrate publicly that it is operating within the law. Every regulated service is required to operate in line with all relevant legislation.

In its inspections of Marie Stopes NI, RQIA focuses on and examines governance arrangements for the private doctor service. The doctor's clinical activities are subject to professional regulation through the GMC, and not RQIA regulation.

It is for the registered provider to ensure that the service is run in accordance with all relevant legislation. Where it is alleged or suspected that a criminal offence has been committed, it is a matter for investigation by the PSNI.

My Department does not collect information on the numbers of procedures carried out by Marie Stopes NI.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health how many abortions have been carried out in each year in the Marie Stopes clinic in Belfast since it opened; and what measures are in place to demonstrate publically that the clinic is operating within the law, given that its remit is focused on the quality of services provided.

**(AQW 5278/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Marie Stopes NI is registered with RQIA as an independent clinic under the category of care "private doctor". Independent clinics are regulated in accordance with the Independent Healthcare Regulations (NI) 2005. My Department's Minimum Care Standards for Healthcare Establishments set out the requirements for the registration and inspection of independent clinics.

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My Department does not collect information on the numbers of procedures carried out by Marie Stopes NI.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health what regulation has been put in place since the Marie Stopes clinic began operating in Belfast.

**(AQW 5279/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Marie Stopes NI is registered with RQIA as an independent clinic under the category of care "private doctor". Independent clinics are regulated in accordance with the Independent Healthcare Regulations (NI) 2005. My Department's Minimum Care Standards for Healthcare Establishments set out the requirements for the registration and inspection of independent clinics.

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My Department does not collect information on the numbers of procedures carried out by Marie Stopes NI.

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health how GPs are increasing their knowledge, understanding and ability to identify the symptoms of borderline personality disorder and other personality disorders.

**(AQW 5280/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** In relation to the professional development of GPs, there is no central process for identifying specific training needs. Under the GMC's Good Medical Practice, GPs are expected to identify and undertake training based on their own assessment of their professional development needs and this is facilitated through compulsory annual appraisal.

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health how many GPs have accreditation as practitioners with a special interest in mental health.

**(AQW 5354/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** There is no formal accreditation process or register within the Health and Social Care Service for GPs with a special interest in mental health. However, I recognise the vital role GPs and the wider primary care team play in the early identification and management of mental illness, as well as in the promotion of mental health and wellbeing.

Through the Quality and Outcomes Framework element of the General Medical Services contract, my Department seeks to ensure that general practice delivers high quality, standardised care and positive outcomes for patients, including those with depression and mental illness.

The management of mild to moderate depression in general practice is a priority for my Department. In 2015/16, 223 GP practices contracted with the Health and Social Care Board to provide enhanced services aimed at supporting the management of mild to moderate depression in general practice. This enhanced service is continuing in the current year, with practices providing access to practice-based counselling services where this is appropriate for a patient's needs.

In addition, the Health and Social Care Board and the BMA's local GP Committee have agreed a set of practical guidelines to ensure the provision of high quality care to patients with severe mental illness. The Board has a contract in place with 19 GP practices to provide an enhanced service for the assessment of patients with a severe mental illness who are not otherwise registered with a GP practice or are receiving treatment outside their normal practice area. Practices providing this service are required to satisfy specific training requirements.

I have committed to bringing forward, by March 2017, a consultation on the role of GP Federations. I believe that Federations have the potential to offer greater scope for GPs to specialise in a number of areas, including mental health. I have also been clear that in future primary care must be based on multidisciplinary teams embedded in general practice, to provide high quality support and care to deliver positive physical and mental health outcomes.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health, in light of the announcement by the Patient and Client Council that Fibromyalgia is to be recognised as a long-term condition, (i) in what form will dedicated services be established across Health and Social Care Trusts; (ii) to detail the pathway to be provided to patients upon diagnosis; and (iii) whether consultation on service provision will take place with patient groups.

**(AQW 5381/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Condition Management Programme (CMP) currently in place in the Northern and Belfast Health and Social Care Trusts is a 12 week voluntary programme delivered by health care professionals, which aims at helping people better understand and manage their health symptoms. Expansion of the CMP to other Health and Social Care Trusts will be subject to affordability within the current challenging financial position.

The pathway is being developed and describes the patient journey from initial symptoms over assessment and investigations in General Practice to potential referral to secondary care. Based on European best practice guidelines for managing fibromyalgia, the pathway will outline options for the management of more severely affected patients with medication and specialised self management programmes provided by hospital based multidisciplinary teams.

The pathway is being co designed by patients and their representative groups identified with support of the Patient and Client Council (PCC) and the NI Pain Forum. The PCC's report 'A hidden condition' is based on consultation with patients and has been coproduced by them.

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Health to detail (i) the number of crutches that have been allocated to patients by each Health and Social Care Trust over the last two years; (ii) the cost associated with these allocations; and (iii) the number that have been returned.

**(AQW 5420/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:**

- i - ii Procurement and Logistics Service within the Business Services Organisation (BSO) issue crutches from warehouse stock to Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts for use by patients. In addition, non-stock purchases of crutches can also be made, which are delivered directly to HSC Trusts by suppliers. This information, including the cost, can be found in the tables below and relate to goods purchased by, or stock issued to, HSC Trusts in the last 2 years. Figures on the number issued to patients are not available.

**Table 1. Number of crutches issued to or purchased by HSC Trusts (2014/15)**

HSC Trust	Number of pairs of crutches issued from warehouse stock	Number of pairs of crutches from non-stock purchases	Total Value (£)
Belfast	5,373	215	£0.04m
Northern	2,547	156	£0.02m
South Eastern	2,994	75	£0.02m
Southern	4,034	374	£0.03m
Western	3,819	169	£0.03m
Total	18,767	989	£0.14m

**Table 2. Number of crutches issued to or purchased by HSC Trusts (2015/16)**

HSC Trust	Number of pairs of crutches issued from warehouse stock	Number of pairs of crutches from non-stock purchases	Total Value (£)
Belfast	5,769	238	£0.04m
Northern	2,329	218	£0.02m

HSC Trust	Number of pairs of crutches issued from warehouse stock	Number of pairs of crutches from non-stock purchases	Total Value (£)
South Eastern	3,009	175	£0.02m
Southern	4,580	237	£0.03m
Western	3,516	219	£0.03m
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,203</b>	<b>1,087</b>	<b>£0.15m</b>

**Note:** Please note figures may not sum due to rounding.

iii) Information on the number of crutches returned is not recorded centrally or held by BSO.

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Health how many nurses are currently being trained; and how many nursing vacancies exist. (AQW 5422/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Pre registration nurse training is delivered over a three year period. The number of pre registration nursing students currently being trained at each University is as follows-

Queen's University Belfast	1382
Ulster University	713
Open University	126

I refer the Member to the number of existing nurse vacancies as set out in AQWs 4046 and 5036/16-21.

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Health how many missed appointments have been recorded in each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years. (AQW 5425/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Information on the number of hospital appointments missed by patients is published annually in the NI Hospital Statistics: Outpatient Activity publication and available for the last three years at the link below;

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/hospital-statistics-outpatient-activity-statistics-201516>

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the value and role of community pharmacies in the wider health service; and whether her Department plans to provide increased funding and support to community pharmacies to meet increased responsibilities and workload in the future. (AQW 5431/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Community pharmacies have a clear role in the wider health and social care system. They help people to get well and stay well, dispensing approximately 40 million prescription items a year, providing advice and information about medicines and healthy lifestyles, as well as offering services to improve the safe, effective use of medicines and to support self care and prevention.

There are currently 533 community pharmacies in the North of Ireland, employing qualified pharmacists supported by dedicated healthcare teams. Community pharmacies are therefore an important resource within local communities and it is estimated that on a daily basis approximately 9% of the population visit a community pharmacy. Community pharmacies have an important role in helping reduce demand on GP and other acute services through the provision of advice and treatment for common complaints, without the need for a doctor's appointment.

My Department and the Health and Social Care Board are currently engaging with Community Pharmacy NI to develop a new framework of community pharmacy services. Funding of community pharmacy services will be considered in that context.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health (i) how many candidates were considered for the post of Ministerial Special Adviser; (ii) what account was taken of any potential imbalance in religious background or gender in the pool from which she selected her Special Adviser; (iii) how wide was the trawl for candidates; (iv) how did she ensure that it was broadly based as required by the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers; and (v) to publish the job description and person specification drawn up before the Special Adviser was appointed. (AQW 5434/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Department of Health's Special Adviser was appointed in accordance with the Code Governing the Appointment of Special Advisers.

**Mr Allen** asked the Minister of Health when she will publish the fatal foetal abnormality working group report. (AQW 5443/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** I refer you to the answer to AQW 5095/16-21.

**Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of Health to detail (i) the number of GP training places made available; (ii) the number of applicants for these places; (iii) the number of participants who started but did not complete the training; and (iv) the number of those trained as GPs who are currently practising as GPs, for each of the last ten years.

**(AQW 5450/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The information requested in respect of parts (i) to (iii) of this question is set out in the table below for each of the last nine years. This information is not available in the format requested prior to 2008.

A recent exercise indicated that, of the 295 GPs who completed training locally within the last five years, 282 (96%) are registered on the Primary Medical Performers List.

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Number of applicants	258	189	190	187	183	171	184	185	149
Number of training places available	65	65	65	65	65	65	65	65	85
Total Recruited	64	65	65	65	64	65	64	65	80*
No of non-completers	1	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	0

\* Currently still engaged in recruitment processes – remaining posts to be filled via Inter-Deanery transfers

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Health what transport services for social activity are provided at each adult learning disability respite care facility in Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

**(AQW 5453/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** In the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust area, transport provision varies across services, in line with the needs of individual users. However, the following transport methods are used at the locations listed below. Service users will also walk to activities where appropriate.

#### Trust facilities

- Hanna Street, Rigby Close and Trench Park – people carrier and taxis
- 80 Malone Road and 611 Ormeau Road – people carrier and staff cars

#### Mertoun Park – taxis and staff cars.

- Independent facilities from which the Trust purchases respite care
- Ardcora, Croft Community, Somerton Road and Aaron House – minibus
- Wheatfield House – people carrier, taxis and public buses.

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Health to outline the number of cancelled adult learning disability respite care bookings as a result of the prioritisation of emergency needs in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 5455/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The information requested is not available and could only be provided at a disproportionate cost.

**Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of Health to detail (i) the number of coach built buses her Department and its arm's-length bodies have purchased in each of the last seven years; (ii) the cost of these buses; (iii) the mileage for each bus; (iv) the mileage on each of the ten buses with the highest mileage; (v) the amount spent on maintenance each year; and (vi) the number of these buses that have been out of service during this period.

**(AQW 5456/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The table below details (i) the number of coach built buses purchased in each of the last seven years; (ii) the cost of these buses; and (v) the amount spent on maintenance each year.

Year	Number of Coach Built Buses Purchased	Cost (£)	Maintenance Costs (£)
2015/2016	15	1,023,463	712,570
2014/2015	25	1,916,886	867,688
2013/2014	41	3,290,936	597,713
2012/2013	35	2,565,180	576,623
2011/2012	41	3,136,132	510,880

Year	Number of Coach Built Buses Purchased	Cost (£)	Maintenance Costs (£)
2010/2011	14	1,054,421	510,947
2009/2010	17	1,122,454	491,633
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>14,109,472</b>	<b>4,268,054</b>

The table below details (iii) the mileage for each bus; and (iv) the mileage on each of the ten buses with the highest mileage.

Highest Mileage	Mileage				
1	216,039	85,126	61,464	33,593	21,062
2	198,048	83,497	60,737	33,531	21,030
3	165,229	82,173	60,627	33,508	20,426
4	160,023	80,689	57,285	33,017	20,172
5	145,544	80,377	57,000	32,612	19,820
6	143,760	79,947	56,883	32,226	18,408
7	143,519	79,800	55,177	32,083	18,113
8	137,981	78,560	54,403	31,821	17,854
9	134,062	78,199	53,996	31,714	17,350
10	132,557	77,962	52,439	31,712	17,057
	131,673	77,837	51,252	31,112	14,176
	130,624	77,503	50,927	30,954	14,121
	121,782	77,478	50,050	30,871	14,116
	120,868	76,333	49,795	30,455	13,110
	120,800	76,247	49,327	30,346	13,072
	117,112	75,960	49,194	30,149	12,586
	112,967	75,883	49,123	30,118	12,404
	112,389	75,765	48,491	30,004	11,977
	112,371	75,501	47,729	29,949	11,817
	112,364	73,659	46,182	29,377	11,657
	110,500	71,859	46,144	29,167	11,602
	110,309	70,832	45,757	29,107	10,175
	104,738	70,689	45,422	28,776	8,377
	103,538	69,504	45,394	28,652	7,676
	101,949	69,158	44,210	28,625	6,764
	101,420	69,093	43,773	28,475	5,331
	100,383	68,180	42,485	28,155	4,605
	99,504	67,695	42,273	27,520	4,345
	99,062	66,309	41,396	27,029	
	98,123	66,018	41,365	26,981	
	97,209	65,961	41,017	26,697	
	96,169	65,737	40,885	25,894	
	94,793	65,658	40,387	25,614	
	94,237	65,323	40,329	24,721	

Highest Mileage	Mileage				
	93,367	64,946	39,139	24,627	
	93,127	64,475	38,525	22,780	
	92,912	63,168	36,868	22,482	
	89,451	63,011	36,555	21,765	
	89,038	62,881	35,037	21,267	
	87,395	62,223	34,299	21,226	

(vi) Buses are out of service between 3-9 days per years for routine vehicle maintenance and LPPV preparation and testing.

**Mr McGuigan** asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the Behavioural Support Service collaboration with the Department of Education that supports children with severe learning difficulties and their families; and whether she will seek assurances from the Minister of Education that he will address the shortage of Behavioural Associates in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

**(AQW 5465/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Dual Agency Behaviour Support Service is jointly funded by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust and the Education Authority. The service provides highly specialist assessment, intervention and support for children with severe learning disability who display challenging behaviour within their own homes, their schools and their communities. This holistic, collaborative and evidence based approach is of great benefit to children and their families.

I am committed to the reinstatement of the service in the Northern Trust area and the Minister of Education has advised me that the Education Authority is currently identifying behavioural assistants from within its existing behaviour support service to allow this to happen.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health to outline the reasons for the frequency of delays in managing the delivery of hospital beds and other necessary equipment to the homes of patients in the Western Health and Social Care Trust that are awaiting discharge from hospital and for whom a home care package has been approved.

**(AQW 5470/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department is not aware of any delays in the Western Health and Social Care Trust's service in managing the delivery of hospital beds and other necessary equipment to the homes of patients who are awaiting discharge from hospital and for whom a home care package has been approved.

In addition, I understand that the Trust has arrangements in place to meet urgent requests, such as hospital discharge, with the delivery of equipment to be made within 48 hours of the initial request.

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Health when the NHS Accessible Information Standard will be introduced.

**(AQW 5479/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The guide 'Making Communication Accessible for All' A Guide for Health and Social Care Staff, was launched in June 2016 by the Health and Social Care Board and outlines good practice in ensuring that those who have a disability or communication difficulty receive the support they need from HSC staff.

The guide was co-produced by a range of disability organisations and, on balance, it is considered prudent to first see how this guide works in practice. In early 2017, my Department will write to Health and Social Care Trusts to seek assurance that they are fully complying with the guide. This exercise will help inform any future decision about the need to introduce the NHS Accessible Information Standard here in the north.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Health when she will answer AQW 4083/16-21.

**(AQW 5483/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I answered AQW 4083/16-21 on the 8 November 2016.

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Health to outline (i) why Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Occupational Therapy ceased at Oakwood Special School, in December 2015; and (ii) when were these services withdrawn formally.

**(AQW 5492/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Occupational Therapy service, provided in Oakwood School until December last year, has since that time largely been provided in settings outside the school, such as community clinics and in the children's homes. While any disruption caused by this change is regrettable, the Belfast Trust is working closely with the Education Authority to minimise

any impact on the children who use the service. Where necessary, for example to address equipment needs, interventions continue to be delivered in the school environment by therapists from across the service. Arrangements have also recently been made to deliver the service for children from Oakwood School in Fleming Fulton School, where clinically appropriate, and to accompany children there for that purpose.

**Ms Hanna** asked the Minister of Health whether consideration has been given to introducing a Baby Box scheme for families, similar to the scheme in Finland.

**(AQW 5542/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Reducing health inequalities is one of the priorities of the draft Programme for Government and initiatives aimed at addressing this are of great interest to me. Already, in the North, some mothers-to-be are eligible for a "Sure Start" maternity grant of £500 to help towards the cost of maternity and baby items.

My Department will keep a watching brief on the progress and outcomes from the recently announced pilot trials of "baby box" initiatives in Limerick and Scotland.

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Health what circumstances led the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to remove Occupational Therapy staff and provision from Oakwood Special School.

**(AQW 5552/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Occupational Therapy service, provided in Oakwood School until December last year, has since that time largely been provided in settings outside the school, such as community clinics and in the children's homes. While any disruption caused by this change is regrettable, the Belfast Trust is working closely with the Education Authority to minimise any impact on the children who use the service. Where necessary, for example to address equipment needs, interventions continue to be delivered in the school environment by therapists from across the service. Arrangements have also recently been made to deliver the service for children from Oakwood School in Fleming Fulton School, where clinically appropriate, and to accompany children there for that purpose.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the appointment of an independent person to consider the underspend in adult learning disability services within the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

**(AQW 5611/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I have asked for an independent facilitator to be appointed to work with the families and the Western Trust to develop an investment plan for adult community learning disability services. Subject to agreement by the families concerned on the Terms of Reference for this facilitator, I expect this person to be in place in the coming weeks. I have also appointed a senior official in my Department to oversee this process and to act as a contact point for the families.

**Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Health to list the art, artefacts, and other historic items owned by her Department that are displayed or held in storage; and to itemise their value.

**(AQW 5627/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department does not own any such items. Art, artefacts and other historic items in the Department form part of the Civil Service Art Collection which is owned by Department of Finance. Other HSC bodies do not routinely collect and hold this information.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Health to detail the (i) expected; (ii) planned; and (iii) actual investment in adult learning disability services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 5647/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I refer the member to AQW 2366/16-21 for the information requested.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health how many buses each Health and Social Care Trust has ordered in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 5700/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The table below details the number of buses ordered by each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last three years.

HSC Trust	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Belfast	13	4	2
Northern	13	6	1
South Eastern	15	5	7
Southern	10	0	3

HSC Trust	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Western	6	3	2
Ambulance Service	NIL	NIL	NIL

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Health how her Department is improving health and social care provision for the transgender community.

**(AQW 5710/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust provides two Regional Gender Identity Services (RGIS) clinics, one of which sits within the Regional Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHs) service, for those patients who experience gender dysphoria.

The services offer a pathway for assessment, care, specialist treatment and support through psychological, social and physical transition, co-ordinating interventions provided directly by the service with interventions offered by other specialist providers for transgender patients.

Where appropriate, funding applications for gender reassignment surgery can be considered for individual, named patients through the Health and Social Care Board's Extra Contractual Referral (ECR) process. Where an application is approved, patients from the North are then referred to an appropriate medical facility in Britain.

The HSC is committed to working in partnership with LGB&T sector organisations to identify ways in which support services can be improved. Recent examples would include the development of guidelines in 2013 to support the needs of older LGB&T people and the provision of funding support to SAILNI for the development of online resources signposting services for transgender individuals and their families.

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Health whether she will provide further funding for the training of health and social care staff and officials on transgender issues.

**(AQW 5711/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Equality and diversity training is already available to all Health and Social Care staff which covers differentiating stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination. The Health and Social Care organisations are increasing awareness of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, as well as Transgender, through the promotion of e-learning, awareness sessions and bespoke training programmes.

**Mr Logan** asked the Minister of Health to list the services available in North Antrim to deal with substance misuse.

**(AQW 5713/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Under the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2, the Public Health Agency commissions a range of substance misuse services which cover the North Antrim area. These services include prevention, information and awareness raising; community support; early intervention and harm reduction; counselling for family members; and treatment and support including the Community Addiction Team and access to inpatient services as required.

The full detail of the service available can be accessed online at: <http://www.drugsandalcoholni.info/services-near-you/>.

**Mr Logan** asked the Minister of Health to list the services available for people in North Antrim that are considering self-harm or suicide.

**(AQW 5714/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** A range of self-harm and suicide prevention services are provided regionally which are available to people in the North Antrim area. These include: Lifeline 24/7 helpline and associated support services; the Self Harm Intervention Service; bereavement support; mental health services; psychological therapies; public information campaigns; and training on suicide/mental health awareness.

The Public Health Agency and Northern Health and Social Care Trust fund a number of organisations to deliver suicide and self harm prevention services in North Antrim. Organisations that are supported include: North Antrim Community Network; Mindwise; Barnardos; EANI Youth Service; Aware; Dare to Stretch and Community Direct. In addition, community emergency response plans have been developed to respond to potential suicide clusters in the area.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health to detail the total number of people in each Health and Social Care Trust waiting for a routine spinal appointment.

**(AQW 5719/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** As at 27th September 2016, 7,911 patients were waiting for a first consultant-led outpatient spinal appointment following a routine referral in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. This is the only HSC Trust in which these appointments take place.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of incidences of patients with less serious ailments attending Emergency Departments having not secured a GP appointment; and how these incidences are recorded.

**(AQW 5720/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Hospital emergency departments do not routinely record this information.

Primary care plays a vital role in helping to keep people well and out of hospital, and I am fully committed to ensuring that everyone has timely access to high quality GP-led services. There has been significant additional investment in GP services over recent years aimed at building capacity and improving access for patients both in hours and out of hours, and the Health and Social Care Board works closely with GP practices to ensure that services make the best use of available capacity in responding to demand.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health to detail the current waiting times for neurological appointments and treatment.

**(AQW 5721/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The waiting times in the neurology specialty for (i) a first consultant led outpatient appointment and (ii) admission for treatment, as at 30th June 2016, the most recent quarter for which official statistics are available, are provided in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1: Waiting times for a first consultant led outpatient appointment in the neurology specialty**

Weeks Waiting as at 30th June 2016							Total Waiting
0-6	>6-9	>9-12	>12-15	>15-18	>18-52	>52	
1,693	663	610	472	546	3,998	3,133	11,115

**Source:** Departmental CH3 return

**Table 2: Waiting times for admission for treatment in the neurology specialty**

Weeks Waiting						Total Waiting
0-6	>6-13	>13-21	>21-26	>26-52	>52	
135	93	51	33	21	0	333

**Source:** DoH Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health whether her Department is planning a new hospital complex at Craigavon.

**(AQW 5724/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Southern Trust has presented a business case to the Department of Health for a new hospital build on the Craigavon Area Hospital site; the business case will require Department of Health and Department of Finance approval. Decisions on this project will be considered alongside other capital investment priorities and will be dependent on future budget availability, value for money and affordability.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health to outline the cost of a new hospital complex in Craigavon.

**(AQW 5725/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Southern Trust has presented a phased business case to the Department of Health for a new hospital build on the Craigavon Area Hospital site. The Capital costs for Phase One of the new build project are estimated to be in the region of £450m.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health to outline the departmental funding for the Public Health Agency in each of the last two financial years.

**(AQW 5737/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The total departmental funding allocated to the Public Health Agency in 2014/15 and 2015/16 was £100.9m and £105.8m respectively. This includes both Capital and Resource funding.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health to detail the current waiting times performance broken down by speciality; and how this compares to the same period for each of the last five years.

**(AQW 5769/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Waiting times for (i) a first consultant led outpatient appointment and (ii) admission to hospital for treatment, is published on a quarterly basis by speciality and HSC Trust level at the links below.

- <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/outpatient-waiting-times>
- <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/inpatient-waiting-times>

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Health whether her Department has a plan to spend extra monies for adult learning disability services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust; and whether she will place this plan in the Assembly library. (AQW 5771/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Western Trust has recently confirmed that it is planning to increase its resourcing in adult learning disability services by £8m. Plans to deliver investments totalling £3m of this have already been provided by the Trust and plans for the investment of the remaining £5m are now to be developed with families and carers in the area. An independent facilitator is to be appointed to work with the Trust and the families and a senior official in my Department has been appointed to oversee this process and to act as a contact point for the families.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health to outline her Department's relationship with the Patient and Client Council. (AQW 5775/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Patient and Client Council is an Arm's Length Body of my Department.

The relationship between a Department and its Arm's Length Bodies is set out in the Department of Finance document entitled Managing Public Money NI.

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Health to outline the protocols and procedures in place in her Department to inform MLAs of their constituency visits and of visits by VIPs and Royalty. (AQW 5794/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** My office notifies MLAs the day before any visit I am due to make in their constituency. My office does not notify MLAs about VIP or Royal visits.

**Mr O'Dowd** asked the Minister of Health what action the Health and Social Care Board has taken to secure GP cover at the Bannview Practice in Portadown Health Centre. (AQW 5914/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** I am aware that due to unforeseen circumstances, Bannview Medical Practice in Portadown is currently under significant pressure. The practice will be providing emergency GP appointments during this time with limited routine appointments available. A notice has been displayed in the surgery informing patients of this change in circumstances.

The Health and Social Care Board will continue to work with Bannview Medical Practice to put in place a longer term solution in relation to the delivery of GP services to ensure normal cover and that the full provision of general medical services resumes as soon as possible. The HSCB will support the Practice in ensuring that all patients are notified of developments in this matter at the earliest opportunity.

**Ms Bunting** asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 3269/16-21, how many (i) 5; (ii) 6; (iii) 7; (iv) 8; (v) 9; (vi) 10; and (vii) 11 year olds are on the Belfast Health Social Care Trust waiting list for ASD assessment. (AQW 5932/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Figures in Table 1 detail the number of children in the requested aged groups on the waiting list for an autism assessment in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust at 14th October 2016.

**Table 1**

Age	No. of children
Aged 5	143
Aged 6	117
Aged 7	96
Aged 8	68
Aged 9	67
Aged 10	45
Aged 11	42

**Source:** Belfast Health and Social Care Trust – PARIS Data Administration System

**Mr Carroll** asked the Minister of Health to detail the annual cost of each private finance initiative of public private partnership schemes related to the Royal Victoria Hospital, since the schemes commenced. (AQW 5976/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** There are two private finance initiatives at the Royal Victoria Hospital, the Managed Equipment Services project and the Royal Victoria Car Park. The table below details the unitary charge payments for the Managed Equipment Services

project. There is no unitary charge for the Royal Victoria Car Park as the contractor incurs all the costs but retains the income generated.

Year	Unitary charge payment £m
2006-07	3.4
2007-08	7.4
2008-09	7.6
2009-10	7.7
2010-11	7.9
2011-12	8.4
2012-13	8.7
2013-14	9.0
2014-15	9.2
2015-16	9.2
2016-17	9.4

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Health whether she plans to introduce 14 day red flag targets for all types of cancer referrals. (AQW 6018/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department's performance standards for the treatment of cancer patients is: from April 2016, all urgent breast cancer referrals should be seen within 14 days; at least 98% of patients diagnosed with cancer should receive their first definitive treatment within 31 days of a decision to treat; and at least 95% of patients urgently referred with a suspected cancer should begin their first definitive treatment within 62 days.

I look to the Health and Social Care (HSC) Board to work with the HSC Trusts to ensure that the current performance standards are met within the resources available to my Department. I have no plans to change these standards.

**Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Health what processes are in place to ensure the speedy release of a Freedom of Information request in circumstances where the absence of clearance from either her or her Special Adviser has taken the request beyond the statutory deadline for response.

(AQW 6095/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:**

1. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) gives rights of public access to information held by public authorities subject to certain exemptions, if applicable.
2. A Section 36 exemption requires the authority's 'qualified person' to give their 'reasonable opinion' that non disclosure is appropriate. The definition of the "qualified person" within the Act is the Minister in charge of that department. Only where section 36 of the FOI Act is being considered, must FOI responses be referred to Minister for consideration and approval before issue.
3. No FOI requests have been referred to Minister for a reasonable opinion on non disclosure under the terms of a Section 36 exemption in the period from May 2016.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health how the format of information provided to patients post-surgery is appropriate for patients affected by sight loss.

(AQW 6096/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Health and Social Care Trusts will provide post-surgery information which takes into account the patient's individual circumstances including their level of visual impairment and their preferred format for information. Much of the information is provided verbally by clinical staff to the patient or if appropriate their carer. Local patient information leaflets can be provided in a range of formats such as large print, Braille, or audio CD.

**Mr Carroll** asked the Minister of Health how many service users attend each Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Mental Health and Learning disability centre on an annual basis.

(AQW 6100/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The information requested is not held centrally and was requested from the Belfast Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust. Their response can be found below.

At 1st October 2016 there were a total of 177 service users registered at the Whiterock, Ravenhill and North Belfast Day Centres for mental health.

Information on the number of service users registered at day centres for learning disabilities can be found in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Number of people registered to attend learning disability day centres.**

Day Centre	Number Registered to Attend - March 2016
Community Day Services North	21
Community Day Services West	23
Edgcumbe	144
Everton	112
Fallswater	24
Fortwilliam	44
Mica Drive	50
Mount Oriel	41
Orchardville	128
Suffolk	90
<b>Total</b>	<b>677</b>

**Mr Carroll** asked the Minister of Health for a breakdown of the capacity of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Metal Health and Learning Disability centres.

**(AQW 6101/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has the capacity for 150 people to attend Metal Health and Learning Disability centres each day, which is a total weekly capacity of 750 attendances per week.

**Mr K Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of older people on a waiting list for domiciliary care packages in each Health and Social Care Trust.

**(AQW 6102/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The information requested is not held centrally and was requested from Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts. Their responses can be found in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Number of older people waiting on a domiciliary care package.**

HSC Trust	Position as at:	Number of Older People Waiting
Belfast	26/10/16	262
Northern	31/10/16	46
South Eastern	28/10/16	48
Southern	27/10/16	27
Western	28/10/16	112
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>495</b>

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health how the number of hospital beds available compares with the situation in December 2014; and how the number of Emergency Department attendances compares over the same period.

**(AQW 6105/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The average number of available beds during the quarter ending 31st December 2014 and quarter ending 30th September 2016<sup>P</sup>, across all Programmes of Care is shown in the table below.

HSC Trust	Average Available Beds		Difference in average available beds
	QE December 2014	QE September 2016P	
Belfast	1,273.6	1,174.4	-99.2
Northern	984.9	999.8	14.9

HSC Trust	Average Available Beds		Difference in average available beds
	QE December 2014	QE September 2016P	
South Eastern	286.4	275.6	-10.8
Southern	877.3	896.0	18.6
Western	983.8	901.2	-82.6
Northern Ireland	4,406.0	4,246.9	-159.1

Source: KH03a

P Data relating to quarter ending 30th September 2016 are provisional and therefore subject to change

The Rapid Review of Northern Ireland Health and Social Care funding needs and the productivity challenge (Appleby, 2011) identified that in 2008/09, acute beds in Northern Ireland were approximately 25% higher than in England, that they were not used as intensively and that the lengths of stay were longer. Hospital bed numbers have therefore decreased since 2011. This change has been managed by more efficient use of beds through changing clinical practice, increasing use of day surgery, better anaesthetics, and improved community rehabilitation options. These developments in changing the patterns of hospital bed use have resulted in shorter stays in hospital. Consequently the average length of stay for all patients in Northern Ireland has fallen. In 2010/11, average length of stay in the acute programme of care was 5.5 days; this decreased to 5.1 days in 2015/16. As a result fewer beds are needed to meet demand. Over the same period, percentage occupancy has fluctuated, increasing by 2.1 percentage points overall. Between 2010/11 and 2015/16, the day case rate increased from 74.2 to 79.1.

Information on the number of attendances (new and unplanned reviews) at each HSC Trust during the quarters ending December 2014 and September 2016, is detailed in the table below, for the most recent period which information is available.

HSC Trust	New & Unplanned Review Attendances		Difference	
	QE December 2014	QE September 2016	Number	Percentage
Belfast	44,039	48,788	4,749	10.8%
Northern	31,755	34,609	2,854	9.0%
South Eastern	35,489	40,394	4,905	13.8%
Southern	36,406	41,615	5,209	14.3%
Western	24,051	29,117	5,066	21.1%
Northern Ireland	171,740	194,523	22,783	13.3%

Source: Regional Data Warehouse

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Health how many article 4 welfare reports were requested from social services by courts in 2014-15; and to outline the approximate cost to Health and Social Care Trusts to provide these reports.  
(AQW 6108/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** There were 970 requests made by Family Courts to the north of Ireland's five HSC Trusts for Article 4 Welfare Reports in the period 2014-15.

It is not possible to outline the approximate financial costs associated in providing Article 4 Welfare Reports due to the disproportionate cost requirement of manually trawling hundreds of files across the five HSC Trusts in the north of Ireland.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health what services are available for people with eating disorders.  
(AQW 6111/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Community-based specialist eating disorder services are available across all five HSC Trusts for adults, children and adolescents.

Inpatient care for children and adolescents is usually provided at Beechcroft, the Regional Child and Adolescent Mental Health Inpatient Unit.

Inpatient treatment for adults with an eating disorder is facilitated in mental health hospitals, or where physical complications necessitate a general medical hospital, with in-reach support provided by specialist community-based teams. Trusts can access specialist beds in England, Scotland and Ireland if required.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health what is the waiting time for an appointment with an eating disorder specialist.  
(AQW 6112/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Health and Social Care Trusts are required to ensure that patients wait no longer than nine weeks from referral to the commencement of treatment. This target is currently being achieved.

The number of people waiting on appointments with specialist eating disorder services is detailed in the table below:

**Number of people waiting for Mental Health- Eating Disorder Services at 30 September 2016**

0-3 weeks	>3-6 weeks	>6-9 weeks	>9 weeks
25	19	4	0

**Source:** Health and Social Care Board

Includes information for both Adult Mental Health and CAMHS

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health whether there are any plans to develop a specialist eating disorder unit.  
(AQW 6113/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Phase two of a scoping exercise into the possible need for a specialist eating disorders unit is under way and I am expecting initial recommendations to be made to me in December.

Phase one, which reported in March 2016, provided a strategic overview of existing provision and a review of the outline cases for and against a local specialist unit. It concluded that there is a definite need for further enhancement of eating disorder services, and an outline case in favour of a specialist unit. However it was agreed that a second phase of study, for more detailed evidence-gathering and analysis, was required.

The phase one report also noted as an alternative option that there is a very strong case for much more investment in, and development of, early intervention and community-based services. This is being thoroughly explored in the phase two study.

I intend to raise the issue of specialist eating disorder services with my counterpart in the South, with a view to exploring the potential for work to be progressed on an all-island basis. Treatment of Eating Disorders

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health how many patients annually are sent to England or Wales for treatment of eating disorders.  
(AQW 6114/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Where intensive specialist treatment is required, Health and Social Care Trusts can access specialist beds for treatment of eating disorders in England, Scotland and the south of Ireland through the Extra Contractual Referral (ECR) process. The number of patients, in the last five years, who have received such treatment outside of the north of Ireland is detailed in the table below:

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
England	10	8	9	12	7
Scotland	1	0	1	3	7
South of Ireland	0	0	1	0	0
Total no. of patients	11	8	11	15	14

**Source:** Health and Social Care Board

Work is under way to consider the feasibility of a specialist eating disorder unit and I am expecting the final recommendations in December 2016. I will also explore options to provide more investment in early intervention and community-based services, and, in conjunction with my counterpart in the South, the possibility of developing services on an all-island basis.

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister of Health which cafes or shops in hospitals provide a facility for patients and visitors to use debit, chip and pin or credit cards; and have an ATM available to withdraw cash.  
(AQW 6124/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Across the South Eastern Trust, no shops or cafes situated in hospitals provide a facility for patients or visitors to use debit, chip and pin or credit cards. An ATM facility to withdraw cash is available at the Ulster Hospital only.

Across the Belfast Trust, no shops or cafes situated in hospitals provide a facility for patients or visitors to use debit, chip and pin or credit cards. ATM facilities to withdraw cash are available in the main Royal Victoria Hospital, the Belfast City Hospital and the Mater Hospital.

Across the Western Trust, only the Front Foyer Shop in the South West Acute Hospital provides a facility for patients or visitors to use debit, chip and pin or credit cards. An ATM facility to withdraw cash is available at both the South West Acute Hospital and Altnagelvin Hospital.

Across the Northern Trust, only the Hospital Shop in the Causeway Hospital provides a facility for patients or visitors to use debit, chip and pin or credit cards. ATM facilities to withdraw cash are available at both the Antrim Area Hospital and Holywell Hospital.

Across the Southern Trust, only the Shop in Daisy Hill Hospital provides a facility for patients or visitors to use debit, chip and pin or credit cards. An ATM facility to withdraw cash is available at the Craigavon Area Hospital.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the future of stroke services at the South West Acute Hospital.  
(AQW 6125/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department is working with the Public Health Agency (PHA) and the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) to develop a new model of Stroke Services for the North. I have made a commitment to consult on the new model by February 2017.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health what incentives the Western Health and Social Care Trust offer to (i) consultants; (ii) nurses; and (iii) GPs to work in Fermanagh.  
(AQW 6126/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Consultants and Nurses are employed in the Trust under regionally agreed Terms and Conditions. No incentives are offered. No GPs are currently employed by the Western Trust.

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Health to outline the measures is she taking to ensure that a GP service will be maintained at the Antrim Coast Medical Practice, Glenarm.  
(AQW 6137/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) is responsible for commissioning general practitioner services to meet the needs of the local population. The HSCB is actively seeking to secure a General Medical Services (GMS) contractor for the Antrim Coast Medical Practice in Glenarm, following notification that the present contractor intends to retire next year.

The HSCB has advertised a new full-time contract for the provision of GMS services in Glenarm, welcoming single or joint applications. The contract has been advertised widely through a range of media. Sessional doctors have also received communication on the advertisement through Northern Ireland Sessional Doctors Association. The closing date for applications is 18th November 2016, and it is anticipated the outcome of the selection process will be known during December 2016.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the use of cancer immune therapies.  
(AQW 6138/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** New drugs for cancer and other life threatening and debilitating illnesses arrive on the market every year. In the North, new medicines are commissioned by the Health and Social Care Board where there is substantive evidence of the clinical and cost effectiveness as determined by National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) or other relevant UK bodies.

There are a number of immunotherapy treatments licensed for treatment of cancer. Some of these are currently being assessed by NICE for use within their licensed indication.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health following the publication of Systems, Not Structures - Changing Health and Social Care and Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together, when she will meet the Minister of Finance in relation to the funding needed for (i) the first 12 months; and (ii) beyond the first 12 months of the plan.  
(AQW 6139/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** I along with other Departmental Ministers will be engaging with the Minister of Finance as part of the Budget 2017/20 process over the next number of weeks. Discussions will be necessary regarding the additional funding required over and above that needed to run the existing service and to enable the transformation process to start. Over the next few months the additional financial requirement for transformation will become clearer and I will bring forward the detail as part of the budget process.

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister of Health what percentage of red flag referrals for suspected ovarian cancer from GPs in the last six months were seen within the two week target waiting time, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.  
(AQW 6141/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The target for red flag/urgent GP referrals to be seen within 14 days is for breast cancer only.

Whilst there is not a specific 14 day target for ovarian cancer, I can advise that the average waiting time from urgent GP referral for suspected cancer until first seen, for those patients first treated for ovarian cancer between 1st January 2016 and 30th June 2016 was 11.3 days in the Belfast HSC Trust, 12.7 days in the Northern HSC Trust, 16.3 days in the South Eastern HSC Trust, 11.3 days in the Southern HSC Trust and 10.4 days in the Western HSC Trust.

**Mr Smith** asked the Minister of Health to detail each budgetary pressure in her Department and its arm's-length bodies; and which of these pressures were raised with officials from the Department of Finance in advance of the October monitoring round.  
(AQW 6144/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** There are a significant number of front line service pressures, right across health and social care from the hospital sector, through community services to social care. The scale of budgetary pressures that my Department and each of its arm's length bodies is facing in 2016/17 is considerable, and these are being proactively managed in order to live within our resources.

Any pressures raised with the Department of Finance are for the purpose of informing the Executive's deliberations in reaching an agreed Monitoring round outcome and as such this information is not disclosed.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health how many of the recommendations of Transforming Your Care (i) have been delivered; and (ii) are currently in the process of being delivered.

**(AQW 6148/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Work to deliver the proposals in response to 'Transforming Your Care' has continued to be embedded in the ongoing business, commissioning and transformation processes underway within the HSC.

The current status of the 99 Transforming Your Care proposals is that 71 are classified as complete (this includes 5 which are nearing completion), with a further 25 in progress and 3 deferred.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health why it took over 13 weeks for her Department to prepare its response to the Systems, Not Structures: Changing Health and Social Care.

**(AQW 6150/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The report was received in July 2016 and I stated then, that I would use this work to inform my own vision for the long term future of health and social care here. The transformation of health and social care will have a significant impact on our population. It was right and proper that I took time to fully consider the implications of this report.

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Health, in relation to the proposed transformation oversight structure in the Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together, to detail (i) the envisaged number of members; (ii) how the members will be appointed; and (iii) how it will avoid duplication with those already with the existing responsibility.

**(AQW 6152/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** In conjunction with clinical leaders and others I am determined to lead and drive forward the changes necessary to deliver the transformation programme. The oversight structure will be a key enabler in delivering successful transformation and I am currently considering its terms of reference. I will make an announcement regarding this matter in the next few weeks.

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the provision of robotic surgery for urology cancer treatment.

**(AQW 6155/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** On 24 October 2016, my Department approved the business case for the procurement and installation of a surgical robot for urology services. The Belfast Trust is currently preparing an implementation plan for the purchase of this robot.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health whether all emergency ambulances are staffed by at least one paramedic in all circumstances.

**(AQW 6157/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Ambulance Service will endeavour at all times to ensure that every Accident & Emergency vehicle crew includes a paramedic. However on occasion, due to circumstances beyond its control, a vehicle may be crewed by a Paramedic in Training and an Emergency Medical Technician or two Emergency Medical Technicians.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister of Health what criteria her Department uses to assess the sustainability of hospitals; and whether the criteria outlined in the Bengoa report will be used.

**(AQW 6168/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** On Friday 11/11/16, I announced a consultation on the proposed criteria to be used to assess if health services need to be changed and are sustainable.

The consultation will run longer than the normal eight weeks to take account of the Christmas period and will include a series of consultation meetings right across the north to allow as many as possible to contribute.

The consultation document is available on my Department's website at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/consultations>.

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the use of the old Banbridge Health Care Centre for town centre parking.

**(AQW 6180/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Southern HSC Trust no longer requires this site for the delivery of a health related service and the disposal process for this Trust property asset is currently underway. Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council has expressed an interest in obtaining this site and the Trust is currently working with Council representatives to discuss a possible short term lease arrangement prior to completion of the disposal process.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health to outline the departmental funding to the Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service in each of the last two financial years.

**(AQW 6185/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Departmental funding to the NI Blood Transfusion Service in each of the last two financial years is as follows:

	2014/15	2015/16
Revenue Resource Limit - Non cash	£435,000	£606,000
Capital Resource Limit	£132,000	£84,000
Funding Provided by Health and Social Care Bodies (HSCB and Trusts)	£22,160,367	£21,356,777

Alternate streams of funding for the NI Blood Transfusion Service in each of the last two financial years are as follows:

	2014/15	2015/16
Private Blood Group	£7,690	£5,545
British Bone Marrow Registry	£14,597	£9,113

The NI Blood Transfusion Service, established in 1946, is an independent Special Agency of the DoH and one of the Department's 17 Arm's Length Bodies.

An Arm's Length Body is defined as a body which has a role in the process of government but is not a Government Department, or part of one, and which accordingly operates to a greater or lesser extent at arm's length from Ministers; and a Body for which the Department has designated Accounting Officer status to an individual within the organisation – normally the Chief Executive.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health how many cases of food poisoning have been reported in the last twelve months.

**(AQW 6188/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** In the twelve month period between 1st October 2015 and 30th September 2016 (inclusive) there have been 2,067 notifications of food poisoning reported to the Public Health Agency.

As this includes notifications up to 30th September 2016, diagnoses may be subject to change. The data is therefore provisional.

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Health whether cancer nurses are permitted to work on a cross-border basis if the patient is registered with a GP in the north but lives in the south of Ireland.

**(AQW 6197/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Whilst there are currently no Health and Social Care cancer nurses working on a cross-border basis, the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications Directive provides a framework for the cross-border recognition of professional health and social care qualifications, with the aim of assisting individuals to work across the European Economic Area on either a permanent or temporary basis.

**Ms Hanna** asked the Minister of Health whether she will engage with Action Cancer on their vision for the development of a new Breast Screening Clinic and Therapeutic Centre of Excellence in South Belfast.

**(AQW 6236/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I am fully supportive of working in partnership with others including charities such as Action Cancer. With regard to the proposed development in South Belfast I would encourage Action Cancer to engage directly with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust who I know would be happy to work in partnership with the Charity as they develop their new clinic and therapeutic centre.

I assure you that I fully appreciate and value the work of Action Cancer. I know that the services they provide are of the highest quality and deliver real benefits to patients.

**Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Health what plans her Department has to develop a centre for excellence for autism.

**(AQW 6237/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Department has no plans at present to develop a centre for excellence for autism. However, the HSC Board is currently leading on a project to design and agree with Trusts a new regional model for autism services which will aim to improve both the diagnostic process and access to early intervention in line with current best practice and NICE guidelines. The new model will also optimise the scope for the integration of child development, emotional and mental health services, as well as closer working with the education sector to ensure the provision of coordinated and appropriate support for children with autism.

**Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Health whether her Department has considered reviewing the pay scales for care assistants. (AQW 6238/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The 2016/17 Agenda for Change (AfC) pay award has resulted in all AfC pay scales (including those of Care Assistants) uplifted by 1 per cent with effect from 1 April 2016.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Health to outline the timetable for the publication of a revised Family Matter Strategy; and to detail her plans to engage further with stakeholders. (AQW 6239/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** I am committed to bringing forward a new Family Support Strategy, building on the success of Families Matter. Work is underway and it is intended to publish a draft strategy for full public consultation in 2017.

My Department will also establish a Family Support Stakeholder Group to assist in the co-production and co-design of this important Strategy.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister of Health to outline her Department's policy on allocating patient appointments; and whether distance from the hospital is taken into account. (AQW 6241/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Outpatient appointments are allocated on the basis of the patient's clinical priority with urgent patients seen and treated first. Patients with the same clinical priority are treated in chronological order. The Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts operate partial booking systems which allow patients to arrange their outpatient appointments for a date and time that suit them. Six weeks prior to appointment, patients are issued with a letter inviting them to contact the HSC Trust to confirm or make an appointment. If a date does not suit, they are offered an alternative date and time.

HSC Trusts will take into account any specific needs for patients as far as possible and where these are known to the Trust, for example arranging a time, day or location to suit travelling distance and transport arrangements. However some specialities only hold clinics on certain sites so it is not always possible to give patients appointments at a location close to their home. In some cases, patients may be offered an appointment at a more distant site because it has shorter waiting times.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health whether her Department will work with the Western Health and Social Care Trust to develop the new Enhanced Local Hospital in Omagh as a centre of excellence in a specialist area. (AQW 6244/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Health and Wellbeing: Delivering Together provides a roadmap for transforming the way we receive health and social care services. This will require whole system transformation across primary, secondary and community care, and a radical change to the way we access services. As part of this, the nature and focus of our hospitals will change to focus on addressing the needs of patients requiring complex planned surgery or emergency care in an inpatient setting.

The Expert Panel has set out a process for reviewing acute services and I plan to consult on their criteria before the end of the year. This will form the basis of a series of service reviews which will ensure that our services are configured and built around what people need.

It is too early to say what services will be provided in individual hospitals, but I would expect that the potential of the Omagh Hospital and Primary Care Complex will be considered as the transformation process goes forward.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the pressures that private nursing homes are experiencing in recruiting and retaining nurses. (AQW 6253/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department is aware of the challenges faced by private nursing homes in recruiting and retaining nurses. This is reflective of a global nursing shortage impacting across these islands. My Department is aware that the independent sector has been recruiting nurses from overseas and that nurse retention is a particular issue, given the enhanced terms and conditions of employment offered by HSC employers.

My Department's Nursing and Midwifery Workforce Plan recommends that all employers should review their recruitment processes and work to make their organisation an employer of choice to encourage both the recruitment and retention of nurses.

My Department is taking forward a range of measures to address the shortage of nurses across the North, which will increase the supply of nurses available for both the statutory and independent sector.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the proposal by her predecessor to abolish the Health and Social Care Board. (AQW 6254/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** I have confirmed the decision to close the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) on a number of occasions. Understandably staff in the HSCB are anxious about their future and as part of my plans to transform health and social care I now intend to move quickly on this matter.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health to detail the full time equivalent staff employed in her Department and each of its arm's-length bodies as of 1 October 2016.

**(AQW 6255/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** There are currently 426 (402.9 WTE) staff employed in the Department of Health.

Information on staff employed (WTE) in the NI Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) at 30 September 2016 is detailed in the table below.

Staff	WTE
Wholetime Firefighters	836.0
Retained Firefighters *	936*
Regional Control Centre	57.0
Support	195.5

\* Retained Duty System (RDS) personnel are counted on a headcount basis, not whole time equivalent (WTE).

Information on staff employed in each HSC organisation at 30 June 2016 (latest available) is detailed in the table below.

HSC Organisation	Headcount	WTE
Belfast HSC Trust	19,721	17,107.5
Northern HSC Trust	10,617	8,934.3
South Eastern HSC Trust	9,123	7,818.4
Southern HSC Trust	9,729	8,292.9
Western HSC Trust	9,745	8,617.2
NI Ambulance Service	1,197	1,168.6
Business Services Organisation	1,424	1,351.1
Health & Social Care Board	548	494.9
NI Blood Transfusion Service	179	155.5
NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency	68	62.5
NI Medical and Dental Training Agency	247	170.2
NI Practice & Education Council	16	15.6
NI Social Care Council	63	58.7
Patient Client Council	30	28.8
Public Health Agency	298	283.1
Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority	145	133.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>63,150</b>	<b>54,692.9</b>

This information on staff employed in each HSC organisation is published in the quarterly NI Health and Social Care (HSC) Key Facts Workforce Bulletin on the Department of Health website at the following link:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/staff-numbers>

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister of Health to detail the average waiting time for red flag referrals from GPs, for suspected ovarian cancer, to (i) first appointment with their consultant; and (ii) access diagnostic scans and tests, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust over the last six months.

**(AQW 6268/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:**

- (i) The table below details the average waiting times for red flag GP referrals, for those patients first treated for suspected ovarian cancer between January and June 2016. Information is provided by the HSC Trust where the patient was first seen by a Consultant.

	Average wait (days)
Belfast	11.3

	<b>Average wait (days)</b>
Northern	12.7
S. Eastern	16.3
Southern	11.3
Western	10.4

**Source:** CaPPS

- 1 Includes only those referrals where patients were subsequently treated for cancer.
- (ii) Information on waiting times for access to diagnostic scans and tests is not collected by the Department.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health how much is the annual ongoing spend on the health of people whose injuries and trauma are the result of terrorist violence.

**(AQW 6288/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The information requested is not available.

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Health to detail the work undertaken to date by the Health and Education Interface Project Board to improve the interfaces and co-operation in the special educational needs framework.

**(AQW 6309/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Education and Health Interfaces Project Board was established in June 2016 to consider each of the education and health interfaces within the special educational needs framework. The Board's first project, the 'Notification, Referral and Statutory Assessment' Project, was also initiated at this time and is expected to be completed by April 2017. This first project will build on and complement the work started by an Education/Health working group. Outputs from this group have included the development of a proposed new HSC Trust common pathway for dealing with requests for medical advice; greater sharing of Education Authority information to assist the HSC Trusts in their advice giving role; work to develop common documentation for medical advice; and use of electronic transfer of information. Further projects will be considered by the Project Board, including Annual Review and Reassessment; and Transition Planning.

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Health whether she will ensure that (i) people with dementia; and (ii) stroke survivors are referred to a speech and language therapist for a timely communication assessment and, when necessary, a swallowing needs assessment.

**(AQW 6386/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** People with communication or swallowing needs including those with dementia and stroke requiring assessment by Speech and Language Therapy should be referred in a timely manner.

Speech and Language Therapists are proactive in raising awareness of communication and swallowing needs in order to assist people in receiving the most appropriate support to meet their needs and those of their carers.

In addition, Speech and Language Therapists have designed a booklet in partnership with the Public Health Agency, entitled "Communicating effectively with a Person living with a Dementia" which aims to provide the public and carers with a general overview of the potential communication difficulties a person living with a dementia may experience and guidance on how to communicate more effectively with them.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Health to outline the uptake of the GP Loans Scheme.

**(AQW 6454/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** A total of nine applications were made to the GP Loan scheme through 3 tranches of the scheme over an 18 month period. Of these, two loans have been issued with total value £0.5m, two are in progress and five have been withdrawn.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health how many people work for the Food Standards Agency.

**(AQW 6460/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Food Standards Agency publishes an annual report detailing its accounts, staff numbers and costs. The average number of whole-time equivalent persons employed during the year 2015/16 by the Food Standards Agency across England, Wales and the North was 1,593. The average number of whole-time equivalent persons employed by the FSA in NI during 2015/16 was 41.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health to outline the departmental funding to the Food Standards Agency in each of the last two financial years.

**(AQW 6461/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Food Standards Agency is a non-ministerial government department. It is not an arm's-length body of my Department. The FSA in NI receives its budget directly from the NI block grant and not from my department.

The FSA in NI is a key delivery partner in the Obesity Prevention Framework – A Fitter Future for All 2012-2022 and entered into contractual arrangements to take forward work in connection with this strategy approved by the Executive. My Department has provided funding of £120k for 2016/17 for the implementation of a range of actions under the Strategy.

The FSA publishes an annual report detailing its accounts, staff numbers and costs. For the financial year 2014/15 the gross resource budget for the FSA in NI was £11,945,000 - with income of £3,757,000 leaving a net budget of £8,188,000. £6,690,000 of this was paid to DAERA for the provision of services on behalf of the FSA. For the financial year 2015/16 the gross resource budget for the FSA in NI was £12,441,000 - with income of £3,808,000 leaving a net budget of £8,633,000. £6,742,000 of this was paid to DAERA for the provision of services on behalf of the FSA.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health how many cases of food and drink containing foreign objects were reported to the food Standards Agency in the last two years; and how many of these cases led to prosecution.

**(AQW 6462/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** During 2013/14, twelve foreign object incidents were referred to the FSA and seven Product Recall Information Notices were issued.

During 2014/15, thirteen foreign object incidents were referred to the FSA and five Product Recall Information Notices were issued.

The FSA is not aware of any prosecutions by competent authorities in relation to foreign object contamination during 2013/14 and 2014/15. Currently, it is not mandatory for District Councils to provide details on the number of sample tests that led to prosecution in their data returns to the FSA.

Foreign object detections can be reported to a number of bodies by various stakeholders. In the first instance, detections should be reported directly to the business responsible for the contaminated product or to the District Council in the area in which the product was purchased. Businesses and District Councils have an obligation to investigate foreign object complaints and respond to the complainant.

In the event that the District Council investigates a foreign object complaint and identifies serious risk to consumers or distribution of potentially contaminated product outside their jurisdiction, the complaint is escalated and referred to the Food Standards Agency as an incident.

The FSA also receives foreign object incident reports from competent authorities in Great Britain in addition to reports from industry, EU Member States and 3rd countries. These are investigated and where there is a serious risk to public health, food recalls and withdrawals and food alerts are actioned where necessary. Foreign objects in food that are suspected to be due to malicious tampering are passed to the PSNI and the National Food Crime Unit.

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Health what services and support are available to people with mental health problems in Strabane.

**(AQW 6468/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Western Health and Social Care Trust Adult Mental Health Services provide a range of support for the Strabane area including Crisis Response and Home Treatment; acute day care services; Primary Care Liaison; recovery services; addiction services; specialist services such as those for eating disorders, forensic and psychosexual conditions; adult psychological therapies; and Supported Living. Individuals who require admission to acute inpatient services are facilitated at Grangewood Mental Health Unit in Derry.

The Western Health and Social Care Trust Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Team based in Rivendell, Omagh, is responsible for the service provision for children and young people up to the age of 18 years in the Strabane area. Specialist multidisciplinary CAMHS Services are part of a wider network of service provision to support children and young people who have emotional, behavioural and mental health difficulties.

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health to detail the total cost of the Bengoa Report, including expenses.

**(AQW 6471/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** It is not possible to provide a detailed breakdown of expenditure at this time as all costs have not yet been billed for. Costs were originally anticipated to be in the region of £120,000 however the final total is now expected to be less than this amount.

**Mr McGrath** asked the Minister of Health what support and advice is given to new parents before they leave the maternity unit, to help them improve their child's development potential and communication skills.

**(AQW 6472/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Trusts provide a range of support and advice to new parents to help with child development. Much of this begins in the antenatal period with discussions between health professionals and parents on relationship building with their baby during pregnancy and the early days.

All women receive the "Pregnancy" and "Birth to 5" books during pregnancy and following birth, with sections relating to care of the baby, their development, learning and playing, and feelings and relationships.

Parents are supported by the midwifery team in the postnatal ward and on discharge, and then by the community midwife. The New Parent programme and family nurse partnerships provide additional, targeted, one to one support for vulnerable first time mothers both during the antenatal period and after the birth.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health when the recruitment process for the first independent guardians for unaccompanied children will be completed; and when the independent guardian role will be fully operational.  
**(AQW 6475/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Health and Social Care Board intends to award the contract for the provision of an Independent Guardianship Service for the north of Ireland on 1 April 2017. The successful provider will then be required to recruit and train staff and produce written policy, procedural and practice guidance. The Board has advised that the successful provider should be fully operational by 1 October 2017.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health how many incidents of food poisoning in restaurants have been reported to the Food Standards Agency over the last two years.  
**(AQW 6479/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** During the period of 2013 – 2015 there have been no "incidents" of food poisoning in restaurants reported to the Food Standards Agency.

Under the Food Law Code of Practice, district councils are required to notify the FSA of food "incidents" concerning outbreaks of foodborne disease where;

- the suspected food has not been distributed beyond the boundaries of the competent authority but which involves: E.coli O157, other Verocytotoxin-producing Escherichia coli (VTEC), Clostridium botulinum, Salmonella typhi or Salmonella paratyphi, or which the district council considers significant because of, for example, the vulnerability of the population likely to be affected, the numbers involved or any deaths associated with the incident; or
- the suspected food has been distributed beyond the boundaries of the district council.

Incidents of foodborne disease, where the suspected food has not been distributed beyond the boundaries of the district council and is not deemed to be a serious localised food hazard are dealt with locally by the district council concerned, in conjunction with other relevant agencies and need not to be reported to FSA in NI.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health how many restaurants and food suppliers have been prosecuted for food hygiene, production, storage, transportation or labelling offences over the last two years.  
**(AQW 6480/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** During the period of 2013 – 2015 there have been 19 food businesses, under the enforcement responsibility of district councils, prosecuted for food hygiene, production, storage transportation or labelling offences.

During the same period (2013–2015) two businesses (one poultry slaughterhouse establishment and one dairy production holding) under FSA enforcement responsibility were prosecuted for failure to comply with the hygiene requirements.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the Southern Health and Social Services plans, as submitted to her Department, for a new hospital on the Craigavon Area Hospital Site; and (i) the date of receipt of the plan; and (ii) to outline her planned discussions with the Minister of Finance on this matter.  
**(AQW 6481/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Strategic Outline Case (SoC) for a new hospital on the Craigavon Area Hospital site was received in January 2014. While the Department considered that the SoC met the necessary requirements it was not forwarded to the Department of Finance for the necessary approval because it was considered unaffordable within that spending period.

The Southern Trust subsequently submitted an Outline Business Case for Craigavon site redevelopment, received in the Department in June this year. This will replace the SoC and will be considered alongside other capital investment priorities and will be further dependent upon budget availability, value for money and affordability.

The Budget 2017 process will set capital budget allocations for the next 4 years and will inform the affordability assessment. All Departments are engaging with the Department of Finance to build up a meaningful picture of Capital DEL profiles for 2017-18 to 2020-21. The Southern Trust proposals form part of this discussion.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health what steps are being taken to ensure that appointment letters across the Health Service are formatted in ways which are appropriate for people affected by sight loss.

**(AQW 6484/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Health and Social Care Trusts offer appointment letters in accessible formats using large clear print and they can also be sent electronically to facilitate blind service users.

In addition, in January 2016, "Making Communication Accessible for All" a Guide for Health and Social Care Staff was produced to assist staff in communicating more effectively with those who have a disability or a communication support need including those who are blind or visually impaired.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health how each Health and Social Care Trust checks that patients have lived in the United Kingdom in the last twelve months.

**(AQW 6487/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Eligibility to access publicly-funded health and social care services in the North of Ireland is based on the concept of ordinary residence. For someone to be considered ordinarily resident, they must satisfy the Health and Social system that they are here lawfully, voluntarily and for a settled purpose. There is no minimum period of residence required to satisfy the ordinary residence test.

In the case of individuals who are not ordinarily resident here, the Provision of Health Services to Persons Not Ordinarily Resident Regulations 2015 provide that health services shall be available to any visitor at a charge. These Regulations also set out a range of services and categories of visitors which are exempt from charge. Under these Regulations, no charge may be made or recovered in respect of health services provided to a visitor who has resided lawfully in the United Kingdom for at least 12 months immediately preceding the time when services were accessed.

In assessing eligibility to access publicly-funded health services for persons who are not ordinarily resident here, Trusts are required to establish if a visitor is exempt from charges under the 2015 Regulations and seek relevant documentary evidence to support this. Where applicable, evidence of lawful residence in the United Kingdom for at least 12 months will be sought—this might include (but may not be limited to) birth and/ or marriage certificates, passports and VISAs, rates bills, bank statements showing address and activity in the UK, mortgage statements or tenancy agreements, pay slips, proof of benefit, pension or tax credit claims, tax returns, or a university student card.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health how much each of her Department's arm's-length bodies have paid to each recruitment agency responsible for sourcing agency and locum staff in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 6488/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Information on the amount paid to each recruitment agency is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. Expenditure on Agency staff, including medical agency staff, for the last 5 years is given below:

Organisation	Financial Year				
	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/16
The Business Services Organisation	£1,374,291	£2,042,323	£2,397,166	£2,644,780	£2,347,732
The Health and Social Care Board	£360,807	£420,094	£525,650	£316,122	£274,753
The Belfast HSC Trust	£17,838,000	£22,927,000	£24,493,064	£27,011,000	£32,672,660
The Northern HSC Trust	£7,233,129	£12,366,333	£12,329,331	£15,668,416	£16,602,079
The Southern HSC Trust	£4,556,009	£8,855,777	£8,070,058	£7,836,228	£12,372,086
The South Eastern HSC Trust	£8,128,072	£13,230,574	£11,882,813	£9,699,195	£11,152,298
The Western HSC Trust	£10,202,989	£10,704,067	£12,282,891	£15,677,902	£18,423,394
The NI Ambulance Service	£398,148	£594,441	£620,534	£615,869	£591,187
The Patient Client Council	£163,866	£163,890	£147,170	£111,387	£30,733
The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority	£91,102	£180,017	£122,974	£44,128	£62,552
The NI Practice and Education Council	£4,027	£0	£0	£15,605	£14,873
The NI Blood Transfusion Service	£0	£6,617	£10,047	£32,462	£21,274
The Public Health Agency	£319,043	£158,760	£246,105	£238,945	£142,162
The NI Social Care Council	£71,276	£57,569	£45,942	£57,950	£56,021

Organisation	Financial Year				
	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/16
The NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency	£20,675	£21,164	£25,692	£63,167	£68,499
The NI Medical and Dental Training Agency	£14,296	£40,875	£84,458	£101,398	£170,898
The NI Fire and Rescue Service	£1,042,262	£1,222,821	£1,289,117	£880,465	£840,218

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health to detail the average length of time that people are waiting to receive treatment following their first episode of psychosis, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust; and how this compares to each of the last ten years.

**(AQW 6491/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The information requested is not available and could only be provided through a manual trawl of records at a disproportionate cost.

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Health how many people, who have had a pre-op assessment, are awaiting a further pre-op assessment, broken down by hospital.

**(AQW 6493/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Patients are placed on a waiting list for inpatient or day case admission, not for a pre-operative assessment. As such, information on the number of people, who have had a pre-op assessment and are awaiting a further pre-op assessment is not available.

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Health to detail the current average waiting times for pre-op assessments, broken down by hospital.

**(AQW 6494/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Patients are placed on a waiting list for inpatient or day case admission, not for a pre-operative assessment. As such, information on waiting times for pre-operative assessments is not available.

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Health how many people are awaiting a pre-op assessment; and how this compares to each of the last five years, broken down by each hospital.

**(AQW 6495/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Patients are placed on a waiting list for inpatient or day case admission, not for a pre-operative assessment. As such, information on the number of people waiting for pre-operative assessments is not available.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health whether her Department will (i) ask the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority to halt plans to remove its two existing administrative posts from Omagh and centralise them in Belfast; and (ii) encourage departmental arm's-length bodies to make a commitment to greater decentralisation.

**(AQW 6519/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** In 2014 a review of administration support for the RQIA's Regulation Directorate recommended that its administration function should be centralised and managed in its Belfast office.

At present, RQIA is consulting on proposals to relocate the Regulation Directorate's administration support from Omagh to Belfast. All views gathered will be considered before any final decisions are made. Alternative suitable employment on the Western Health and Social Care Trust site is currently an option available to the two current staff in post.

My Department currently sponsors 17 Arm's Length Bodies; all ALBs have to ensure they deliver their objectives in the most efficient and effective way.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health whether there is a recognised position or acceptance of Stockholm Syndrome in her departmental agencies and clinicians employed by the Health and Social Care Trusts.

**(AQW 6526/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Stockholm syndrome is not a recognised mental disorder. However, it is a recognised term within clinical practice and should an individual present with a complex trauma experience it may form part of discussions in order to fully identify and assess the individual's clinical needs.

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the practice of hiring agency occupational therapist staff rather than occupational therapist staff on regional waiting lists.

**(AQW 6527/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I am committed to ensuring a first-class health service, in which services are delivered primarily from the Health and Social Care (HSC) in-house workforce.

The use of agency staff by the HSC is to ensure that service provision is maintained for patients and clients, in specific short-term circumstances, to address workforce shortages. My Department looks to the HSC Trusts to ensure that agency staff are only engaged when alternative workforce supply sources have been exhausted. HSC Trusts have been asked to examine reliance upon agency staff and my Department will continue to monitor expenditure closely.

Regional recruitment initiatives for Band 5 Allied Health Professional (AHP) posts are being progressed by the HSC. This includes the centralisation of waiting lists for some AHP professions including occupational therapists to ensure an ongoing supply of therapists for vacant posts. These waiting lists are replenished annually. Recruitment of more senior posts is undertaken by Trusts individually and agency staff are considered only when all alternative options have been explored. Hiring Agency Occupational Therapists

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health what impact the practice of hiring occupational therapist agency staff has on occupational therapist regional waiting lists.

**(AQW 6528/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I am committed to ensuring a first-class health service, in which services are delivered primarily from the Health and Social Care (HSC) in-house workforce.

The use of agency staff by the HSC is to ensure that service provision is maintained for patients and clients, in specific short-term circumstances, to address workforce shortages. My Department looks to the HSC Trusts to ensure that agency staff are only engaged when alternative workforce supply sources have been exhausted. HSC Trusts have been asked to examine reliance upon agency staff and my Department will continue to monitor expenditure closely.

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**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health what steps her Department is taking to address the practice of hiring agency occupational therapist staff rather than occupational therapists on regional waiting lists.

**(AQW 6529/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I am committed to ensuring a first-class health service, in which services are delivered primarily from the Health and Social Care (HSC) in-house workforce.

The use of agency staff by the HSC is to ensure that service provision is maintained for patients and clients, in specific short-term circumstances, to address workforce shortages. My Department looks to the HSC Trusts to ensure that agency staff are only engaged when alternative workforce supply sources have been exhausted. HSC Trusts have been asked to examine reliance upon agency staff and my Department will continue to monitor expenditure closely.

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**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health whether her Department and the Western Health and Social Care Trust will work with Derry and Strabane District Council to facilitate the extension of the Waterside greenway in Derry through the grounds of Gransha hospital.

**(AQW 6531/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I would refer you to my answer to AQW 3838/16-21

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health on how many occasions, in each of the last three years, ambulances were required to wait for more than one hour to hand over patients at Emergency Departments, broken down by individual Emergency Department.

**(AQW 6585/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Information on the time taken to handover a patient at emergency care departments is not available.

However, information is available on ambulance turnaround times at hospitals with emergency care departments, which refers to the time between an ambulance arriving at the emergency care department and it 'clearing' the location. The crew will remain with the patient until they have been handed over to the relevant clinical personnel within the HSC Hospital environment. The ambulance turnaround time will include other aspects such as the time to clean and replenish the ambulance for the next call.

The number of occasions ambulance turnaround times exceeded 1 hour at each acute hospital with an emergency care department, during each of the last three years, is detailed in the table below.

Hospital <sup>1</sup>	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Mater	180	257	284
Royal Victoria	1,954	3,138	1,593
RBHSC	34	49	42
Antrim Area	205	255	300
Causeway	109	94	288
Downe	21	20	31
Lagan Valley	77	58	75
Ulster	1,338	1,464	1,900
Craigavon Area	1,802	1,673	1,753
Daisy Hill	665	374	326
Altnagelvin Area	311	236	370
South West Acute	174	281	501

**Source:** Ambulance Service (NIAS)

1 Refers to all ambulance journeys, including those resulting from emergency calls and any urgent & routine patient journeys.

**Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of Health to outline her Department's approach to continuing healthcare, as provided in England. (AQW 6591/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** In England, NHS Continuing Healthcare is the name given to a package of care which is arranged and funded solely by the NHS for individuals outside of hospital who have ongoing health needs.

In the North of Ireland, continuing healthcare is the term used for the practice of the health service meeting the cost of any social care need which is driven primarily by a healthcare need.

It is the responsibility of Health and Social Care Trusts (HSC) to carry out assessments of need for individuals with continuing care needs. It should be noted that assessment covers both health and social care. The outcome of the assessment could be a primary need for healthcare, which is provided free in whatever setting, together with any accompanying social care needs. Alternatively a primary need for social care may be identified and, where such need is met in a residential or nursing care home, the service user is required to pay a means-tested contribution.

**Mr Middleton** asked the Minister of Health given that core grant funding continues to decrease, for an update on the introduction of the Innovation Fund. (AQW 6592/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** It is anticipated the new Health and Social Care Innovation Scheme will open for applications early in 2017.

**Mr Middleton** asked the Minister of Health to outline her plans for the Health and Social Care Board following the release of the Bengoa report. (AQW 6593/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** On 25 October 2016 to align with the publication of my vision for health and social care, Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together I wrote to all HSCB staff confirming the HSCB would close and that I would move quickly to conclude the work on the new approach to planning and management of HSC services.

I owe the staff in the Board the courtesy of talking to them first about their future and it is my intention to do this as soon as possible.

**Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the implementation of the Regional Acquired Brain Injury Implementation Group action plan of 2011. (AQW 6594/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Regional Acquired Brain Injury Implementation Group (RABIIG) has made good progress across a number of key Action Plan areas for example:

- Creation of regional standards for Acquired Brain Injury (ABI).
- Development of in-patient and community care pathways for adults and children.

- Production and launch of an ABI information pack.
- Development of an ABI Education and Training plan.
- New recurrent investment of £128,000 for specialist rehabilitation medical posts and £100,000 for services for children with ABI.

Full achievement of some of the Action Plan areas still remains dependent on funding being identified in the current very challenging financial climate.

In the interim, Health and Social Care Trusts continue to assess and plan locally for the needs of people with ABI (including accommodation needs) using their existing Trust planning and delivery processes.

**Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Health what specialist training social service staff receive in understanding men's feelings and emotions.

**(AQW 6595/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** This question has been redirected to my Department for answer.

Social Services staff have access to training which is appropriate to their job role and function. I am not aware of any specialist training in respect of understanding men's emotions but social workers and social care staff do use their experience and expertise to build therapeutic relationships with a range of service users.

**Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of recommendations that have been implemented following the October 2015 Regulation Quality Improvement Authority review of acquired brain injury rehabilitation services.

**(AQW 6596/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The RQIA review report made twenty three recommendations covering adult and children's acquired brain injury rehabilitation services.

Fifteen of these recommendations were specific to Health and Social Care Trusts (recommendations 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22) and they have reported to the Health and Social Care Board that while each recommendation is at varying stages of work towards its completion, overall they have already achieved, or are on track to achieve, thirteen of the fifteen Trust specific recommendations.

One recommendation was specific to the Board (recommendation 23) and this has been achieved.

Seven of the recommendations were joint HSC Board/ Trust recommendations (1, 4, 7, 8, 9, 17, 21) and four of these have already been achieved.

**Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Health what plans her Department has to recognise paramedics as allied health professionals, particularly given the increased role they will play in the implementation of Health and Well-Being 2026.

**(AQW 6597/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department is giving consideration to Paramedics becoming one of the Allied Health Professions in the North of Ireland.

My Top Management Group (TMG) was presented with a paper in March this year asking them to consider officially recognising paramedics as one of the AHP groupings in the North of Ireland.

A scoping exercise is now underway.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health for a breakdown of the £1bn extra funding for the Health Service that was pledged prior to the 2016 Assembly Election.

**(AQW 6604/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I am aware of the commitment made by Executive Parties of a further £1bn in funding for Health over this mandate. Although the Executive is facing many financial challenges it continues to recognise the importance of health. For the current year, my Department has been afforded protection and received an increase in baseline funding of £133m as part of the Budget process. The in year monitoring process has also provided over £71m of additional funding to meet a range of pressures across health and social care, including unscheduled care, improving patient flow through our hospitals, additional social care provision to help meet increasing demands and for Highly Specialised Technologies.

Transformation is needed if we are to meet increasing demand and deliver a world class health and social care service. In my statement to the Assembly on 25 October, I confirmed that the Executive have endorsed the direction of travel, in the recognition that additional funding is needed and that this will be worked through the due process of the budget decisions in the coming months.

I have and will continue to engage with the Finance Minister and Executive colleagues to secure the necessary additional funding for health and social care transformation including tackling waiting lists.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health pursuant to AQW 5524/16-21, how many deaths are linked to the incidents in each year, broken down by (i) Health and Social Care Trust; and (ii) programme of care; and how many were referred to the coroner's office.

**(AQW 6606/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** In order to avoid the disclosure of personal information, it is not possible to provide the information broken down by Programme of Care or to provide data in respect of the Ambulance Service (NIAS). The total number of deaths which have a link to an SAI broken down by Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last twelve months, and the last five years is outlined in the table below.

**Deaths linked to an\* SAI reported to HSCB by Org / Year**

	BHSCT	NHSCT	SEHSCT	SHSCT	WHSCCT	Total **
2011	41	27	34	28	18	148
2012	48	33	36	25	23	165
2013	56	50	43	38	35	222
2014	126	59	47	61	55	348
2015	120	55	52	61	35	323
<b>Totals</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>1206</b>

\* It should be noted that a SAI notification which documents a death does not necessarily imply that the circumstances relating to the adverse incident contributed to the cause of the death. Also, on occasions an SAI may be received relating to one incident but may involve one or more deaths e.g. maternal / neonatal death. These above data include total death related incidents NOT total deaths

\*\* A change in the SAI process in October 2013 introduced a requirement to report all child deaths as SAIs including those from natural causes. This significantly increased the number of SAIs. Sir Liam Donaldson recommended that the deaths of children from natural causes should not be classified as SAIs and that mandatory reporting of all child deaths ceased. This requirement was removed in February 2016. The SAI criterion has been amended to include only those cases where the death of the child has been unexpected or unexplained.

Information on the number of deaths which are linked to SAIs and which were reported to the Coroner is only available from April 2014.

**Deaths linked to an SAI referred to HM Coroner since April 2014 \*\*\***

	BHSCT	NHSCT	SEHSCT	SHSCT	WHSCCT	Total
2014	14	4	5	17	1	41
2015	26	25	15	40	10	116
<b>Totals</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>157</b>

\*\*\* The tables also include data on suicide-related SAIs. While the SAI may have been reported by the Trust, the incident may have occurred in the community. In these circumstances the death would have been reported to the Coroner by a GP or the PSNI.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health pursuant to AQW 6489/16-21, how many patients were (i) adults long stay; and (ii) adults short stay, as of 4 November 2016 .

**(AQW 6608/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** It is assumed that 'long stay' refers to patients resident in hospital for over a year and 'short stay' to patients resident for a year or less.

At 17th February 2016, the latest information available, there were (i) 73 long stay adult, and (ii) 26 short stay adult patients in Muckamore Abbey Hospital.

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Health how many children are waiting currently for an autism spectrum assessment.

**(AQW 6629/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** At 30 September 2016 there were 2,325 children waiting for an autism spectrum assessment in the north of Ireland. These are the latest available figures.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health how the Bengoa report will impact on the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

**(AQW 6633/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My vision for health and social care, Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together takes significant account of the Expert Panel's report. It is clear that the configuration of services is not able to meet current and future demands. Delivering Together is an ambitious approach which will radically change the way we plan and deliver HSC services focussing on people rather than structures.

One of the first steps I have taken is to launch a public consultation on the proposed criteria for reconfiguring health and social care services. It is this criteria, alongside the views and opinions of clinicians, patients and staff that will guide decisions about how and where services are planned and delivered in the future.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the future of the South West Acute Hospital.  
(AQW 6634/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together provides a roadmap for transforming the way we receive health and social care services. This will require whole system transformation across primary, secondary and community care, and a radical change to the way we access services. As part of this, the nature and focus of our hospitals will change to focus on addressing the needs of patients requiring complex planned surgery or emergency care in an inpatient setting.

It is too early to say what services will be provided in individual hospitals, but I can assure the member that any significant change in how services are delivered will include full engagement with those who use and deliver them.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health whether she will meet with the GPs, nurses and other staff at Carrickmore Health Centre to witness and learn at first hand the demands and challenges facing a rural primary care practice which is distant from acute services.  
(AQW 6682/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** I have been clear that delivering sustainable health and social care services for the population here will require partnership working with patients, service users, staff and politicians. In "Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together" I committed to engage with staff and service users about my proposals for the model of health and care for the future and will consider all written invitations received by my office on a case by case basis.

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the disbandment of the Health and Social Care Board and the timelines involved.  
(AQW 6685/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** On 25 October 2016 to align with the publication of my vision for health and social care, Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together I wrote to all HSCB staff confirming the HSCB would close and that I would move quickly to conclude the work on the new approach to planning and management of HSC services.

I owe the staff in the Board the courtesy of talking to them first about their future and it is my intention to do this as soon as possible.

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister of Health to detail any capital projects in her Department which have benefited from EU funding in each of the last ten years.  
(AQW 6686/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** There has been no EU funding received for any capital projects within my Department in the last 10 years.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health (i) whether a standard procedure or agreed practice is in place in Health and Social Care Trusts for people that display signs and symptoms of mental health issues but do not accept they are unwell and refuse to attend a clinician, and are behaving in a manner which could be dangerous to themselves and others; and (ii) whether other options are considered before police are alerted in the interests of the individual's safety and public safety; and (iii) which agencies are responsible in such instances.  
(AQW 6687/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:**

- i) People who are seriously mentally unwell but refuse to accept this are likely to come within the provisions of the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, which provides for the compulsory admission for assessment or treatment of individuals if there is considered to be a risk of harm to themselves or others. The Regional Interagency Protocol On The Operation Of Place Of Safety & Conveyance To Hospital Under The Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 (October 2015) provides a framework for co-operation and joint working between the Police Service, Ambulance Service and Health and Social Care Trusts to ensure that people with a mental disorder are managed in a safe, efficient and effective manner when agencies are discharging their duties under the 1986 Order.
- ii) The protocol advises that Police Service support should only be requested when the reason for their attendance is consistent with their statutory functions (protection of life, prevention of crime, to prevent a breach of the peace), and based on an assessment of the risks associated with the specific circumstances. The protocol contains a Risk Assessment Matrix to help inform this judgement.

- iii) Depending on the circumstances of such instances the responsible agencies may include some or all of the following; General Practitioner, General Practitioner Out-of-Hours Service, Health and Social Care Trust, Out of Hours Social Work, Ambulance Trust and Police Service.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health to outline the difference between the roles of a (i) paramedic; and (ii) medical technician on an ambulance crew.

**(AQW 6688/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) and paramedics work together as a team, making up the crew of an emergency ambulance. They are trained in common areas of out-of-hospital emergency care including scene management, patient assessment and treatment for a wide range of conditions, illness and injury. The initial training and scope of practice for paramedics and EMTs is common to both roles.

Paramedics have a range of additional knowledge and skills including enhanced patient assessment and the ability to perform certain interventions such as advanced airway maintenance by way of endotracheal intubation, certain drug administrations (including intravenous and other injection routes), fluid replacement therapy and clinical decision making regarding the referral of patients to appropriate care pathways.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health, in instances where court defendants are supported by Health and Social Care Trust clinicians in claims for anonymity due to suicidal ideation, what medical safeguarding follow up is undertaken with these defendants and by which agencies; and whether there is an automatic follow-up assessment or intervention.

**(AQW 6702/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** If a health care need is identified by clinicians, a treatment plan will be drawn up in consultation and agreement with the patient. In all cases, a full and comprehensive risk assessment is undertaken by the clinician, using the standardised template approach currently in use throughout the North of Ireland. If specific risk is identified, this is examined in more detail, and addressed by the clinician or referred to an appropriate agency or service.

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health to detail the funding provided for bereavement counselling in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 6703/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Bereavement counselling is mainly provided by the charity CRUSE Bereavement Care. Departmental funding to CRUSE in each of the last five years is shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
52,467	52,467	52,467	52,467	52,467

HSC Trust funding to CRUSE is detailed in Table 2 below:

**Table 2**

Trust	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Western	38,458	38,458	38,458	38,458	38,551
Southern	30,000	39,400	29,400	29,400	29,400
Belfast	43,958	43,958	43,958	43,958	43,958
South Eastern	38,454	38,454	38,454	35,161	35,161
<b>Northern *</b>	<b>36,431</b>	<b>36,431</b>	<b>36,431</b>	<b>36,431</b>	<b>47,735</b>

\* Northern Trust also provides funding to Carecall Solutions

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health to detail the demand and waiting times for bereavement counselling in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 6704/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The information requested is not available.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health to detail the specialities that have been reconfigured or centralised over the last ten years.

**(AQW 6708/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The development and delivery of health care specialities is a continually evolving process dependent on a wide range of factors. It would not be practical to list all the changes that have taken place over the past ten years.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health on how many occasions patients waited in ambulances for longer than 15 minutes before hand over to each Emergency Department, in each of the last twelve months.

**(AQW 6709/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Information on the time taken to handover a patient at emergency care departments is not available.

However, information is available on ambulance turnaround times at hospitals with emergency care departments, which refers to the time between an ambulance arriving at the emergency care department and it 'clearing' the location. The crew will remain with the patient until they have been handed over to the relevant clinical personnel within the HSC Hospital environment. The ambulance turnaround time will include other aspects such as the time to clean and replenish the ambulance for the next call.

The number of occasions ambulance turnaround times exceeded 15 minutes at each acute hospital with an emergency care department, during each of the last 12 months, is detailed below.

Hospital <sup>1</sup>	Nov 2015	Dec 2015	Jan 2016	Feb 2016	Mar 2016	Apr 2016	May 2016	Jun 2016	Jul 2016	Aug 2016	Sep 2016	Oct 2016
Mater	443	546	559	553	647	639	567	580	612	577	583	518
Royal Victoria	2,539	3,047	2,619	2,510	2,535	2,563	2,538	2,450	2,583	2,537	2,441	2,576
RBHSC	201	197	159	154	162	163	152	156	141	129	147	162
Antrim Area	1,749	1,998	1,782	1,716	1,775	1,639	1,720	1,683	1,706	1,637	1,681	1,800
Causeway	652	799	666	574	689	612	646	599	681	678	601	637
Downe	124	147	122	124	132	131	106	125	120	130	124	126
Lagan Valley	208	258	225	188	208	176	187	203	202	196	205	197
Ulster	1,842	2,076	1,826	1,687	1,743	1,603	1,722	1,697	1,703	1,842	1,660	1,864
Craigavon Area	1,404	1,781	1,532	1,369	1,625	1,458	1,513	1,489	1,441	1,440	1,499	1,619
Daisy Hill	605	684	677	570	686	553	623	600	568	586	563	635
Altnagelvin Area	1,125	1,317	1,086	1,138	1,196	1,070	1,109	960	1,161	1,115	1,085	1,188
South West Acute	623	785	637	595	631	576	652	603	628	655	583	669

**Source:** Ambulance Service (NIAS)

- 1 Refers to all ambulance journeys, including those resulting from emergency calls and any urgent & routine patient journeys.
- 2 Information from April 2016 onwards is provisional and may be subject to change.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health on how many occasions patients waited in ambulances for longer than (i) one hour; and (ii) two hours before hand over to each Emergency Department in each of the last twelve months.

**(AQW 6710/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Information on the time taken to handover a patient at emergency care departments is not available.

However, information is available on ambulance turnaround times at hospitals with emergency care departments, which refers to the time between an ambulance arriving at the emergency care department and it 'clearing' the location. The crew will remain with the patient until they have been handed over to the relevant clinical personnel within the HSC Hospital environment. The ambulance turnaround time will include other aspects such as the time to clean and replenish the ambulance for the next call.

- (i) The number of occasions ambulance turnaround times exceeded 1 hour at each acute hospital with an emergency care department, during each of the last 12 months, is detailed in the table below.

Hospital <sup>1,2</sup>	Nov 2015	Dec 2015	Jan 2016	Feb 2016	Mar 2016	Apr 2016	May 2016	Jun 2016	Jul 2016	Aug 2016	Sep 2016	Oct 2016
Mater	10	24	18	30	27	43	30	22	29	25	28	18
Royal Victoria	97	151	125	138	99	133	172	113	108	98	89	80
RBHSC	4	4	6	4	4	5	3	6	2	4	6	5
Antrim Area	29	38	30	28	31	20	22	19	18	15	17	27
Causeway	27	46	23	27	34	26	11	18	35	35	25	18
Downe	3	2	3	4	0	4	1	1	1	3	6	1

Hospital <sup>1, 2</sup>	Nov 2015	Dec 2015	Jan 2016	Feb 2016	Mar 2016	Apr 2016	May 2016	Jun 2016	Jul 2016	Aug 2016	Sep 2016	Oct 2016
Lagan Valley	6	9	7	8	7	5	2	3	7	6	6	4
Ulster	137	192	189	265	216	164	79	78	47	153	86	102
Craigavon Area	141	217	196	141	244	148	171	200	110	126	143	191
Daisy Hill	27	25	48	31	43	25	33	42	19	38	30	34
Altnagelvin Area	36	44	29	48	54	44	39	26	40	49	70	51
South West Acute	40	102	93	66	50	23	78	90	74	87	66	75

**Source:** Ambulance Service (NIAS)

- 1 Refers to all ambulance journeys, including those resulting from emergency calls and any urgent & routine patient journeys.
  - 2 Information from April 2016 onwards is provisional and may be subject to change.
- (ii) The number of occasions ambulance turnaround times exceeded 2 hours at each acute hospital with an emergency care department, during each of the last 12 months, is detailed in the table below.

Hospital 3, 4	Nov 2015	Dec 2015	Jan 2016	Feb 2016	Mar 2016	Apr 2016	May 2016	Jun 2016	Jul 2016	Aug 2016	Sep 2016	Oct 2016
Mater	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	3	1	0	1	0
Royal Victoria	5	0	4	5	6	7	4	1	2	3	0	0
RBHSC	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Antrim Area	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
Causeway	1	0	0	1	2	1	1	0	2	0	1	1
Downe	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lagan Valley	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Ulster	5	23	8	31	24	18	0	0	1	10	2	5
Craigavon Area	10	22	20	5	26	18	17	17	0	9	4	22
Daisy Hill	2	0	6	0	4	2	0	3	0	0	2	2
Altnagelvin Area	2	3	1	0	0	2	0	1	2	2	4	5
South West Acute	4	20	12	8	4	0	10	9	3	4	3	10

**Source:** Ambulance Service (NIAS)

- 3 Refers to all ambulance journeys, including those resulting from emergency calls and any urgent & routine patient journeys.
- 4 Information from April 2016 onwards is provisional and may be subject to change.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health what GP practices in Fermanagh and South Tyrone have contacted her Department because of a lack of staff.

**(AQW 6715/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Health and Social Care Board is responsible for securing general medical services (GMS) for the population here and contracts with GPs to provide services for their practice area. No GP practices have contacted my Department directly regarding a lack of a staff.

**Mr K Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health how many orthopaedic consultant posts are vacant in each Health and Social Care Trust.

**(AQW 6723/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** There are currently no vacant orthopaedic consult posts in the Health and Social Care Trusts.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health to detail (i) the total level of capital receipts generated by her Department in each year since 2012; (ii) each individual asset; (iii) its location; (iv) when it was sold; (v) for how much it was sold.  
(AQW 6724/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:**

(i) Capital receipts are recorded by financial year. Property receipts for each year are as follows:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Property Capital Receipts (Net Book Value) £</b>
2012/13	£2,782,000
2013/14	£903,850
2014/15	£7,614,331
2015/16	£2,658,100
2016/17*	£120,000

\*To date

The table below details (ii) each individual asset; (iii) its location; (iv) when it was sold; (v) for how much it was sold.

<b>Asset</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Year sold</b>	<b>Proceeds</b>
149 & 151 Falls Road	Belfast	2012/13	£175,000
92 University Street	Belfast	2012/13	£88,000
58 Main Street	Larne	2012/13	£49,000
Land at 165 Groomsport Road	Bangor	2012/13	£1,037,500
18-21 Woodlawn Park	Dungannon	2012/13	£82,500
Downshire Hospital	Downpatrick	2012/13	£1,000,000
Plot 13, Crevenagh Road	Omagh	2012/13	£400,000
2 Gilnahirk Rise	Belfast	2013/14	£123,750
Land at 29a Annadale Avenue	Belfast	2013/14	£275,000
1-4 Minnowburn Terrace	Belfast	2013/14	£180,000
449 Antrim Road	Belfast	2013/14	£167,000
Glasvey Special Care School	Limavady	2013/14	£60,000
Belvoir Clinic	Belfast	2013/14	£104,000
Land at Ballyhornan Road	Downpatrick	2013/14	£3,500
Land at Market Street	Downpatrick	2013/14	£20,000
Belvoir Hospital	Belfast	2014/15	£4,550,000
137-141 Ormeau Road	Belfast	2014/15	£210,000
414 Ormeau Road	Belfast	2014/15	£280,000
Greyabbey Clinic	Greyabbey	2014/15	£27,000
44a Tempo Road	Enniskillen	2014/15	£79,500
25a Tamar Street	Belfast	2014/15	£117,000
89 Durham Street	Belfast	2014/15	£275,000
116-120 Great Victoria Street	Belfast	2014/15	£295,000
16 Cupar Street	Belfast	2014/15	£160,000
Old Downe Hospital	Downpatrick	2014/15	£600,000
Land adjacent to Ralph's Close	Derry	2014/15	£200,000
Abbots Road	Whiteabbey	2014/15	£180,000
Shore Road Elderly Persons Home	Greenisland	2014/15	£380,000

Asset	Location	Year sold	Proceeds
Ravara Old People's Home	Bangor	2014/15	£200,000
Land at Gleenwood Green	Lisburn	2014/15	£74,150
Land at 58 Newry Street	Kilkeel	2014/15	£130,000
63 Clarendon Street	Derry	2015/16	£147,000
Davaar Avenue	Belfast	2015/16	£45,000
Grovetree House, Cullingtree Road	Belfast	2015/16	£285,000
14 Lower Crescent	Belfast	2015/16	£191,000
37 Glantane Drive	Belfast	2015/16	£66,000
195 Templemore Avenue	Belfast	2015/16	£84,000
Land at Knockbracken	Belfast	2015/16	£35,000
Princes Gardens	Larne	2015/16	£125,000
Lynwood House	Ballyduff	2015/16	£173,000
Lisburn HC, Hillsborough Road	Lisburn	2015/16	£150,000
Erne Site	Enniskillen	2015/16	£1,350,000
Millars Lane Day Centre	Belfast	2015/16	£80,000
Omagh Fire Station	Omagh	2015/16	£170,000
Branial Health Centre	Belfast	2016/17	£120,000

HSC bodies also identified for disposal, sale and write off a large number of items of plant, equipment and vehicles. These also count as capital receipts under the current budgeting rules and are in addition to those outlined above.

Year	Asset Value £	Proceeds £
2012/13	820,772	487,395
2013/14	531,028	595,636
2014/15	106,497	367,539
2015/16	159,879	320,904
2016/17*	147,904	352,137

\*to date

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health whether she has considered the creation of a GP out-of-hours service operating from the Banbridge Health and Care Centre.

**(AQW 6725/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** There are currently no plans to provide a GP out of hours service from the Banbridge Health Care Centre. The Southern Health and Social Care Trust provides a GP out of hours service from five bases—Armagh, Craigavon, Dungannon, Newry and Kilkeel. Contact with the out of hours service should be by telephone in the first instance, and the current configuration is intended to ensure that residents in the Southern Trust area have access to an out of hours base should a face to face appointment be required.

**Mr K Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health how many GP surgeries in Mid Ulster require replacement or significant upgrade.

**(AQW 6733/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The majority of GP surgeries in the Mid-Ulster area are privately owned and I am advised by the Health & Social Care Board that currently 15 properties require replacement or significant upgrade. Of these properties none fall within the Western Trust area and only 2 are owned by the Northern Trust and as part of their ongoing Capital Priorities review and implementation of their Reform and Modernisation Programme they will ensure that all facilities are either replaced or refurbished to meet the long terms needs of the service.

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Health what consideration has been given to funding a specialist MS consultant post in Craigmavon Area Hospital.

**(AQW 6776/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** During 2016/17 the HSCB supported the creation of an additional neurology consultant post in the Southern Trust. An advertisement will be placed shortly with the intention to appoint in early 2017.

While the sub-specialty interest of this position will depend on the candidates applying and will not be known until appointment is made, it is expected that MS patients will benefit from the additional neurology capacity overall.

## Department for Infrastructure

**Dr Farry** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail, from the most recent net present cost estimates, the proposed investment in relation to (a) the York Street interchange; (b) the A5; and (c) the A6.

**(AQW 6287/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure):** The York Street Interchange, A5 Western Transport Corridor and A6 schemes will provide a positive return on investment. They therefore have a net value as opposed to a net cost to the Executive. The detail of the latest Net Present Value estimate for each scheme is listed in the table below. These figures may change as scheme development continues. My Department is progressing two separate projects on the A6 route; the Randalstown to Castledawson and Derry to Dungiven schemes. Figures for both of these schemes have been included below.

In accordance with standard transport appraisal methodology, figures have been discounted to a common assessment year. The common assessment year is 2010 for all schemes with the exception of the A6 Derry to Dungiven scheme which has an assessment year of 2002. Work is currently underway to update economic appraisal information for the A6 Derry to Dungiven scheme. To facilitate a cursory like for like comparison, HM Treasury's Gross Domestic Product Deflator has been used to uplift figures for the A6 Derry to Dungiven scheme to 2010 prices.

It should be noted that costs (Present Value of Costs) outlined below are not the latest scheme estimates. These are the anticipated cost within the parameters of the economic appraisal to deliver the scheme at the time of the respective scheme assessments, discounted to 2010 prices.

Scheme Name	Present Value of Costs (£m)	Present Value of Benefits (£m)	Net Present Value (£m)
York Street Interchange	75	175	100
A5 Western Transport Corridor	657	1234	577
A6 Randalstown to Castledawson	113	267	154
A6 Derry to Dungiven	299 (2002) 361 (2010)	405 (2002) 489 (2010)	106 (2002) 128 (2010)

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Infrastructure pursuant to AQW 4396/16-21, whether (i) the five press officers are the entirety of his Department's Information Service; (ii) there are additional staff; and, if so, (a) how many; and (b) at what cost. **(AQW 6409/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** There are no additional Executive Information Service staff in DFI.

Press officers are supported by five administrative staff who are not part of the Executive Information Service. These officers are involved in a range of administrative activities including media monitoring, and financial planning.

The salary costs for these five administrative posts from 9 May until 30 September 2016 is £60,317.79.

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the investment in (i) the repair of; and (ii) maintenance of river banks in the last five years.

**(AQW 6433/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** DfI Rivers does not classify expenditure on the repair and maintenance of river banks separately, however the table below details the resource expenditure on watercourse maintenance, in each of the last five financial years.

Year	2011/12 £k	2012/13 £k	2013/14 £k	2014/15 £k	2015/16 £k
Repairs & Maintenance	788	1,157	1,175	888	1,091
Wages	5,463	5,286	5,602	5,438	5,853

Year	2011/12 £k	2012/13 £k	2013/14 £k	2014/15 £k	2015/16 £k
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,251</b>	<b>6,443</b>	<b>6,777</b>	<b>6,326</b>	<b>6,944</b>

Please note the wage figure includes our response to flood emergency situations.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on inter-departmental efforts, co-ordinated by Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and by Derry and Strabane District Council aimed at (i) preventing flooding in West Tyrone in the first instance; and (ii) increasing the capacity and resilience of communities in West Tyrone to deal with the recurrence of flooding in the future, with particular reference to the communities of (a) Fintona; (b) Beragh; (c) Clady; (d) Newtownstewart; (e) Strabane; and (f) Omagh.

**(AQW 6516/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** A key approach we use to build community flood resilience is the regional Community Resilience Group (RCRG). This group is co-chaired by Local Government and DfI Rivers. Activities undertaken with communities include raising their awareness of flood risk, developing household and community emergency plans, pre-deploying sandbags and providing water-level alerts where appropriate.

During 2014/15 the RCRG completed a pilot project to engage with 10 communities who have been flooded in the past, these include Fintona and Beragh. Since then engagement has been carried out with communities in Omagh, with further engagement planned for areas of Strabane and Clady.

DfI Rivers also has a key role to play during flooding events in discharging our Lead Government Department responsibilities. This involves working closely with communities and other organisations to ensure the overall response to flooding is as effective as possible. Multi Agency Emergency Responders groups, chaired by local councils also exist and have a key role in preparing for flooding emergencies. This multi Agency approach was very well received during last winter's floods and I plan to build on this success.

The Western Emergency Planning Group (WEPG) has been working steadily to produce an effective multi-agency plan and response to flooding across the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and the Derry and Strabane District Council areas. A Multi-Agency Flood Response Plan has been agreed, tested and is in use by all the responding agencies and groups. DfI Rivers is currently on site repairing defective flood banks in the Newtownstewart area and the standard of protection provided by the flood protection measures at Back Burn in the Mill Street area of Newtownstewart is being reviewed.

In addition the 'Homeowner Flood Protection Grant Scheme' has been developed by DfI Rivers on behalf of the Inter-Departmental EU Floods Directive Steering Group. This scheme provides assistance to property owners who wish to install individual property protection to help reduce the impact of flooding. The Grant Scheme is available to the owners of residential properties that meet a simple eligibility criteria. The scheme will generally cover 90% of the installation costs with the remaining 10% contributed by the homeowner. The grant is capped at £10,000. There have been a number of applications from West Tyrone and these are working their way through the process now. My Department also carries out routine maintenance to drainage systems to ensure they are in free flowing condition, for example, DfI Rivers programme of regular inspection and maintenance of watercourses, culverts and flood defence structures.

Works have also been completed in two locations in the Campsie area of Omagh which will help reduce the basement and surface water flooding in the area.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how many of his staff have raised issues regarding personal safety (a) in work; and (b) outside work; and (ii) how his Department has addressed this since October 2014.

**(AQW 6535/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The Department's Security Unit has received reports from three members of staff regarding personal safety since October 2014. One report related to personal safety in work and two to safety outside work.

In all cases the Department's Security Unit received advice from the Executive Office and advised staff members to remain in contact with the PSNI and other bodies relevant to their individual circumstances.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how many (i) informal; and (ii) formal cases of (a) threats; (b) harassment; (c) sexual harassment; and (d) stalking have been lodged by his staff over the last three years; and to detail (iii) the internal procedures taken; and (iv) how the victims were supported.

**(AQW 6537/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** (i), (ii), (a), (b), (c), (d). The Department for Infrastructure does not record informal complaints. The number of cases lodged with the Department is as follows:

	Formal cases of threats	Formal cases of Harassment	Formal cases of Sexual Harassment	Formal cases of stalking
2014/15	3	1	Nil	Nil

	Formal cases of threats	Formal cases of Harassment	Formal cases of Sexual Harassment	Formal cases of stalking
2015/16	2	3	Nil	Nil
2016/17	1	Nil	Nil	Nil

- (ii) The procedures for managing these cases are detailed in the Dignity at Work Policy NICS HR Handbook Policy which can be viewed at: <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dfp/6.09-dignity-at-work.pdf>.
- (iii) The victims are supported by Departmental Dignity at Work Officers, Departmental Mediation Officers, the NICS Welfare Services and the employee assistance programme offered by Carecall.

**Mr Chambers** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has any plans to designate street lighting outages in housing complexes for older people as being priority repairs.

**(AQW 6564/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department is responsible for street lighting on adopted roads and streets, but is not responsible for lighting of unadopted areas in housing complexes for older people, such as sheltered housing developments.

Street lighting repairs are currently prioritised on the basis of electrical, structural and road safety considerations. I do not have any plans to designate street lighting outages in housing complexes for older people as being priority repairs.

Parking on Groomsport Road, Bangor

**Mr Chambers** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how Transport NI balances the presence of a designated parking bay on Groomsport Road, Bangor, facing its junction with Bellevue, against advice in the Highway Code not to park within 10 metres of a junction.

**(AQW 6565/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The presence of a parking bay on Groomsport Road opposite the junction of Bellevue is similar to many locations across the North of Ireland, where parking occurs along a street. This parking bay provides much needed on street parking within the vicinity of the adjacent shops.

The NI Highway Code states under Rule No. 240 that 'you must not park within 15 metres (50 feet) of any junction, except in a lay-by in specified circumstances or in a designated parking area.' For legislation or enforcement purposes in the north, the 15 metre corner restriction applies to vehicles parking on either the approach or exit of a junction on the same side of the road as the junction.

The junction of Bellevue with Groomsport Road has been designated as a STOP junction due to the restricted sightlines onto the main road. Drivers approaching the junction of Bellevue should be mindful of Rule No. 171 of the Highway Code, which advises drivers that they must stop behind a line at a junction with a STOP sign and a solid white line across the road and wait for a safe gap in traffic before moving off.

Double yellow lines have been provided on either side of Bellevue to highlight the 15 metre corner restriction thereby improving safety for vehicles leaving Bellevue emerging onto Groomsport Road.

I am pleased to advise that a review of the personal injury collision history for the Bellevue junction over the past 10 years has shown no recorded incidents at this location.

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what flood alleviation works are planned in East Belfast by May 2021.  
**(AQW 6613/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Flood alleviation works as part of the Connswater Community Greenway/East Belfast Flood Alleviation Scheme Phase 2 are presently ongoing with completion programmed for the end of March 2017.

A separate DfI Rivers 'Standalone' Flood Alleviation Scheme which dovetails with the aforementioned scheme is presently being constructed in East Belfast. This scheme forms an integral part of the overall East Belfast Flood Alleviation Scheme. The works on the 'Standalone' scheme are well progressed with completion anticipated by the end of December 2016. In addition, works on the upgrade of an existing culvert on the Loop River under Ladas Way in East Belfast will commence in mid 2017.

There are other areas in East Belfast that have been identified as being at fluvial flood risk and each of these areas will be considered for capital works as resources permit. DfI Rivers will continue with its open watercourse, culverted watercourse and trash grille maintenance on a planned ongoing basis. The flood emergency response provided by DfI will also continue.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in light of the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs' recent statement regarding the Environmental Protection Agency of Ireland's report on Hydraulic Fracturing and the splitting of functions of the former Department of the Environment, whether he will engage with the peer review of this report before it is published.

**(AQW 6638/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I am aware of the Environmental Protection Agency's recent 'Statement Regarding Research Programme on Unconventional Gas Exploration and Extraction' which confirms that Phase 1 of the all-Ireland joint research programme into Unconventional Hydrocarbon Extraction or 'fracking' has now been substantially completed, and that an integrated report and other research outputs from Phase 1 of the programme will be published before the end of the year.

It is my understanding that the peer review process for the outputs from the Unconventional Gas Exploration and Extraction (UGEE) Joint Research Programme is a matter for the Programme Steering Committee which includes NIEA, an Executive Agency within DAERA.

The Member recognises that, following the reform of Government Departments, the environmental expertise held by NIEA transferred to DAERA, and not to my Department. In this context, I do not consider that it would be appropriate for my Department to be involved in the peer review process.

However, as Minister for Infrastructure I will take a keen interest in the integrated report and other research outputs from Phase 1 of the research programme, particularly in the context of the regional strategic planning policy approach to Unconventional Hydrocarbon Extraction or 'fracking' which is set out in my Department's Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS).

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether (i) the judicial review being progressed by Tamboran with regard to the Strategic Planning Policy Statement is now to be defended by his Department; and (ii) is it still his intention to defend the policy of presumption against unconventional fossil fuel exploitation until proven safe.

**(AQW 6640/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** With regards to the judicial review currently being progressed by Tamboran Resources UK Limited, my Department does intend to contest the grounds of the legal challenge. The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) is presumed to be valid in law, pending any decision of a Court to the contrary and sets out that there should be a presumption against the exploitation of unconventional hydrocarbon extraction until there is sufficient and robust evidence on all the environmental impacts. It would not be appropriate to comment further on this matter.

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed Southern Relief Road, Newry including (i) costs for the project; and (ii) when he expects works to commence on site.

**(AQW 6662/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department is continuing to progress the proposed Newry Southern Relief Road, to link the A1 Belfast to Dublin Road to the A2 Warrenpoint dual-carriageway.

The current work involves progressing the Stage 1 Preliminary Options Scheme Assessment, which will identify the best performing options to take forward for further development and subsequent identification of a Preferred Option. It is expected that the Stage 1 Assessment should be complete in winter 2016.

A feasibility study into the Southern Relief Road completed in 2009 indicated costs to be in the range £100 to £211 million; however these costs will be updated as part of the current assessment.

A significant amount of development work remains to be carried out on this proposal and at this stage it is not possible to identify when works could commence on site, as progression to construction remains subject to clearing the statutory procedures, having a satisfactory economic appraisal and funding made available to my Department.

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed Armagh North–West Link Road including (i) when a preferred route will be confirmed; (ii) costs for the project; and (iii) when he expects works to commence on site.

**(AQW 6663/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The Armagh North and West Link Road extends approximately 6.9 km around the Western and Northern outskirts of Armagh City, from the A3 Monaghan Road to the A3 Portadown Road crossing a number of radial roads.

The current stage of development would conclude with the confirmation of a Preferred Option and junction strategy for the link road, however, it is not considered appropriate to make a decision on the Preferred Option at this time, pending development of proposals for the Mullinure Area highlighted in the Armagh City Centre Masterplan 2030.

At this stage it is not therefore possible to provide an indication of when either a preferred route will be confirmed or when works could be expected to commence on site. It is also important to note that further progression to construction remains subject to clearing the statutory procedures, having a satisfactory economic appraisal and funding made available to my Department.

The current estimate for the cost of this scheme is in the range £55 to £75 million.

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed Armagh East Link Road including (i) when a preferred route will be confirmed; (ii) costs for the project; and (iii) when he expects works to commence on site.

**(AQW 6664/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Following feedback received at a Public Information event for the proposed Armagh East Link held in June 2014, the Preferred Option was further reviewed.

The review identified viable alternative options which are now subject to detailed assessment before a Preferred Option can be confirmed. It is anticipated that this work will be complete in the coming months, however, it is important to note that the Preferred Option may, or may not, change as a result of this review.

The cost estimate for the original Preferred Option was in the range of £12 - £20 million, however this may change depending on the outcome of the current work.

Following identification of the Preferred Option, the next stage of development work, involves completing the detailed design which will be subject to further comprehensive environmental, economic and engineering assessments. The formal statutory procedures will then follow and it is likely a Public Inquiry will be required to determine if the proposal should go ahead as planned.

At this stage, it is not possible to identify when works could commence on site, as progression to construction remains subject to clearing the statutory procedures, having a

satisfactory economic appraisal and funding made available to my Department.

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail any departmental capital projects that have benefited from European Union funding in each of the last ten years.

**(AQW 6665/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Since 2007 the Department for Regional Development, and latterly the Department for Infrastructure, has secured £98.569 million from a wide range of European Funding programmes and the attached Annex A details the projects that have benefited from this co-financing.

#### Annex A

£'000	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
<b>EU Sustainable Competitiveness Programme</b>						5,800	10,736	7,185		23,721
A2 Upgrade – Belfast Shore Road Greenisland							5,486			5,486
A2 Upgrade – Belfast Shore Road Greenisland Extension								3,450		3,450
Extended Bus Replacement Project							5,250			5,250
Optares and Goldlines								3,735		3,735
Replacement of Goldline and Metro Fleet						5,800				5,800
<b>FP7 Research and Development – People Programme</b>			177							177
Advanced Technologies for Water Resource Management			177							177
<b>INTERREG IVA</b>		2,592		424		2,400	10,279			15,695
ANSWER				424						424
CBRIDS – Upgrade		2,518								2,518
Drogheda Viaduct							3,168			3,168
Enterprise Phase 3 Overhaul – Stage 2							7,111			7,111
Redevelopment of Portadown Railway Station						2,400				2,400
Small Ferries Project		74								74
<b>INTERREG IVB (Arc Atlantique)</b>					284					284
BATTERIE Project					284					284

£'000	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
INTERREG IVB (North West Europe)			568							568
The Sustainable Stations Project – Antrim Integrated Transport Centre			568							568
TEN-T	13,460	1,408	3,312		2,441	15,725		2,860		39,206
Ballymena – Derry: Track Life Extension		1,408								1,408
Belfast Multi-modal Transport Hub – (Scheme Development Study)								2,860		2,860
Coleraine to Derry Track Relay – Phase 1					1,309					1,309
Dualling of A1 Beech Hill to Cloghogue	12,959									12,959
Dualling of A6 Derry to Dungiven (Scheme Development Study)			1,141							1,141
Dualling of A8 Belfast to Larne (Scheme Development Study)			1,934							1,934
Dualling of A8 Belfast to Larne (Capital Works)						15,725				15,725
EASYWAY I	501									501
EASYWAY II			237							237
Installation of rapid charge points for electric vehicles					110					110
York Street Interchange (Scheme Development Study)					1,021					1,021
<b>CEF</b>									<b>18,918</b>	<b>18,918</b>
Bottleneck Alleviation and Cross-Border Connectivity Works – Knockmore to Lurgan									7,576	7,576
Technical Equipment and Infrastructure Upgrade: Derry to Coleraine Rail Line									11,342	11,342
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>13,460</b>	<b>4,000</b>	<b>4,057</b>	<b>424</b>	<b>2,725</b>	<b>23,925</b>	<b>21,014</b>	<b>10,045</b>	<b>18,918</b>	<b>98,569</b>

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether the recent investment in rural roads included an investigation on the Shore Road, Portaferry following the investment in the new ferry.

**(AQW 6693/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I would advise the Member that the Rural Roads Initiative which I announced earlier this year was for resurfacing stretches of roads in rural areas. Shore Road in Portaferry lies within the town boundary therefore I can confirm that it was not considered for inclusion in this initiative.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to (i) confirm which footpaths are owned by Transport NI in Portaferry; and (ii) provide a map marking which footpaths are within his Department/Transport NI ownership and which are not.

**(AQW 6694/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I should clarify for the Member's benefit that there are subtle differences between the adoption, ownership and maintenance responsibility of footways and indeed carriageways. In the majority of cases the Department/TransportNI does not own the footways but has control over them, including for maintenance responsibility, by virtue of the handover at

the reorganisation of local government in 1973 or for more recent developments by way of formal adoption under the Private Streets (NI) Order 1980.

In many cases the householder owns the bed and soil below the footway. As such, a map as requested is not readily available.

I am assuming the Member may have a particular location in mind and if this is the case I would ask you to contact the local TransportNI Section Office in Newtownards with the details of the request so that the status can be established.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the cost of the Multi-Purpose Vehicle recently purchased by Northern Ireland Railways.

**(AQW 6718/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** A contract has been awarded to Windhoff GmbH for the supply of a replacement sandite and water jetting vehicle. The vehicle has been delivered but is not yet in use. Final payments have yet to be made and will only be done so when contract conditions have been met and testing and commissioning is complete. The overall cost of the project including the vehicle was estimated at £4.4m when approved and it is not expected that this amount will be exceeded.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of fully qualified engineers employed by Translink, broken down by discipline.

**(AQW 6719/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Translink has advised that it currently employs 58 fully qualified engineers as follows:

- 14 - Bus Engineering
- 20 - Rail Engineering
- 24 - Infrastructure

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether any staff member was disciplined following the incident on the Knockmore line on the 4 February 2016.

**(AQW 6720/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** No member of Translink staff was disciplined in relation to the incident. The incident involved the company contracted by Translink to carry out the work.

Translink suspended the contractors from further works until further safety checks were carried out. The contractors carried out their own investigation and disciplinary procedure.

Translink has acted to implement recommendations from independent reviews undertaken of the incident.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of Permanent Way inspectors employed by Northern Ireland Railways, in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 6721/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The number of Permanent Way inspectors employed by Translink is as follows:

- 2016/17     NIL
- 2015/16     3
- 2014/15     3
- 2013/14     3
- 2012/13     4

As part of an internal reorganisation, Translink no longer formally designates staff as Permanent Way Inspectors but this work is now carried out continually by Infrastructure engineering and technical staff.

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for the estimated turnaround time from the report of faulty streetlights to repair; broken down by constituency.

**(AQW 6729/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The average time from the report of faulty street lights until repair is currently estimated to be approximately 13 working days. Unfortunately, it is not possible for my Department to provide a breakdown of response times by constituency.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure pursuant to AQO 389/16-21, (i) to detail each part-time 20 mph speed limit; (ii) for his assessment of its effectiveness at reducing the risk of accidents adjacent to schools; and (iii) whether he plans to roll out this initiative across all applicable schools.

**(AQW 6735/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department has a statutory duty to promote road safety and within the context of the Road Safety Strategy does this by supporting road safety schemes and providing road safety teaching resources free to schools.

Regrettably over 95% of road traffic collisions where someone dies or is seriously injured are due to human error. As young children are amongst the most vulnerable people using our roads, we need to give them extra time, be patient but mostly we need to expect the unexpected from them as they continue to develop their road safety awareness and skills. Therefore, in addition to my Department's portfolio of educational activities, we also help improve safety by encouraging drivers to reduce their speed and reminding them of school children in the area through engineering initiatives.

Part time 20 mph speed limits have been installed at the following schools:

- Kilmoyle Primary School, near Ballybogey
- Hezlett Primary School, near Castlerock
- Templepatrick Primary School in Templepatrick
- Moyallon Primary School, near Gilford
- St. Peter's Primary School, College Lands, near Gilford
- Clonalig Primary School, near Cullaville (to be activated at the end of November)
- Model Primary School in Carrickfergus is planned for installation in April 2017.

Measures installed at the first three schools on the above list were monitored to assess their impact on traffic speeds during operational periods. The assessment showed that there is clear evidence that there was substantial compliance with the reduced speed limit and this continues to be the case. A report on the impact of these pilot schemes was produced, which detailed the speed reductions and other impacts. Copies of this report can be accessed at [www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/drd/20mph-part-time-speed-limits-report-on-pilot-projects.pdf](http://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/drd/20mph-part-time-speed-limits-report-on-pilot-projects.pdf).

The part time speed limits are only part of a range of engineering measures that are available for installation on roads at schools to provide as safe an environment as possible for children. These can include the provision of enhanced signing and road markings, pedestrian crossings, lay-bys central islands and street lighting.

I am therefore keen to roll out this important safety measure to other schools, especially those located on roads where the national speed limit applies. However, with installation costs currently in the region of £50,000 per school, these systems are expensive to provide and maintain. My officials are currently developing an alternative and more cost effective method to provide part time enforceable 20mph speed limits at schools, which would have the potential to allow more schools to be treated, subject to available funding in the current challenging financial position.

I am committed to continuing to work towards reducing deaths and serious injuries on our roads. I recognise the continuing challenges of preventing road deaths and serious injuries and will continue to ensure that my Department uses the tools at its disposal to address the issues.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has plans to establish a Derry to Dublin railway service. (AQW 6738/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** Building the strategic connections between Derry, Belfast and Dublin will help unlock the economic potential of the North West. My Programme for Government Delivery Plan includes a feasibility study on the enhancement of the Enterprise Service and a proposal to develop the Derry to Dublin rail service.

Passengers travelling between Derry and Dublin currently connect at Central Station. Connection times vary depending upon the time of day.

The current Enterprise timetable was introduced in April 2016 and provides best fit with existing NI Railways (NIR) and Iarnród Éireann suburban services.

The current Derry timetable is based on a largely clock faced format and links with other NIR local services to and from Belfast.

The ability to run a Derry to Dublin direct service requires the purchase of additional rolling stock commensurate with an intercity service and then increasing the frequency of services between Derry to Belfast and Belfast to Dublin to an hourly frequency. This will require a significant increase in revenue subsidy both for NIR and Iarnród Éireann as well as new Enterprise trains.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has considered extending the rail network in the West. (AQW 6739/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** My Delivery Plans for the Programme for Government indicators on transport will contain a number of new initiatives, to address the infrastructure deficit, particularly in the West.

In line with my Delivery Plan I will continue to make the case for investment in our rail network. My immediate priority for railway investment, however, is to maintain and improve passenger capacity on the existing network including the services to Derry and on the Enterprise route. This approach has delivered significant increases in passenger numbers on rail services over the recent past.

I am determined to build on the progress that has been made and I am committed to deliver a new transport hub for the North West on the site of the old Waterside Train Station. This will cement the significant progress on upgrading the Derry-Belfast rail line with Phase 2 of the Coleraine-Derry track upgrade due for completion by December providing the infrastructure needed to introduce an hourly rail service between Derry and Belfast, though this will be dependent on the availability of additional funding.

Whilst the Delivery Plan reflects my ambition to commission feasibility studies on rail extensions towards Castledawson and Dungannon and an enhancement of the Enterprise Service, how much I can actually deliver in terms of these studies will similarly be determined by the capital and resources made available over the period 2016-21 and beyond.

**Mr Clarke** asked the Minister for Infrastructure pursuant to AQW 5885/16-21, to detail (i) how many bus stops are between Antrim and Lisburn, via Belfast International Airport; (ii) the location of each bus stop; and (iii) how many passengers have got on at each bus stop daily over the last six months.

**(AQW 6746/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:**

- (i) There are 12 bus stops between Lisburn and Antrim (via Belfast International Airport).
- (ii) The location of each bus stop between Lisburn and Antrim (via Belfast International Airport) are as follows:
- |                           |                         |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| ■ Lisburn, Buscentre      | ■ Glenavy, Main Street  |
| ■ Eco Village             | ■ Canning Grove         |
| ■ Brookmount              | ■ Crumlin, Main Street  |
| ■ Meetinghouse Lane       | ■ Nutts Corner          |
| ■ Upper Ballinderry       | ■ International Airport |
| ■ Glenavy Railway Station | ■ Antrim, Buscentre     |
- (iii) Due to the large volume of information required to respond to this part of the Assembly Question I have arranged for the information to be placed in the Assembly Library.

It should be noted that Translink's ticketing system cannot supply this information by individual bus stop but by boarding and alighting stages of each route. For example, in the stage designated as "Crumlin", there could be a number of stops along the route that fall within this stage. This system allows Translink to calculate fares along each route and records passenger numbers by stage only.

**Mr Clarke** asked the Minister for Infrastructure pursuant to AQW 5885/16-21, to detail (i) how many bus stops are between Crumlin to Antrim Area Hospital; (ii) the location of each bus stop; and (iii) how many passengers have got on at each bus stop daily over the last six months.

**(AQW 6748/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:**

- (iv) There are 27 bus stops between Crumlin to Antrim Area Hospital
- (v) The location of each bus stop between Crumlin and Antrim Area Hospital are as follows:
- |                          |                             |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ■ Crumlin, Main Street   | ■ Greenmount Gates          |
| ■ Crumlin Ps             | ■ Hole In The Wall          |
| ■ Glendarragh Pk         | ■ Antrim, Market Square     |
| ■ Manse Cnr              | ■ Antrim, Buscentre         |
| ■ Fitzgeralds Cnr        | ■ Council Offices           |
| ■ Blackstown Rd          | ■ Mill House                |
| ■ Aldergrove, Crossroads | ■ The Meadows               |
| ■ Aldergrove Station     | ■ Antrim, Spring Farm       |
| ■ Townland Road          | ■ Bush Town Road            |
| ■ Mcateers Cnr           | ■ Old Peoples Home          |
| ■ White Horse Inn        | ■ Springfarm Primary School |
| ■ Wilsons Hse/Dunore Rd  | ■ Old Peoples Home          |
| ■ Millars Bridge         | ■ Antrim Area Hospital      |
| ■ Greenmount Cnr         |                             |
- (vi) Due to the large volume of information required to respond to this part of the Assembly Question I have arranged for the information to be placed in the Assembly Library.

It should be noted that Translink's ticketing system cannot supply this information by individual bus stop but by boarding and alighting stages of each route. For example, in the stage designated as "Crumlin", there could be a number of stops along

the route that fall within this stage. This system allows Translink to calculate fares along each route and records passenger numbers by stage only.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister for Infrastructure pursuant to AQW 6091/16-21, for a breakdown of the activities the funding is to be allocated for in each division.

**(AQW 6770/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** This funding is to be targeted entirely on capital structural maintenance activities, primarily the resurfacing and reconstruction of the road network across all Divisions.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail those wastewater treatment works in West Tyrone that are included in the prioritised list for upgrading by NI Water in consultation with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency during the PC15 (2015 - 2021) investment period.

**(AQW 6793/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I have been advised by NI Water that, following consultation with the NI Environment Agency during Price Control 15 (2015-2021), there are two wastewater treatment works in West Tyrone included in the prioritised list for upgrading. These are the Wastewater Treatment Works at Artigarvan and Clabby.

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has given any consideration to implementing a Christmas parking rate in Strabane.

**(AQW 6794/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I understand that there are nine public car parks in Strabane, five of which operate a pay and display parking arrangement. These car parks were previously managed by my Department but are now managed by Derry City and Strabane District Council. Other than carrying out enforcement duties on behalf of the Council, my Department does not get involved in off street car park management or charging.

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed Ballynahinch Bypass.

**(AQW 6797/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** A significant amount of work has been completed on the A24 Ballynahinch Bypass and a Public Inquiry was held in January 2016. The Inspector's Report of the Inquiry was received in March and my Department's project development team have considered the report and recommendations, and are currently finalising a report for my consideration.

Subject to a satisfactory outcome, my Department will publish the Environmental Statement Notice of Intention to Proceed and make the Direction Order for the proposed scheme. I expect the making of the Vesting Order for the scheme will be delayed to align with the construction programme for the bypass.

Progression of the proposed Ballynahinch Bypass to procurement and subsequent construction will be dependent on the approval of the business case, clearing the statutory procedures, and funding being made available to my Department.

The project will remain on my agenda as projects are considered in line with resources available from the forthcoming budget process

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether a public hire taxi driver can stand in a public place wearing a high visibility jacket and direct members of the public towards taxis.

**(AQW 6801/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The touting provisions in Section 43 of the Taxi Act (NI) 2008 state that any person who solicits any person to be carried for hire or reward in a taxi is guilty of an offence.

Driver & Vehicle Agency enforcement officers will assess whether a touting offence has been committed on a case by case basis and will gather sufficient evidence to support the issue of a £90 Fixed Penalty Notice or prosecution as required.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many parking tickets have been issued for parking in the loading area outside Menarys, Main Street, Bangor since enforcement started.

**(AQW 6804/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** 78 parking tickets (Penalty Charge Notices) have been issued for parking contraventions in the loading bay outside Menarys, Main Street, Bangor since enforcement started recently this year.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how many road signs are currently being stored by Transport NI; and (ii) the costs involved.

**(AQW 6805/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** TransportNI currently has in stock approximately 3485 road signs of approximate value £107,200.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much of the £15m announced funding will be provided for roads structural maintenance for the Ards and North Down area.

**(AQW 6806/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I am pleased to advise that from the £15m provided to my Department for roads Capital Structural Maintenance activities, a total of £899k has been allocated for the Ards and North Down area.

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the provision of enhanced Park and Ride facilities in Dungiven.

**(AQW 6807/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I am pleased to report that my Department's TransportNI is currently developing proposals for an enhanced Park & Ride facility in Dungiven. Subject to acquisition of the land and planning approval it is anticipated work on the facility will be carried out in the 2017-18 financial year.

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the amount of money recovered from oil delivery companies and others involved in the transportation of this product following oil spillages on roads over the last five years.

**(AQW 6808/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department does not maintain a record of the information in the format requested.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how he will improve safety measures on the A509 road between Derrylin and Enniskillen.

**(AQW 6809/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department's TransportNI in Western Division have identified a number of safety improvement projects on this route.

- A large scale improvement scheme to widen and realign the A509 carriageway at Derryhawlaght between Bellanaleck and Derrylin, estimated to cost approximately £1.2m.
- A junction improvement scheme to reduce road traffic collisions that have been occurring on A509 at Montiagh Crossroads, estimated to cost around £20k.

Completion of these two schemes will be subject to sufficient funding being available in future years.

Both these schemes were included in the draft 2016-2018 Local Transport and Safety Measures (LTSM) programme presented to Fermanagh and Omagh Council last Autumn. Full details of all schemes proposed across the Council area can be viewed at: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/type/corporatereports>

If there are any other locations along this route where you believe a safety improvement should be considered then please contact Colm McElholm in Western Division's Network Development Section (Tel 028 8225 4164 or email to [colm.mcelholm@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk](mailto:colm.mcelholm@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk)) and he will arrange to have them considered when the LTSM programme for 2017-2019 is being developed.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has plans to increase (i) on-street parking; (ii) off-street parking; and (iii) private parking spaces in Omagh.

**(AQW 6810/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The primary responsibility for general parking provision within Omagh now lies with Fermanagh and Omagh Council and my Department's responsibility is restricted to on-street parking which is influenced by the need to manage road space and cater for all users through ensuring that appropriate levels of loading and disabled bays are provided.

Within Omagh it is believed that all existing on-street waiting restrictions (which ultimately control levels of on-street parking) are appropriate and therefore there are no plans to increase levels of on-street parking at this time.

**Mr Logan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether Transport NI has any plans to extend the gritting schedule to include roads around rural schools.

**(AQW 6825/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Following the severe wintry conditions experienced at the start of December 2008, the then Committee for Regional Development requested that an examination was carried out in relation to the winter service operational response to areas around rural schools. This examination resulted in the introduction of enhanced communication arrangements, and priority "secondary" salting to the 46 rural schools most affected by weather conditions throughout the winter of 2008/09.

This amended policy which was designed to prioritise such schools will be in operation again this winter.

The policy which is maintained at a local level by TransportNI Section offices takes on board local weather conditions and has the flexibility to add other schools as conditions dictate throughout the winter period. At the same time the criteria for the provision of grit/salt piles and salt bins was also amended so that these can now be provided to affected schools, if requested.

I am therefore satisfied with current arrangements and have no plans to extend the salting schedule.

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what procedures her Department has put in place to help prevent future severe flooding of farmland, particularly in the Bannfoot area.

**(AQW 6831/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department manages the water levels of Lough Neagh within the prescribed limits, as far as climactic conditions allow. By doing this we minimise the likelihood of floods, however it does need to be recognised that during prolonged periods of wet weather as we experienced last winter the upper levels will be exceeded and flooding will occur.

You are aware that Alan Strong, Chairman of the Drainage Council is undertaking a review of last winter's flooding event. This review is examining the causes of the flooding, the multi-agency emergency response to these events and will also consider the water levels in Lough Neagh. The report is due to be made public during the first week of December.

My Department also continues to carry out routine maintenance on watercourses to ensure they are free flowing. In rural areas inspections take place on a 6 year cycle and maintenance is programmed as funding permits. I hope this assures you my Department is proactive in its management of floods.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether he has any plans to introduce a bus pass for carers; and (ii) to provide further details on these plans.

**(AQW 6859/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I am sympathetic to the idea of introducing a bus pass for carers. However, the position is that the concessionary fares budget remains under pressure and there is currently no provision within the budget to support any further extension of the scheme.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to outline the strategic planning issues discussed at his meeting with the eleven council Chief Executives on 2 November 2016; and (ii) whether it is his Department's intention to make the record of that meeting publically available.

**(AQW 6860/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The meeting on 2 November was my first opportunity to meet with representatives from all eleven councils. The strategic areas of discussion were: planning performance, work being carried out to identify what will replace the existing NI Planning Portal, Planning Agreements, and the work being carried out by the Department for Communities on revising certain sections of the code of conduct for councillors.

The minutes of the meeting will be published on the Department's website, when they have been agreed with all those who attended the meeting.

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether he is aware of the confirmation given by HM Treasury that it will provide a guarantee for all structural and investment fund projects signed before the UK leaves the EU; and (ii) how is he actively progressing the York Street Interchange project.

**(AQW 6867/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I am aware of the confirmation provided by the British Treasury. The Connecting Europe Facility funding is, however, highly competitive with member states required to submit applications as part of a formal bidding process. The next available call for major projects is not anticipated until 2018 and there is nothing to suggest that we would be successful.

The outcome of this process and any potential signing off, if successful, is unlikely to be in place before Brexit completes. While the York Street project could have attracted up to 40% EU funding there is absolutely no guarantee from the British Chancellor that the money will now be available for the scheme.

With regard to the progression of the York Street Interchange scheme, I'm sure you are aware that I announced the publication of the outcome of the Public Inquiry along with a Departmental Statement and Notice to Proceed on Tuesday 15 November. This was an important step, which allows my officials to progress the development of the scheme, in particular the recommendations in the Inspector's Report from the Public Inquiry regarding consultation with the local community and other key stakeholders.

Progression of this scheme to construction is dependent on funding and I will need to consider this project, together with other priorities as part of my Budget 2017-21. The York Street Interchange, however, remains a priority and I am committed to do all that I can to deliver the scheme within the current financial context, working with the Finance Minister and other Executive colleagues.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the Three Rivers Project, Strabane.

**(AQW 6871/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Outline planning approval for an employment park, a learning campus; a 90 bed Hotel, a retail food store, a garden centre, petrol filling station, a children's play area, a sports and wellbeing centre, a river wildlife centre and environmental and access infrastructure was granted by the former Department of the Environment on 9 December 2014.

To date no applications for approval of Reserved Matters have been submitted to my Department for determination.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the total income from (i) all pay and display car parks and; (ii) Penalty Charge Notices in the last three years, broken down by local council area.

**(AQW 6925/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Please see the tables below for the total income in the last three years for:

- (i) all pay and display car parks tariff income for financial years 2013/14 and 2014/15 broken down by local council area. Figures for financial year 2015/16 are not included in this table as the new councils became responsible for car parks on 1 April 2015.

Requests for information for financial year 2015/16 should be directed to the various councils.

Council	2013/14 £	2014/15 £
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	694,210.35	694,797.87
Mid Ulster	358,770.30	408,141.07
North Down & Ards	838,583.11	801,023.33
Newry Mourne & Down	437,943.04	423,458.13
Lisburn-Castlereagh	672,913.89	578,354.92
Derry-Strabane	816,522.87	680,347.91
Fermanagh & Omagh	789,120.18	762,832.21
Mid & East Antrim	1,078,727.80	1,029,045.46
Belfast	1,616,965.97	1,402,916.85
Antrim & Newtownabbey	246,048.86	241,942.82
Causeway Coast & Glens	830,637.20	790,847.01

- (ii) all parking Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) income in the last three years.

My Department's Parking Enforcement Computer System is unable to provide PCN income figures broken down by local council area.

Financial year	Total income £
2013/14	4,624,186
2014/15	4,551,865
2015/16	*4,347,571

\* includes PCN income from car parks which became Council responsibility on 1 April 2015.

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister for Infrastructure following the death of a pedestrian, whether he will review the (i) road safety measures; and (ii) the speed limit on (a) Strabane Road, Newtownstewart and (b) Orr Park, Newtownstewart.

**(AQW 6926/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I understand that this particular stretch of the Strabane Road and Orr Park housing estate are within the 30mph speed limit and that a pedestrian crossing point is located 15 metres west of the entrance frontage to the Spar Shop providing a direct link to Orr Park. This pedestrian crossing is close to the location where the fatal accident occurred. Officials will be liaising with PSNI officials after their investigation is complete to see if any other road safety measures are considered appropriate.

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether any plans are in place to introduce a pedestrian crossing at the new bridge in Strabane linking Ballycolman to the head of the town.

**(AQW 6927/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I can confirm that it is my Department's intention to provide a zebra crossing on Townsend Street close to its junction with the new footbridge. The works are planned to be carried out in early 2017.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Infrastructure pursuant to AQW 1703/16-21, to outline the specific circumstances which led the Department of the Environment to revise its position in July 2014 in regard to the requirement for a waste management plan for the exploratory drilling at Woodburn Forest.

**(AQW 6951/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I can advise that:

- (a) Jurisdiction for this matter passed to Mid and East Antrim Borough Council in April 2015 following the transfer of planning functions to local government;
- (b) There is an ongoing judicial review in relation to this case and it is important that the independent judicial process is respected; and
- (c) It is the Department's understanding that Mid and East Antrim Borough Council approved the Waste Management Plan prior to the Company availing of permitted development rights and the commencement of development on the site.

On that basis it is not considered appropriate for my Department to comment on these specific matters further.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the current position regarding his proposed change to planning legislation which will prevent exploratory drilling for hydrocarbons from being dealt with under current permitted development regulations.

**(AQW 6952/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department is currently developing proposals for legislative change in respect of mineral exploration. The proposed changes to the Planning (General Permitted Development) Order (NI) 2015, including the removal of permitted development rights for oil and gas exploration, will be fully detailed in a public consultation document which I intend to launch before the end of the year. The public consultation process will provide the opportunity for the public to put forward their views on the proposals for legislative change.

**Mr McGuigan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether (i) he would consider designating the Millennium Centre, Loughgiel as a suitable location as an e-working centre for departmental staff as it has all the necessary facilities; and (ii) any other locations in North Antrim will be considered.

**(AQW 6967/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:**

- (i) The Millennium Centre, Loughgiel, is not part of the NICS estate and therefore not suitable to be considered as an e-Working centre.
- (ii) The Department has an e-Working centre in Ballymena and is currently seeking other possible locations in the North Antrim area.

**Ms Hanna** asked the Minister for Infrastructure why his Department is proposing to carry out an experimental Sustainable Urban Drainage scheme in College Park Avenue, Belfast, when a report prepared for his Department stated that the scheme may increase localised flood risk, damage existing service utilities and place increased resource pressures on Transport NI maintenance systems.

**(AQW 6993/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department is taking forward a resurfacing project in College Park Avenue that includes a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SuDS). The components of SuDS are not experimental but are an established and accepted industry standard for sustainable drainage solutions. The Department has used SuDS solutions on many of its infrastructure projects and road schemes.

The College Park Avenue project is an innovative project that seeks to incorporate sustainable drainage solutions within existing built-up urban environment to allow stormwater run-off to be managed in a more environmental responsible and cost effective manner.

The report prepared by my Department provided an overview of the College Park Avenue project with commentary on the use of SuDS in this context. The risks that the Member has highlighted above are the disbenefits that are considered when compiling the generic risks associated with this (or any other) scheme. The identification of these is common to any infrastructure project to enable a design to be developed that will mitigate them.

As a result of this process, the scheme at College Park Avenue has been carefully designed and will include a separated drainage system to deal with stormwater run-off in a more sustainable manner. Safeguards have also been included in the design to accommodate the run-off without the use of the SuDS. This includes the retention of the road gullies and a direct drainage connection to the River Lagan, improving on the current arrangements

The Department has also undertaken a number of site surveys, consulted with statutory bodies and utility companies, and excavated trial holes in the area to ensure that existing utilities are incorporated and accommodated within the scheme.

In addition to the many environmental advantages of a scheme such as this, there is also the financial benefit derived from the removal of the stormwater from the combined sewer system eliminating unnecessary treatment costs. As with all my Department's drainage infrastructure, my officials will continue to inspect and maintain the completed project to ensure that it continues to operate as designed.

**Ms Hanna** asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) when College Park Avenue, Belfast was adopted as a public road; and (ii) whether the existing trees in the avenue are part of the adopted road.

**(AQW 6994/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The earliest records of the adoption and maintenance responsibility of College Park Avenue date back to 1930. Responsibility for the road transferred to the Department from the former Belfast Corporation during the Northern Ireland Local Government Reorganisation in May 1973. The existing trees are part of the adopted public road and therefore also the responsibility of the Department.

**Ms Hanna** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department has the lawful authority to cut down the existing trees in College Park Avenue, Belfast, without serving notice on the owners of the trees or the occupiers of the land in accordance with Article 50 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993.

**(AQW 6995/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Article 50 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993 relates to the provision for the Department to serve notice on the owner of any tree or hedge adjoining, adjacent to, or growing on a road requiring its removal, cutting back, or remedy any other matter to which the notice relates if it is considered to be potentially dangerous. As the trees to be removed in College Park Avenue are within the public road and the responsibility of the Department, there is no requirement to serve notice.

**Ms Hanna** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether, before removing any more trees in College Park Avenue, Belfast, his Department will consult individually with all households in the street, including those that are not part of any residents' group.

**(AQW 6996/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department's TransportNI has been in consultation with the residents of College Park Avenue in relation to the work in College Park Avenue, Belfast and will continue to liaise with all the residents and stakeholders, including those not part of a residents group as the scheme progresses.

**Ms Hanna** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in the event that his Department proceeds to cut down the remaining trees in College Park Avenue, Belfast, to detail (i) how many replacement trees will be planted; (ii) the species that will be used; and (iii) the timescales between the removal of the existing trees and the planting of new trees.

**(AQW 6997/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** As part of the work in College Park Avenue the existing ten Sycamore trees are to be replaced with nineteen new semi-mature trees. The species of tree is still under consideration by my Department's TransportNI but will be either Silver Leaf Lime or Flowering Cherry trees. These trees will be approximately five metres in height and are more appropriate for a streetscape environment.

The works programme is being finalised with the TransportNI's Contractor. However, it is envisaged that once the trees are removed it will take approximately six weeks to reconstruct the footways and carriageway, at which time the new trees will be planted. My officials will provide regular updates on the programme to all the residents and stakeholders.

**Mr Anderson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the total amount paid in fines for pollution offences by NI Water in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 6998/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The total amounts paid in fines for pollution offences by NI Water in each of the last five years are set out in the table below.

Year	Number of Cases	Fines
2011	14	£16,250
2012	11	£22,500
2013	6	£7,450
2014	3	£9,300
2015	4	£5,250
2016 to date	3	£17,000

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the talks that have taken place between his Department and representatives of the quarry industry in regard to the reintroduction of an Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme.

**(AQW 7013/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department meets regularly with representatives from the quarry industry and to date no talks have taken place relating to the reintroduction of an Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail his legislative programme for this mandate.

**(AQW 7043/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** As the Member will be aware, a draft Programme for Government framework, which sets the direction for the Executive for the next five years recently issued for consultation. By the end of this year, detailed plans will be in place for delivering the intended outcomes. It is therefore essential that the Executive's legislative proposals for this mandate should reflect and support the priorities in the Programme for Government and be developed in tandem with this process. While I acknowledge fully the need to advise the Assembly of my legislative proposals, this cannot be done in isolation from the wider development of the Programme for Government, and I will give further consideration to the timing and most appropriate means of providing this information.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the planned capital expenditure for the development of greenways in the Ards and North Down Borough Council area.

**(AQW 7057/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Under the Small Grants Programme for Greenways, Ards and North Down Borough Council were awarded three grants of £8,000 each for the development of feasibility studies for the following greenway proposals:

- Comber to Newtownards Greenway
- Orlock to Donaghadee, Newtownards and Helen's Bay
- Orlock to Hollywood

I am currently considering the development of a capital grant scheme to assist Councils in the construction of greenways. However, given that work is only starting on the feasibility studies, no capital allocations have been made against any specific schemes at this stage.

**Mr Robinson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure pursuant to AQW 5120/16-21 and AQW 5121/16-21, to detail (i) the meters that can and did meet the paper out criteria before the decision to make that function a non-requirement; (ii) the meters that demonstrated this and passed approval; and (iii) the meters that could not perform this task.

**(AQW 7082/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department's taximeter approval criteria initially included a requirement for the taximeter to cease functioning when the printer was out of paper or when the printer was disconnected from the taximeter. This particular functional requirement was removed on 12 September 2016.

The taximeters that have been assessed as complying with the taximeter approval requirements, including the paper out requirement, are listed below with details of their respective approval and publication dates:

Taximeter Make and Model	Date Approved	Date Published
Aquila (T2)	19 January 2016	2 February 2016
Aquila (T-tiny)	19 January 2016	2 February 2016
Digitax Automotive Electronics (F3 Plus)	4 February 2016	8 February 2016
Digitax Automotive Electronics (M1)	4 February 2016	8 February 2016
Digitax Automotive Electronics (F1 Plus)	4 February 2016	8 February 2016
Hale Taximeters (SPT02)	10 February 2016	11 February 2016
Hale Taximeters (MCT06)	10 February 2016	11 February 2016
Viking (Viking 5)	7 March 2016	8 March 2016
Viking (Viking 5M)	7 March 2016	8 March 2016
Autocab (Minos pulse metered)	7 April 2016	11 April 2016
Alberen (M12)	28 April 2016	28 April 2016
Tetas (A1)	27 June 2016	1 July 2016
Cygnus (MR500)	1 September 2016	2 September 2016

The last taximeter to be formally assessed for compliance with the paper out requirement was the Cygnus (MR500). This taximeter was published on my Department's list of approved taximeters and printers on 2 September 2016.

The taximeters that have been assessed as complying with the revised taximeter approval requirements (i.e. excluding the paper out requirement) are listed below with details of their respective approval and publication dates:

Taximeter Make and Model	Date Approved	Date Published
Cygnus (MR400)	20 September 2016	20 September 2016
Cygnus (MR500 view)	17 November 2016	18 November 2016

**Mr Robinson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure pursuant to AQW 5120/16-21 and AQW 5121/16-21, to detail (i) when the last manufacturer able to complete this task was added to the list; (ii) when his Department decided to make this function a non-requirement; and (iii) the dates that each manufacturer and model number were included on the list.

**(AQW 7086/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department's taximeter approval criteria initially included a requirement for the taximeter to cease functioning when the printer was out of paper or when the printer was disconnected from the taximeter. This particular functional requirement was removed on 12 September 2016.

The taximeters that have been assessed as complying with the taximeter approval requirements, including the paper out requirement, are listed below with details of their respective approval and publication dates:

Taximeter Make and Model	Date Approved	Date Published
Aquila (T2)	19 January 2016	2 February 2016
Aquila (T-tiny)	19 January 2016	2 February 2016
Digitax Automotive Electronics (F3 Plus)	4 February 2016	8 February 2016
Digitax Automotive Electronics (M1)	4 February 2016	8 February 2016
Digitax Automotive Electronics (F1 Plus)	4 February 2016	8 February 2016
Hale Taximeters (SPT02)	10 February 2016	11 February 2016
Hale Taximeters (MCT06)	10 February 2016	11 February 2016
Viking (Viking 5)	7 March 2016	8 March 2016
Viking (Viking 5M)	7 March 2016	8 March 2016
Autocab (Minos pulse metered)	7 April 2016	11 April 2016
Alberen (M12)	28 April 2016	28 April 2016
Tetas (A1)	27 June 2016	1 July 2016
Cygnus (MR500)	1 September 2016	2 September 2016

The last taximeter to be formally assessed for compliance with the paper out requirement was the Cygnus (MR500). This taximeter was published on my Department's list of approved taximeters and printers on 2 September 2016.

The taximeters that have been assessed as complying with the revised taximeter approval requirements (i.e. excluding the paper out requirement) are listed below with details of their respective approval and publication dates:

Taximeter Make and Model	Date Approved	Date Published
Cygnus (MR400)	20 September 2016	20 September 2016
Cygnus (MR500 view)	17 November 2016	18 November 2016

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the extra support he is offering local councils to allow them to process planning applications in a timely manner for projects also applying for support through Tier 2 of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme – Capital.

**(AQW 7113/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I appreciate the importance of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme, both Tier 1 and Tier 2, not only for the farming and agri-food industry, but also for the wider economy of the north.

I am very supportive of the scheme, but as you are aware, responsibility for processing the majority of planning applications now falls to the 11 councils.

However, I understand my officials have been liaising with colleagues in DAERA and have provided key planning contacts in the councils for DAERA officials. I will also ensure that this issue is raised by my officials at the next Strategic Planning Group meeting due to be held on 24 November, which is attended by council heads of planning, and will ask my officials to highlight the key role of planning plays in the scheme.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline his top priority for improving infrastructure in Mid Ulster.  
(AQO 631/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** The Executive's Programme for Government is focused on outcomes that will support a prosperous economic future for the people of the north.

Last month I was pleased to welcome an additional £25million funding package intended to stimulate and support infrastructure development. As part of a programme of measures across roads and public transport this funding allows me to advance preparatory development on a number of very important projects including the Cookstown bypass. Work to advance this scheme through the statutory procedures will now be resumed.

As the Member will be aware, the Executive is fully committed to the delivery of the flagship A5 and A6 major road schemes. These schemes continue to be a top priority for me in redressing the historic infrastructure deficit, particularly in the west.

The A5 scheme is currently the subject of a Public Inquiry, from which the Inspector's Report is expected around May or June 2017. My officials and I will consider the recommendations of the Report in detail before I make a decision on whether to proceed with the scheme and make the necessary Statutory Orders.

As for the A6, papers were lodged recently with the High Court to apply for leave for a Judicial Review. I had anticipated that construction work would begin in October of this year. However at this time, it is too early to determine the impact of any Court action on the scheme.

Despite this, I want to assure the Member that I am fully committed to progressing both these major schemes during this mandate.

**Mr McCausland** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many vehicles use the York Street Interchange per day.  
(AQO 632/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** As most Members of this Assembly will know, the York Street Interchange scheme will replace the existing signalised junction at York Street with direct links between Westlink, M2 and M3, the three busiest roads in the north.

It will also separate strategic traffic from local traffic movements via underpasses below the existing road and rail bridges, and underneath a new bridge at York Street. The complex nature of the junction arrangements and the traffic flows for which it caters mean that providing traffic flows for direct comparison to other schemes is difficult. I have therefore decided to provide two traffic flows to reflect the current usage of this junction.

The five day average 24 hour flow for the Westlink at Clifton Street was recorded in the 2014 census as 89,940 vehicles. This is the most appropriate of the three legs approaching the York Street junction in terms of associated traffic flow.

The traffic travelling between the Westlink, M2 and M3 travel through a combination of four sets of traffic signals. The surveys show that this is about 112,000 vehicles per day. This figure is based on the traffic counts carried out in May 2012 as part of the York Street Interchange Proposed Scheme Report.

**Mr Kelly** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for his plans to improve traffic flow in North Belfast.  
(AQO 633/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** I am aware that there can be traffic congestion in parts of North Belfast, particularly in peak periods. On an ongoing basis My Department monitors this and manages it from a Traffic Control Centre, which is generally operational Monday to Saturday. Staff at the Control Centre monitor 156 CCTV cameras across the city and use this information to continuously update traffic signal timings at over 200 traffic light junctions based on actual traffic flows. This "live, up to the minute" programming of signal timings ensures the road network operates at its maximum efficiency.

My Department also has longer term plans to deal with traffic congestion by constructing the York Street Interchange. This scheme remains one of my priorities given its location at the junction of our busiest roads, the M1/Westlink, M2 and M3 and will address a major bottleneck on the strategic road network in Belfast. It will replace the existing signalised junction at York Street with direct links between Westlink, M2 and M3, the three busiest roads in the north by way of underpasses below the existing road and rail bridges and underneath a new bridge at York Street.

Furthermore, my Department will be constructing new hardshoulder busways on the M2 motorway between Junction 2 (at Greencastle) and Junction 1B (at Duncrue Street), a length of approximately 2.5km. These will improve the journey times and reliability of bus services using the M2 and encourage more commuters to use public transport. The work is planned to be delivered in 2017.

**Mr F McCann** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the Belfast Transport Hub.  
(AQO 634/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** The Belfast Transport Hub will be a world class multi-modal transport interchange acting as a high quality gateway for Belfast and beyond.

The first stage Outline Business Case (OBC) for the Hub, identifying a preferred option, has been approved by both my Department and the Department of Finance.

The project is currently at design and planning stage and a budget has been identified to progress it this year and next before a further OBC will be produced. Before developing a full planning application Translink has started a consultation which runs until 2 December 2016. This consultation will provide members of the public with the opportunity to review the proposals and provide their feedback.

As well as providing an online survey for interested members of the public to complete, Translink will hold several public workshops, presentations and displays during the month of November. Full details are set out on Translink's website.

The feedback from this consultation will help to inform the design and masterplan for the project and further consultation is then planned.

The estimated cost of the project could be over £175m up to 2021.

The Belfast Transport Hub is an Executive flagship project and we need to consider all options including funding and phasing.

**Mr McAleer** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the Rural Roads Initiative.

**(AQO 636/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** As the Member is aware, following the additional capital funding prioritised by the Executive for structural maintenance as part of June monitoring, I listened to concerns about the deterioration in rural roads, and I earmarked £10m for the resurfacing of rural roads across the north.

The Rural Roads Initiative is a significant investment and is helping to address those rural roads in the worst condition, thus helping to reduce a backlog of rural road resurfacing and repairs.

The improvements are targeting many short lengths of rural roads in particularly poor condition, and it is estimated that around a thousand locations on the rural road network will be improved.

TransportNI Divisions have now finalised their programmes and work is well underway in most areas. As at the end of October 2016 approximately 400 schemes have been completed across all Divisions.

I am pleased to say that further additional capital funding was prioritised by the Executive for structural maintenance as part of October monitoring. The £15million additional funding for roads will target structural maintenance and resurfacing across the road network. This will help to address maintenance backlogs and will see communities across the north benefit from a better and safer roads network.

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, given the tourism benefits to the area, when the Narrow Water Bridge project will commence.

**(AQO 638/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I have previously set out my strong commitment to the Narrow Water Bridge project, and I am delighted that through the Fresh Start agreement both Governments on this island have confirmed they remain supportive of the concept.

This is an exciting project and I am determined to do everything I can to take it forward as a priority. If we are to realise the maximum benefits for local people and businesses, however, the Narrow Water Bridge project needs to be progressed as part of an integrated programme to unlock the significant economic potential of the area, particularly tourism. It is also important that the Narrow Water Bridge and Newry Southern Relief Roads are progressed as complimentary projects. That was the key conclusion of a report on options to progress the Narrow Water Bridge project considered by Ministers at the North South Ministerial Council Plenary held in Dublin on 4th July.

Following that meeting officials from my Department and the Department for Transport, Tourism and Sport in the South have been continuing to explore options and have met with key stakeholders to look at how the project can be best advanced.

A further meeting has been agreed with Key Stakeholders for early in the new year, to assess the full range of options and agree a preferred way forward. Officials are finalising an assessment criteria to inform those discussions and these will be shared with key stakeholders in advance.

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on his review of taxi legislation.

**(AQO 639/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Upon taking up office as Minister of the Department for Infrastructure, I made clear my determination that a comprehensive review of the current taxi legislation should be undertaken. I am pleased to say that this process is underway. I have established a new Taxi Forum to represent the views of consumers and all parts of the industry. I was pleased to open the inaugural meeting of the Forum on the 19th of October and see it as an important source of advice during the course of the review.

Clearly there is much work to be done and many challenges to overcome to ensure the people of the North have a modern and safe taxi service, which also allows those providing it to make a decent living.

Of particular concern to me are two issues which need to be resolved quickly. The first is connected to taxi licensing categories, specifically Class C and the second concerns the pass rate for the theory element of the Taxi Driver Test. My officials are looking at both, which will also involve engagement with the Forum, and I await their recommendations. However

I have clearly stated that Class C was not intended for general use taxis and I intend to close this loophole. I am also concerned at the low pass rate for the theory element of the Taxi Driver test, which is currently standing at 16%.

**Mr Kearney** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how he plans to progress the Active Travel Agenda by May 2021.  
(AQO 640/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** As Minister for Infrastructure, I am absolutely committed to promoting sustainable transport right across the north and transforming how we travel. I want to see more people using public transport and undertaking their journeys by walking and cycling. Indeed this is the central focus of my Programme for Government Delivery Plan which sets out my initial proposals to bring about that transformation. But drawing on my experience in China, I want to be even more radical and ambitious. I want to use the consultation to build on those proposals and to look at how we can truly transform our transport infrastructure and how we use it.

In terms of active travel delivery, in June I announced a five year Active School Travel Programme. This is a joint programme working with the Public Health Agency through Sustrans to increase the number of children walking and cycling to school.

Last Wednesday I published my Strategic Plan for Greenways entitled 'Exercise – Explore – Enjoy': an ambitious 25-year plan to provide people with ready access to a safe traffic-free environment for health, active travel and leisure.

Alongside this I announced 20 small grants to councils for the development of greenway feasibility studies – these proposals will begin the work of delivering a 1,000 kilometre greenway network.

I also have plans for improving the bicycle infrastructure in our urban areas so that people will have the freedom and confidence to travel by bicycle for everyday journeys.

My officials are also considering other ways in which active travel could be provided for and promoted. In support of that I am currently considering opportunities to introduce an Active Travel Bill in the current mandate.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the economic benefits of the (i) A5; (ii) A6; and (iii) York Street interchange.  
(AQW 7136/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** The A5 Western Transport Corridor, York Street Interchange and A6 schemes will provide significant direct economic benefits. Benefits include reduced journey times, improved road safety and savings in vehicle operating costs. In accordance with standard transport appraisal methodology, benefits are typically measured in the form of a Benefit to Cost ratio. The current estimated Benefit to Cost ratio for each scheme is listed in the table below. These figures may change as scheme development continues.

My Department is progressing two separate projects on the A6 route; the Randalstown to Castledawson and Derry to Dungiven schemes. Figures for both A6 projects have been included.

Scheme Name	Benefit to Cost Ratio
A5 Western Transport Corridor	1.88
A6 Randalstown to Castledawson	2.35
A6 Derry to Dungiven	1.35
York Street Interchange	2.33

The Benefit to Cost ratio demonstrates the level of return on investment. For example, every £1 spent on the A5 Western Transport Corridor should deliver £1.88 of benefits over the standard 60 year appraisal period.

In addition to the direct economic benefits considered as part of the ratios above, each scheme may deliver wider economic benefits. These wider benefits may include increased productivity due to improved accessibility between businesses, enhanced business profitability due to reduced transport costs and access to a wider labour pool; all of which encourage investment.

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the review of flooding events commissioned by the previous Minister and led by Alan Strong.  
(AQW 7157/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department has received a 'near final' draft which is currently being refined by Alan and he plans to submit a final version shortly.

I am to receive a briefing from Alan on his findings at the end of November and I plan to release the report to the Assembly during the first week of December.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many operators were working on cameras in order to direct traffic flow around Belfast during severe congestion on 15 November 2016.

**(AQW 7224/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** There are two Traffic Control Operators on duty during all peak traffic periods. During the critical periods of an incident, such as this, on the strategic road network the operators will be augmented with additional experienced staff from within TICC.

During this incident TICC staff undertook a number of mitigating actions to minimise the impact of the incident, including:

- Displaying messages on our wide network of electronic message signs to inform the public of the incident, its impacts and potential alternative routes,
- Amend traffic signals timings to minimise any resulting congestion,
- Use of our network of 156 CCTV cameras to make informed decisions,
- Use of our Trafficwatchni website, social media platforms and inform local broadcasters to ensure frequent updates are available,
- Close liaison with PSNI to ensure a co-ordinated approach to managing the incident and to ensure prompt opening of the lanes.

I can also confirm that a PSNI Traffic Management Officer was deployed to TICC to assist with management of the incident and to co-ordinate with TransportNI.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there are any plans to resurface any part of Moss Road, Millisle.

**(AQW 7238/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I am pleased to advise the Member that my Department has programmed resurfacing on Moss Road, Millisle for 22 – 24 November 2016. This work is being carried out under the Rural Roads Initiative which I announced earlier this year.

**Mr Middleton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, following a number of serious accidents, what additional safety measures are being put in place on the A2 Clooney Road in Londonderry, between Gransha and Maydown.

**(AQW 7246/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The recent collisions on the A2 Clooney Road are under investigation along with the longer term accident history of the road. When this is complete my officials will bring forward a number of initiatives to target improving safety on this stretch of road, in particular, on that section between Gransha and Maydown roundabouts. Measures are likely to include reviewing the cross over junctions, road surface and road markings on the road as well as further enhancements to the warning signs.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the protocols that exist in his Department in regard to officials dealing directly with Member enquiries.

**(AQW 7329/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** It is not unusual for Members and other elected representatives to make direct contact with specific business areas and local offices within my Department, and for them to receive responses to their enquiries from the most appropriate official. If officials feel that the nature of the enquiry warrants my consideration as Minister, they will arrange for it to be brought to my attention.

**Mr Robinson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the means of communication between his Department and the PSNI in relation to road closures during adverse weather conditions.

**(AQW 7686/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** TransportNI has established Incident Reporting Procedures which are contained within its Emergency Response Plan. These procedures set out how an emergency incident or “significant” roads-related newsworthy incidents shall be reported. During Normal Working Hours A Roads Incident Desk has been established in the Traffic Information Control Centre (TICC).

TICC has a close working relationship with PSNI Call Management Centre (previously known as Belfast Regional Control) as we jointly operate a number of control systems. PSNI and TNI have a joint protocol for dealing with incidents on the network and this will include bad weather conditions. Depending on the severity of the incident, a PSNI Traffic Management Officer will be stationed within TICC to liaise directly between TNI and PSNI Silver Command.

Emergencies that occur ‘out of hours’ are reported to the TransportNI Lead Communicator for collation and onward transmission. A Lead Communicator is available out of hours 52 weeks of the year to report to the media and PSNI on significant widespread incidents. Alternatively, the PSNI will report Significant Road Closures to TransportNI either through Divisions during Office Hours or to TransportNI’s out of hours service at Coleraine (Except in the case of Flooding whereby the assembly has introduced a Single point of contact through the Flooding Incident Line.)

From a Rivers point of view, DfI Rivers has effective working relationships with co responders, including the PSNI, when responding to flooding events. Rivers Agency do not close roads in flooding emergencies but if the need arose we would contact TNI and PSNI on this issue.

The need for road closures, as a result of wide spread flooding, is usually addressed through multi agency co-ordination meetings and the most suitable organisation is then tasked to respond to this need. PSNI are represented at these meetings.

**Ms Bailey** asked the Minister for Infrastructure pursuant to AQW 5551/16-21, to outline a timeline for his Departmental Solicitor's Office decision on Northern Ireland Water's statutory powers to carry out work on an asset that is on private property as part of the South Belfast Flood Alleviation Projects.

**(AQW 7709/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department is currently carrying out a review of legal powers available, to progress work associated with the Sicily Park Flood Alleviation Scheme. It is envisaged that this review will be complete by the end of December 2016.

## Department of Justice

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Justice to outline her Department's role in assisting the PSNI to trace those evading justice and claiming benefits.

**(AQW 6575/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice):** I chair the Organised Crime Task Force which has a number of expert subgroups, one of which deals with criminal finance. This is made up of representatives from the PSNI and various other agencies, including the Department for Communities' (DfC's) own specialist investigations team for dealing with allegations of benefit fraud. This allows the sharing of good practice and provides an opportunity to discuss collaborative working where appropriate. Primacy for investigation of benefit fraud rests with the DfC.

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Justice whether her Department intends to reform the Sexual Offences (NI) Order 2008 to include a provision to reverse the burden of proof for child victims.

**(AQW 6577/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** I intend to consider this particular provision of the Sexual Offences (NI) Order 2008 as part of a wider review I am undertaking on a range of child sexual offences and sexual exploitation. Proposals arising from the review will be subject to public consultation, which I plan to initiate by April 2017.

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Justice to outline where responsibility lies for the health and social care of prisoners.

**(AQW 6578/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** My Department, along with the Department of Health, work together in partnership to provide for the health and social care needs of prisoners. Both aspects have been incorporated within the draft "Improving Health within Criminal Justice" strategy which recently underwent consultation. This is now subject to approval by myself and the Minister of Health.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Justice to outline how the monies collected by speeding fines for mobile and fixed cameras is accounted for in her Department.

**(AQW 6583/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** Income from speeding fines is collected by the NI Courts Service. They retain income to cover their costs and account for this in their Fine Trust Statements.

The NI Court Service transfers the remaining balance to PSNI, who account for this income and associated expenditure in their Annual Report and Accounts.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any road safety initiatives, funded by monies collected through speeding fines for mobile and fixed cameras, broken down by year since 2013.

**(AQW 6584/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** There have been no road safety initiatives funded from these monies since 2012 when new mobile cameras and road safety camera vans were purchased.

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Justice to outline when the draft E-Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland will be released for public consultation.

**(AQW 6649/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The development of the e-Safety Strategy is an Executive initiative. The Executive in the previous mandate granted approval to the Department of Health (formerly DHSSPS) to commission the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) to develop an e-Safety Strategy.

Whilst officials within my Department are assisting with the development of the e-Safety Strategy, my Department is not leading the initiative and I am not therefore in a position to advise as to when the Strategy will be released for public consultation or when the e-Safety Strategy will be finalised following the consultation process. I am advised that publication of the final e-Safety Strategy will be dependent upon the outcome of the consultation and Executive agreement.

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Justice to outline when she expects the E-Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland to be finalised following the consultation process.  
(AQW 6650/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** The development of the e-Safety Strategy is an Executive initiative. The Executive in the previous mandate granted approval to the Department of Health (formerly DHSSPS) to commission the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) to develop an e-Safety Strategy.

Whilst officials within my Department are assisting with the development of the e-Safety Strategy, my Department is not leading the initiative and I am not therefore in a position to advise as to when the Strategy will be released for public consultation or when the e-Safety Strategy will be finalised following the consultation process. I am advised that publication of the final e-Safety Strategy will be dependent upon the outcome of the consultation and Executive agreement.

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Justice to outline what measures are in place to arrange suitable accommodation for prisoners on release from prison.  
(AQW 6651/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** The Northern Ireland Prison Service recognises accommodation is a key resettlement pathway when preparing for release from prison. Release planning is completed and agreed no later than 30 working days prior to a prisoner's date of release.

NIPS works in partnership with a range of organisations, including the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (responsible for supervision in the community), as well as voluntary and community organisations such as Housing Rights to provide advice and practical assistance to address identified prisoner accommodation needs.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Justice to outline what action she is taking to reduce organised waste crime.  
(AQW 6696/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** Operational responsibility for tackling waste crime lies with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's (NIEA) Environmental Crime Unit and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has overall policy responsibility.

The Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF), which I chair and which NIEA is a member of, also plays an important role in supporting efforts to tackle waste crime by providing a strategic multi-agency partnership response to organised criminality more generally.

NIEA has advised that much of the waste crime it deals with is organised and is conducted for financial gain, and as such it has assessed that organised waste crime remains a significant problem in Northern Ireland. However I understand that infiltration by known organised crime groups has been assessed as neither systematic nor prevalent in Northern Ireland.

One positive outcome in relation to waste crime is that the reduction in fuel laundering following the introduction of a new fuel marker has seen a consequential reduction in the significant quantities of associated laundering waste that had previously been produced as well as the damaging impact such waste had on the environment.

**Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Justice to detail her Department's (i) art; (ii) artefacts; and (iii) other historic items either displayed or held in storage; and to itemise their value.  
(AQW 6701/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** The Department of Justice has the following pieces:

(1) Art:

**Paintings**

Description	Estimated Value
Gilt Frame Portrait Sir Staples Bar	£800
Gilt Frame Water Colour by F McKelvey	£5,000
Blue Moon Painting by Louis Reed	N/K

Description	Estimated Value
Overgrown Garden Painting	N/K

**Limited Edition Prints**

St Malachy's Belfast by Jean Duncan	N/K
Temple Tree (Pair) by Cliona Doyle	N/K
The Passion (Pair) by Tracy Staunton	N/K
Two Men Talking About Fishing by Eddie Rafferty	N/K
Drawing of a Garden by David Barber	N/K
Ephesis 1 X Hermogenes	N/K
Lottie by M Martin	N/K
Esme by M Martin	N/K
Forum Romanium by J Adams	N/K
Northern Sea by James Allen	N/K
Blue Vase	N/K
Antiquity by J Adams	N/K
Donegal Place by D Groms	N/K
Waterfront by Cynthia Neal	N/K
The Journey by Carmel Benson	N/K
Island Figure by Carmel Benson	N/K

## (ii) Artefacts

Description	Estimated Value
William IV Mahogany Extend Table	£800
Large Mahogany Table	£1,500

## (iii) Other Historical Items

Description	Estimated Value
Table on which the Good Friday Agreement was signed	N/K

Please note that all prison service artefacts and files were relocated from the former Prison Service College in Millisle to a secure location in NIPS HQ. At present there is no inventory of the items or any assessment of value, however, I asked my officials to carry out a scoping exercise to determine the work involved.

In addition the Department has a number of items on loan from NICS Arts Collection which is managed by the Department of Finance.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister of Justice to outline what provisions have been made to prepare for industrial action by prison officers in Maghaberry prison.

**(AQW 6713/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) met with staff associations on Tuesday 15 November regarding the 2016/17 pay remit.

The Prison Service believes a very good pay settlement is being offered in the current economic climate.

NIPS have contingency plans in place to respond to disruption that can result from industrial action by prison officers.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to outline how many cases of fraud by false representation are currently within the court system, shown (i) per court division; and (ii) as magistrates' courts and crown courts.

**(AQW 6785/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** Cases of fraud by false representation currently in the court system, broken down by (i) court division; and (ii) Magistrates' and Crown Courts are presented in the table below:

**Table 1 - Active Cases with at least one 'Fraud by false representation' charge<sup>1</sup>**

Court Division	Magistrates' Court	Crown Court
Belfast	45	5
Londonderry	13	1
Antrim	16	2
Fermanagh and Tyrone	22	4
Armagh and South Down	15	2
Ards	13	3
Craigavon	10	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>17</b>

**Source:** Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

1 Active cases as of 4th November 2016 including at least one charge with code 44.05.227 - 'Fraud by false representation'

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to outline (i) when NIPS stopped numbering generic security notices for prison staff; and (ii) the reason behind this decision.

**(AQW 6786/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not number security notices issued by Headquarters and this has always been the case.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice pursuant to AQW 5988/16-21, to outline why the Health and Safety Executive were not brought in to conduct an investigation, given prisons are Government buildings.

**(AQW 6787/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** It is not standard policy that the Health and Safety Executive conduct a review of a fire incident in government property.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service conducted their own investigation via their Fire Incident Report format. The Maghaberry local Fire Officers are suitably trained and are members of the Institute of Fire Prevention Officers.

This is also monitored via the Headquarters Health and Safety Adviser who is also a member of the Institute of Fire Prevention Officers.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to outline how many committal warrants have been issued for unpaid fines in the former Londonderry Court Division (i) per court house; and (ii) shown as magistrates' or crown courts; and of these how many resulted (a) in a prison term; or (b) in full payment on service of the committal warrant.

**(AQW 6788/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** As the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service is currently upgrading management information systems in preparation for the establishment of the new Fine Collection and Enforcement Service, it is not possible to provide the information requested at this time. The information will be provided as soon as it is possible to do so.

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Justice to (i) publish the Order, Warrant or Policy her Department was given allowing her Department to change the locks of the Disabled Police Officers Association of Northern Ireland office to allow the removal of personal details of members by the Charity Commission NI in August 2014; and (ii) outline any actions she has taken in respect of this security breach.

**(AQW 6789/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (the Commission) opened a statutory inquiry into the Disabled Police Officers' Association Northern Ireland (DPOANI) under section 22 of the Charities Act (NI) 2008 on 14 February 2014. The Commission asked the site manager at Maryfield, where the office of the DPOANI is located, to secure the office in the pursuance of its inquiry. The locks on the office were changed to that end.

It would be inappropriate for me to comment on the specifics of an investigation carried out by an arm's-length body of another Government department.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Justice to outline how she intends to secure the long term future of Strabane Courthouse.

**(AQW 6829/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** As I indicated in my statement on 25 October 2016 I have commissioned a review of what future court services should look like in 2020 and beyond. I will publish Terms of Reference for the review in due course; however, it is not possible at this stage to predict the outcome of the review for any specific court building.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the input Northern Ireland Prison Service staff will have on the annual pay review process.  
(AQW 6843/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** Discussions took place in recent months between Northern Ireland Prison Service and Department of Justice senior managers and the trade unions on a 2016 pay award for prison grades.

I also met with the Prison Officers Association and Prison Governors Association to discuss the financial climate we are operating in and to listen to their views.

The Acting Director of Reducing Offending has also been in correspondence with the staff and most recently wrote to all operational staff on 17 November providing further details on the pay award.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment on the stress-related absence amongst prison officers; and the support provided by the Northern Ireland Prison Service.  
(AQW 6844/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** Historically stress and psychological disorders have consistently been the main cause of long term sickness absence in the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) reflecting the difficult environment in which they work. Prison Officers face many challenges, working with all types of prisoners from those on remand to those with mental health issues, sexual offenders and dissidents. Absence from work is complex. Factors such as operational environment, organisational change and culture as well as employment terms and conditions all have an impact. I am committed to examining all these aspects with a view to mitigating against any impact on staff's wellbeing.

The Department of Justice takes seriously the health and wellbeing of all staff working in NIPS, who are employed in what can be a demanding and challenging environment.

Sickness absence is managed in accordance with the Northern Ireland Civil Service Sickness Absence & Inefficiency Policy. When staff are off work due to sickness they are offered various support mechanisms to assist them to return to work at the earliest possible opportunity. These include a Staff Welfare Service along with access to the Occupational Health Service and a confidential counselling service provided by Carecall. Staff can also contact Staff Welfare Services and Carecall themselves. In addition, the Department of Justice utilises, where appropriate, the Services of the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust (PRRT) particularly where staff have been subject to assaults or have been witnesses of distressing scenes.

A dedicated Human Resources team within the Department works closely with all staff who are off through sickness, meeting regularly in an effort to assist them return to work. My officials will continue to seek to improve the working environment and enhance the support services which are available to staff within available resourcing constraints. I continue to support them in that endeavour.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of orders that have been (a) sought and (b) made, by the High Court of Justice in Northern Ireland, prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive relief since May 2007; (ii) the date each order was made; and (iii) the number that remain in place.  
(AQW 6851/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** Information on the basis of the injunctive relief sought is held on the originating application. A manual review would be required to identify the nature of each application to determine if it included an application to prohibit publicity. This would incur a disproportionate cost.

The table below details the number of orders granted since 2007 prohibiting publicity on the granting of the injunctive relief. The exact date when an order was made or discharged cannot be provided without a risk of contravening the terms of the order.

Year	Number of "Super-Injunctions" granted	Status as at 11 November 2016
2007	0	-
2008	0	-
2009	2	1 Discharged in 2011 1 Live
2010	2	1 Discharged in 2011 1 Live
2011	2	1 Discharged in 2012 1 Live

Year	Number of "Super-Injunctions" granted	Status as at 11 November 2016
2012	0	-
2013	1	Live
2014	0	-
2015	1	Live
2016*	1	Live
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6 Live</b> <b>3 Discharged</b>

\* Data for 2016 are provided up to and including 28 October 2016.

**Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total number of convictions for offences relating to anti-social behaviour in each of the last five years, broken down by court division.  
(AQW 6869/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** Datasets held by my Department currently do not contain information on the circumstances in which offences were committed and there is no specific offence relating to anti-social behaviour, other than that relating to a 'breach of an anti-social behaviour order', which would measure only a very small proportion of anti-social behaviour related incidents. Therefore, it is not possible to provide the information requested from data held.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland publishes information on the number of anti-social behaviour incidents recorded. The most recent complete years for which data are available are 2011/12 – 2015/16. They have been provided in the table below.

**Anti-social behaviour incidents recorded, 2011/12 – 2015/16**

Year	Anti-social behaviour incidents
2011/12	64,184
2012/13	65,357
2013/14	60,706
2014/15	60,982
2015/16	59,502

**Notes:**

- 1 Anti-social behaviour incident data are output from a command and control system which is used to respond to calls for service from members of the public by prioritising the call and tasking the appropriate police response. Each incident is closed off using codes and definitions set out in the National Standard for Incident Recording, designed to provide a common approach to be followed by police forces in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in classifying the broad range of calls for service received. These figures should be interpreted as 'calls for service' rather than as figures which reflect the true level of victimisation.
- 2 These figures only relate to those anti-social behaviour incidents reported to the police (and may exclude those incidents reported to other agencies, such as local councils).

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Justice to detail how many (i) informal; and (ii) formal cases of (a) threats; (b) harassment; (c) sexual harassment; and (d) stalking have been lodged by her staff over the last three years; and to detail (iii) the internal procedures taken; and (iv) how the victims were supported.  
(AQW 6879/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** The Department does not hold or collect information in respect of any incident that is not formally lodged by a staff member. The numbers of formal cases lodged in the period are detailed in the table below;

No. of cases formally lodged	2014	2015	2016
Threats	0	0	0
Harassment	4	10	3
Sexual harassment	0	0	0
Stalking	0	0	0

In all such cases the Department adheres to the NICS Dignity at Work policy and procedures. In addition staff are encouraged to avail of the support services provided through the Welfare Service and Carecall.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice pursuant to AQW 6059/16-21 and given this incident occurred in a government staffed and maintained premises, to outline whether Health and Safety Executive NI were (i) invited to conduct an investigation but refused to do so; or (ii) not invited to conduct an investigation, including why this was not actioned. (AQW 6891/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** The HSENI were not invited to carry out an investigation as it is not standard policy that they conduct a review of a fire incident in government property.

The Director General of the Prison Service instigated an independent inquiry into this incident.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice pursuant to AQW 6301/16-21, whether she will (i) have a copy supplied for reference to NIPS; (ii) study and consider the relevance of the content; and (iii) place a copy of in the Assembly Library. (AQW 6892/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** NIPS will be writing to the Prison Officer's Association U.K. to request a copy of the report for consideration.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to outline how many committal warrants were issued for unpaid fines in the former Belfast Court Division, per court house and shown as magistrates or crown courts; of these how many resulted in (i) a prison term; or (ii) full payment on service of the committal warrant. (AQW 6893/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** As the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service is currently upgrading management information systems in preparation for the establishment of the new Fine Collection and Enforcement Service, it is not possible to provide the information requested at this time. The information will be provided as soon as it is possible to do so.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Justice to detail on how many occasions a pardon in Northern Ireland legislation has been provided for heterosexual individuals in respect of obsolete criminal offences. (AQW 6904/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** I would refer the Member to the reply I gave to his question on pardons in legislation for obsolete offences, reference number AQW/6903/16-21.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Justice to detail how many incidents of (i) physical assault; and (ii) verbal abuse against prison officers have been recorded by the Northern Ireland Prison Service, in each of the last three years. (AQW 6907/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:**

- (i) The table below shows the recorded number of assaults on prison officers in prisons in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years

**Number of Recorded Assaults on Staff**

2013	2014	2015
94	105	100

- (ii) The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not hold records which detail all instances of verbal abuse against prison officers.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Justice to outline how the support provided by the Northern Ireland Prison Service to Prison Officers injured as a result of an assault in the line of duty differs from the support provided by Police Service of Northern Ireland to Police Officers injured in the line of duty. (AQW 6908/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** Support to both Prison Officers in the Northern Ireland Prison Service and Police Officers in the Police Service of Northern Ireland who are subject to such assaults is provided in accord with the nature of the injury received.

Each respective organisation provides a range of support services that staff can and do avail of. These services reflect the different nature of the roles these officers perform.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of orders that have been made by the High Court of Justice in Northern Ireland prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive relief since 30 April 2012; (ii) when each order was made;

(iii) the numbers that are extant; (iv) whether any such orders have been discharged since 30 April 2012; and (v) the total orders, whenever made, extant at the date of answer.

**(AQW 6959/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The table below details the number of orders granted since 30 April 2012 prohibiting publicity on the granting of the injunctive relief. The exact date when an order was made or discharged cannot be provided without a risk of contravening the terms of the order.

Year	Number of "Super-Injunctions" granted	Status as at 11 November 2016
2012	0	-
2013	1	Live
2014	0	-
2015	1	Live
2016*	1	Live
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3 Live 0 Discharged</b>

\* Data for 2016 are provided up to and including 28 October 2016.

In addition there were 6 orders made between 2006 and 30 April 2012 prohibiting publicity on the granting of the injunctive relief and of these three remain extant. Information prior to 2006 is not readily available and could only be compiled at a disproportionate cost.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to outline how many committal warrants have been issued for unpaid fines in the former Craigavon Court Division in each court house, broken down by magistrates' or crown courts; and of these how many resulted in (i) a prison term; or (ii) full payment on service of the committal warrant.

**(AQW 6962/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** As the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service is currently upgrading management information systems in preparation for the establishment of the new Fine Collection and Enforcement Service, it is not possible to provide the information requested at this time. The information will be provided as soon as it is possible to do so.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the persons or bodies to whom her Department has provided hospitality; and (ii) the cost of providing this hospitality, in each of the last twelve months.

**(AQW 6991/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** Details of the persons or bodies to whom hospitality has been provided are not held on the Department's financial accounting system.

The following table sets out the costs incurred by the Department in respect of hospitality during the twelve months ended 31 October 2016. Costs cover the Core Department and Departmental Agencies. The figures in the table relating to the 2016-17 financial year are still subject to year end audit.

Month	Amount (£)
November 2015	3,130
December 2015	3,697
January 2016	4,566
February 2016	3,074
March 2016	3,249
April 2016	1,453
May 2016	978
June 2016	872
July 2016	1,106
August 2016	2,111
September 2016	1,930
October 2016	2,367

Month	Amount (£)
<b>Total</b>	<b>28,533</b>

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the consideration given to medical staff carrying out body searches in prisons as opposed to prison officers.

**(AQW 7052/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** There has been no consideration given to asking medical staff to carry out any type of searches in prisons.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total committal warrants issued for unpaid fines in the former Antrim Court Division, (i) per court house; and (ii) shown as magistrates' or crown courts; and of these how many resulted in (a) a prison term; or (b) full payment on service of the committal warrant.

**(AQW 7054/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** As the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service is currently upgrading management information systems in preparation for the establishment of the new Fine Collection and Enforcement Service, it is not possible to provide the information requested at this time. The information will be provided as soon as it is possible to do so.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Justice whether she intends to set up a task force to address criminality in East Antrim.

**(AQW 7112/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The establishment of a task force to address criminality in East Antrim is an operational matter for the Chief Constable of the PSNI.

However, tackling criminality, paramilitarism and organised criminality - wherever these occur across Northern Ireland - and eliminating the control they exert over communities is a priority for the Executive.

Individuals and communities wishing to make the transition away from criminality need to support the police to help tackle criminality in all its forms. Equally, communities in transition need support and the Executive is committed to this via Fresh Start. Considerable progress is already being made.

We published an Executive action plan on 19 July 2016. This sets out the high level measures we will progress over the 2016-2021 period to fulfil the commitments made on tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime.

We have made a good start to implementing the measures. The first part of the public awareness campaign, envisaged in Section A of Fresh Start - which aims to raise awareness about organised crime, explain the links to paramilitaries and promote a culture of lawfulness - will begin in December.

We are also working with our justice system partners to deliver initiatives to speed up justice including applying principles of the Ards Indictable Cases Pilot to a range of additional offences across Northern Ireland from May 2017; and implementing committal reform around the end of 2017. We are developing concerted law enforcement activity, and have made £1.123m available to PSNI this year for work to tackle organised criminality.

The Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF), which I chair, also plays an important role in confronting organised crime through multi-agency partnership and helps to inform the strategic response. The work of the OCTF is now complemented by the cross-jurisdictional Joint Agency Task Force, which is providing an effective multi-agency operational response to criminality across the island of Ireland. I welcome the progress that is being made and the operational successes to date.

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Justice pursuant to AQW 6305/16-21, to detail the funding available from the UK government over the next four years to address paramilitary activity.

**(AQW 7116/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The UK Government is making £25million available over five years to address paramilitary activity. We have not yet sought to draw down any HMT funding for the 2016/17 financial year. We are continuing to work with the NIO as we develop implementation plans to agree the profile of funding in each year.

**Mr Beattie** asked the Minister of Justice to detail the (i) current total level of long-term sick and absence in the Northern Ireland Prison Service; and (ii) percentage of the overall staff in prisons.

**(AQW 7125/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** I can confirm that the number of staff on long term sickness absence, in the Northern Ireland Prison Service, on Tuesday 15 November 2016 was 68. This figure relates to all grades.

The percentage of staff based in each of the prison establishments, on that date, was as follows;

- Maghaberry – 47.5%
- Magilligan – 20.7%
- Hydebank Wood – 13.8 %

The remaining 18% are based in other parts of the Prison Service. Again, the above percentage figures relate to all grades.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether Leo Hoad is categorised as dangerous, as defined in the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008.

**(AQW 7226/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The provisions of that Order do not apply in this case as the offences were committed before the Order was enacted.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of people convicted of assaulting pensioners in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 7304/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The specific information requested is not available. Departmental prosecutions and convictions datasets do not currently record victim age, so it is not possible to identify those cases in which there was an assault where the victim was an older person.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether Barry Cavan was subject to a Supporting Prisoners at Risk programme at the time of his death in HMP Maghaberry.

**(AQW 7348/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** Mr Cavan was not on a Supporting Prisoners At Risk (SPAR) at the time of his death.

**Mr Milne** asked the Minister of Justice what is the current purpose of Donard Landing in Maghaberry prison; and to outline any plans for its closure or for a change of purpose.

**(AQW 7460/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The purpose of the Donard Landing is to provide residential living space which is safe, decent and secure, to prisoners committed to Maghaberry Prison, who have been assessed by prison staff and identified as vulnerable.

Whilst there are no current plans to close the Donard Landing or change its function, I announced an immediate review of Vulnerable People in Custody in my statement to the Assembly on 21 November and the role and function of the Donard Landing may fall within this review. This review will be a joint Departmental review and officials from both Departments are now working together to define the structure, scope and timeframe of this review.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the stakeholders consulted, and how, in respect of the proposal to introduce by legislative consent motion the provisions of the Policing and Crime Bill allowing for pardons for convictions of certain abolished sexual offences.

**(AQW 7685/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** No formal consultation was held. My decision to seek Executive agreement to ask the Assembly to approve a legislative consent motion for these provisions was taken to allow Northern Ireland to benefit from developments in England and Wales to address past discrimination and social injustice against those involved in consensual same-sex relationships.

## Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

**Mr Allister** asked the Assembly Commission to outline where the Union Flag referenced in the answer to AQW 955/11 is located currently; and if it is no longer held by the Assembly, when and why it ceased to be held.

**(AQW 6678/16-21)**

**Mr Dickson (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** I can confirm that the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission still retains ownership of the Union Flag. It is currently being stored in a specialist storage facility in Dunmurry.

**Mr Allister** asked the Assembly Commission to outline where the black leather dispatch boxes referenced in the answer to AQW 955/11 are located currently; and if they are no longer held by the Assembly when and why they ceased to be held.

**(AQW 6679/16-21)**

**Mr Dickson (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission still retains ownership of the black leather dispatch box. It is located in Parliament Buildings in Room 41 (the Speakers' Office).

**Mr Allister** asked the Assembly Commission to outline where the framed letter from HRH Duke of Edinburgh referenced in the answer to AQW 955/11 is located currently; and if it is no longer held by the Assembly when and why it ceased to be held.

**(AQW 6680/16-21)**

**Mr Dickson (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** I can confirm that the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission still retains ownership of the framed letter from HRH Duke of Edinburgh. It is currently being stored in a specialist storage facility in Dunmurry.

**Mr Allister** asked the Assembly Commission what is the value of each work of art held by the Assembly.  
(AQW 6818/16-21)

**Mr Attwood (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** The table below indicates the current value of each work of art belonging to the Assembly Commission.

Please note that the last valuation was carried out in 2011; a new valuation is due to take place in early 2017.

For those pieces that have been purchased since the last valuation the purchase price has been provided in the table.

Description	Valuation
Portrait of Sir Henry Wilson MP by H.W. Gates	£1,500
Portrait of Viscount Craigavon by N Becher	£3,000
State Opening of Parliament, small by William Conor	£20,000
State Opening of Parliament, large by William Conor	£40,000
Portrait of Lord Armaghdale by Riviere	£2,000
Portrait of HM Queen Elizabeth II by Lydia de Burgh	£1,500
Portrait of Frederick Temple, 3rd Marquess of Dufferin and Ava by C Williams	£3,000
Portrait of Rt Hon JM Andrews by F McKelvey	£2,000
The Obelisk on the Boyne by J Tudor	£250,000
Painting believed to include William III and the Pope by Pieter Van Der Meulen	£40,000
The House Will Divide (pencil sketch) by Noel Murphy	£1,500
Portrait of Seamus Mallon by Rita Duffy	£5,000
Rowel Friars Drawings	£4,800
The Assembly in Session (oil on canvas) by Noel Murphy	£20,000
Portrait of Lord Bannside by Nolan	£5,000
Portrait of Eileen Bell by Conor Walton	£5,000
Portrait of Lord Alderdice by Carol Graham	£2,500
Portrait of the former First Minister, the Rt Honourable Lord Trimble of Lisnagarvey, by David Nolan	£3,800
Portrait of Mark Durkan by Conor Walton	£5,000
Portrait of Lord Craigavon by N Becker	£3,000
Portrait of Seamus Heaney by Ross Wilson	£5,000
Portrait of CS Lewis by Ross Wilson	£5,000

**Mr Allister** asked the Assembly Commission, following the recent ruling of the Fair Employment Tribunal that disciplining a civil servant for expressing political views on social media was unlawful, whether it has conducted a review of the Assembly's Social Media Policy.

(AQW 6901/16-21)

**Mr Wells (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** The Assembly Commission regularly reviews its HR policies to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. The Commission's Social Media Policy is currently being reviewed in consultation with Trade Union Side as part of that review cycle.

**Mr Allister** asked the Assembly Commission pursuant to AQW 53440/11-16 and following the ruling of the Fair Employment Tribunal that disciplining a civil servant for expressing political views on social media was unlawful, whether it has conducted a review into the dismissal of two members of staff in 2015.

(AQW 6902/16-21)

**Mr Wells (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** The Assembly Commission has reviewed the decision in McCrossan -v- Department for Social Development (62/15FET). The Commission does not consider that the facts in this case are comparable to the cases of two Assembly members of staff to which the Member refers and does not propose to review these cases.

**Mr Allister** asked the Assembly Commission pursuant to AQW 955/11, to detail where the collection of a bottle, goblets and saucers in blue pottery referenced is located currently; and if it is no longer held by the Assembly to detail (i) when; and (ii) why it ceased to be held.

**(AQW 7081/16-21)**

**Mr Maskey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** I can confirm that the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission still retains ownership of the collection of a bottle, goblets and saucers in blue pottery referenced in AQW 955/11. It is currently being stored in a specialist storage facility in Dunmurry.

**Mr Robinson** asked the Assembly Commission to outline any plans it has to extend the terms and conditions by which Members' staff are employed to all secretariat staff in the interest of equality in the public sector.

**(AQW 7084/16-21)**

**Mr Hussey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** The Assembly Commission has no plans to extend the terms and conditions by which Members' staff are employed to Assembly Secretariat staff.

The Commission is a wholly separate and distinct employer to each Member. The terms and conditions for staff employed by Members were prescribed by the Independent Financial Review Panel in its March 2016 Determination. If a Member wishes to use the funding for Staff Costs that is made available by the Determination, he or she is required to use the contract of employment that was appended to the Determination.

The Determination does not and cannot apply to any person other than a Member and it has no relevance, equality-related or otherwise, to the Assembly Commission. Similarly, it has no impact on any other employer within the public sector such as the Health Service, local government, the education sector or the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

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# Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 2 December 2016

## Written Answers to Questions

### The Executive Office

**Mr Lyttle** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the findings of the European Policy Unit document, Preliminary Analysis on the impact of a UK referendum on its membership of the European Union, were not disclosed to the Executive, the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Assembly or made available for public consideration.

**(AQW 4112/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister):** The paper produced by the European Policy and Co-ordination Unit was commissioned by the Head of the Civil Service in May 2015. Officials prepare a range of papers on a regular basis, many of which are working papers and do not form submissions sent to Ministers. This analysis paper was not sent to us for consideration following its completion.

Following a Freedom of Information request we became aware of this work and the document was released on two occasions following Freedom of Information requests.

The Executive Office could not have taken sides in the referendum campaigns in the absence of an agreed position. In any case the document contains well rehearsed arguments which were openly being aired during the referendum campaign.

**Ms Bailey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much funding their Department allocated to (i) LGBT; (ii) disability; and (iii) gender equality groups in each year since 2007.

**(AQW 4395/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** Following departmental restructuring in May 2016 policy responsibility for LGBT, disability and gender equality groups transferred to the Department for Communities. In tandem with this transfer of policy responsibility the former OFMDFM staff who worked in these areas, and associated records, also moved to the Department for Communities.

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 3362/16-21, whether they will place a copy of the procedure in the Assembly Library.

**(AQW 4815/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** We will not be placing a copy of the disciplinary procedure in the Assembly Library.

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether any security vetting took place in respect of the staff of Charter NI before a Social Investment Fund grant of £1.7m was made to the organisation.

**(AQW 4917/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** A robust process is in place, in relation to all Social Investment Fund projects, to ensure the capability of lead partners and delivery organisations to manage public money and the projects prior to any funding commitments being made.

**Mr Ford** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline when the detailed Action Plan to tackle paramilitarism, due to be published before the end of June 2016 as provided by paragraph 4.3 of A Fresh Start and referenced in the foreword to the Executive Action Plan published on 19 July 2016, will be published.

**(AQW 5180/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** The foreword to the Executive Action Plan states clearly that the more detailed action plan will be an internal plan for consideration by the Executive.

**Mr Swann** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail what driving qualifications are required for ministerial drivers when employed by (i) the Executive Office; and (ii) themselves or their party.

**(AQW 5528/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** Ministerial drivers for the deputy First Minister and both junior Ministers are required to have a valid category B driving licence.

**Mr Kennedy** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the protocols and procedures in place in their Department to inform MLAs of their constituency visits and of visits by VIPs and Royalty.

**(AQW 5535/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** The procedures agreed by Executive Ministers for notifying MLAs of Ministerial visits within their constituencies were notified to the Speaker on 12 February 2008 and subsequently brought to the attention of the Business Committee at its meeting on 19 February 2008.

Under these procedures, and taking account of the underlying need to protect the safety and security of Ministers and their officials, MLAs should normally be informed of any Ministerial visit to their respective constituencies not less than 24 hours in advance of the visit. However it is at the discretion of the event promotor/organiser as to whether they invite MLAs to attend. Adherence to these procedures is the responsibility of individual Ministers.

No protocol exists for VIP visits to constituencies as arrangements for these visits are made on a case by case basis. Protocols relating to Royal visits are the responsibility of the NIO.

**Mr Lyttle** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) for their assessment of the quarter cost analysis of the Proposed Redress Scheme for Historical Residential Abuses; and (ii) to detail what scoping they have conducted to prepare for the compensation scheme that Sir Anthony Hart will recommend in January 2017.

**(AQW 5566/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** We are aware that the autonomous Panel of Experts on Redress launched its third report on 17th October entitled: "Historic Institutional Abuse: Cost Analysis of Proposed Compensation Scheme". We noted the content of the first two reports prepared by the Panel: "What Survivors Want From Redress" and "A Compensation Framework for Historic Abuses in Residential Institutions" when they were published.

The Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry Report and Findings will be delivered to the Executive in January 2017, including its fully formed recommendation with regard to redress. It would therefore be inappropriate to pre-empt the Inquiry's findings, or any future Executive decision, by speculating now about redress or potential models of redress.

**Mr Attwood** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the total cost of administering the Urban Villages Project in each year since it was established.

**(AQW 5842/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** The information requested is included in the table below.

**Urban Villages Project – cost of administration**

Financial Year	Total (£)
2014/15	335,165
2015/16	870,148.02
2016/17 (costs up to 30 September 2016)	698,423.94

**Mr Attwood** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the total number of staff engaged in the Urban Villages Project; (ii) the total cost of salaries; (iii) the pay scales of staff in each year since the scheme was established.

**(AQW 5843/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** The information requested is included in the table below.

Financial Year	Total Number of TEO Urban Villages Staff	TEO Urban Villages Staff Costs (£)	Relevant TEO Pay Scales	Total Number of SIB Urban Villages Staff	SIB Urban Villages Staff Costs (£)	Relevant SIB Pay Scales	Total Salary Costs (£)
2014/15	0	0	N/A	4.6*	326,464	SIB salaries are fixed and pay scales are not applicable.	326,464
2015/16	3*	94,320.83 (TEO costs since taking over the UV programme in June 2015)	Executive Officer 2 £23,428 - £24,728  Deputy Principal £35,190 - £39,675  Grade 7 £46,141 - £51,816	8.66*	709,649	SIB salaries are fixed and pay scales are not applicable.	803,969.83
2016/17 (Costs up to 30 September 2016)	3*	71,643.47	As above, pending decision on 2016-17 pay award	11.77*	496,104**	SIB salaries are fixed and pay scales are not applicable.	567,747.47

\*Full time equivalent

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail, when acting jointly, how often they have (i) issued Ministerial Directions since 2007; (ii) for what purposes; and (iii) with what justification.  
(AQW 5862/16-21)

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** Since 2007 there:

- (i) Have been two Ministerial Directions.
- (ii)
  - a) To take the Shackleton former military site at Ballykelly into the Department's ownership. (September 2011).
  - b) To put the Shackleton site on the market without going through a business case process. (May 2015).
- (iii)
  - a) The justification for taking the site into the Department's ownership was that the proposed selling price was not high enough to maximise the value of the site.
  - b) The justification for selling it without going through a business case process was Ministers' assessment of the benefits in disposing of the site expeditiously.

**Mr E McCann** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the steps her Department will take to ensure people that suffered injuries in the conflict, that have been unable to build up an occupational pension and now have to exist on benefits, will receive the special pension campaigned for by the Injured Group of the WAVE Trauma Centre.  
(AQW 5875/16-21)

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** The Stormont House Agreement stated that "Further work will be undertaken to seek an acceptable way forward on the proposal for a pension for severely physically injured victims in Northern Ireland".

The Fresh Start Agreement reaffirms the Executive's, the UK Government's and the Irish Government's commitment to full and fair implementation of the Stormont House Agreement provisions on the past.

We remain fully committed to seeking a resolution on the outstanding legacy issues as quickly as possible, which includes the proposal for a pension for severely physically injured victims.

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the steps taken to ensure all relevant interests had been declared by the East Belfast Steering Group before it recommended Charter NI for appointment as the lead partner in the delivery of the £1.7m Social Investment Fund employability programme in East Belfast.

**(AQW 5926/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** The Social Investment Fund was and is very much community led.

Given the focus on the community developing and prioritising projects to address local needs, a standard process to manage any conflicts of interest was put in place.

This required Steering Group members to declare conflicts of interest when potential projects were being proposed. Where a conflict was declared, the Steering Group member was not involved in any discussion or decision around the prioritisation of the proposal. This process was in place in respect of East Belfast.

The role of the lead partner is to oversee and manage delivery of projects prioritised by the local Steering Groups in line with the original approach to delivery of SIF. This is to ensure the outcomes, objectives and focus of the projects, directly informed by the local community to address specific needs, are retained throughout delivery.

The lead partner does not deliver the projects. Delivery agents or contractors are procured following a competitive procurement in line with Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy. The tendering process is overseen or managed by Central Procurement Directorate.

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) what other providers were considered before Charter NI was awarded lead partner status in the delivery of the £1.7m employability programme in East Belfast ;and (ii) on what criteria was the selection made.

**(AQW 5930/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** We refer the member to the answer given to AQW 5929/16-21.

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the funding provided to Belfast South Community Resources in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 6104/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** Funding has been provided to the Belfast South Community Resources for delivery of the Sandy Row Social Investment Fund project. Funding has been provided for this during the last two years as follows:

Year	Amount provided
2015/16	£6,856
2016/17 to 31 October 2016	£473,410*

\* The funding allocated for 2016/17 is £906,566

In addition to the Social Investment Fund, the Department for Communities (DfC) has provided funding to Belfast South Community Resource for salaries, rent and running costs in each of the last 5 years as follows:

Year	Amount provided
2012/13	£100,911.46
2013/14	£113,214.90
2014/15	£113,864.00
2015/16	£110,350.44
2016/17	£112,863.97

DfC has additionally awarded £17,223.53 to Belfast South Community Resources for the financial year 2016/17 under the Innovation and Research Fund for costs related to management of the Sandy Row Social Enterprise Hub.

Belfast South Community Resources also received support in 2015/16 through the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's Cultural Hub Programme, which was delivered in partnership with the Nerve Centre. The £50k investment allowed for the purchase of laptops, iPads and accessories, software and music-making and film-editing technologies. The equipment is available to young people, community groups and users of the centre.

**Mr Agnew** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister , in relation to the October Monitoring Round statement to the Assembly by the Minister of Finance, to outline why £7.1m of funding for the Delivering Social Change programme is deemed to no longer be required for this year.

**(AQW 6282/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** It was decided to surrender, within the October Monitoring Round, £7.105m of Delivering Social Change capital funds as it was apparent from budget profiles that these funds would not be needed during the 2016/17 financial year.

The surrender of this funding recognised the intrinsic financial profile of capital projects which build to a high spending peak over time and then tail off.

Projected capital project spend in 2016/17 is currently in line with a profile of £7.5m by year end and in light of the contractual commitments, that will fall due in the coming financial year, this profile is expected to build to full utilisation of the capital funding envelope in 2017/18.

**Mr Smith** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail each budgetary pressure in their Department and its arm's-length bodies; and which of these pressures were raised with officials from the Department of Finance in advance of the October monitoring round.

**(AQW 6289/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** Departmental officials engage with their Assembly committee in advance of each monitoring round in relation to the Department's in-year budgetary position.

Any pressures raised with the Department of Finance are for the purpose of informing the Executive's deliberations in reaching an agreed Monitoring round outcome and as such this information is not disclosed.

**Ms Mallon** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for a copy of their departmental bid for additional allocations as stated in page 3 of the 2016-17 October Monitoring Round Statement made to the NI Assembly by the Minister of Finance on 25 October 2016.

**(AQW 6404/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** The Executive has adopted a more streamlined and efficient approach to the monitoring round process through on-going dialogue among Executive Ministers around collectively agreed priorities. The previous process has been replaced by these new arrangements.

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) how many times; and (ii) in respect of what applications have declarations of interest been made by members of Social Investment Fund Steering Groups.

**(AQW 6415/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** Steering Group members were required to declare conflicts of interest when potential projects were being proposed. Where a conflict was declared, the process for managing this was applied thereafter where discussion or decisions were required. This process was overseen by CPD and the Department.

A number of declarations were declared specific to proposals, these included: Cloona House; Childcare & Family Support; Taughmonagh; Sure Start Taughmonagh; Sure Start Belvoir & Milltown; Bryson Street Surgery; Best of the East; Kilcooley Sports Forum; Early Intervention Lisburn; Work Ready West; Building Change Connect; Building Brighter Futures; Harmony; Argyle; St Comgall's; LORAG; Belfast South Community Resources; Hanwood; Market House Portaferry project; Laganview; West Lisburn and Castlewellan proposals.

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the membership of each of the steering groups of the nine social investment zones; (ii) when any member was replaced; and (iii) who they were replaced by.

**(AQW 6549/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** The information requested is available on the Department's website via the link below.

<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/articles/social-investment-fund-steering-groups>

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they are committed to ensuring no border manifestations will operate between Northern Ireland and Great Britain once the United Kingdom leaves the European Union.

**(AQO 578/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** We wish to see free movement of people and the maintenance of the Common Travel Area across the whole of the UK and Ireland.

**Mr Dickson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister pursuant to AQW 3388/16-21, to whom the new Executive press secretary will directly report.

**(AQW 6706/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** We refer the Member to the answer given to AQW 3387/16-21 on 11 October 2016.

**Mr Butler** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will publish a disclosure log of Freedom of Information requests, including the information provided in response.

**(AQW 6941/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** We have no plans to publish a disclosure log of Freedom of Information requests.

**Mr Agnew** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they envisage the Racial Equality Strategy being implemented in the absence of an umbrella organisation for Black and Minority Ethnic communities

**(AQW 7283/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** This Department remains committed to improving racial equality. Our Racial Equality Strategy covers a 10 year period and sets out an ambitious but achievable programme to do that.

The Strategy was developed based on the input from a widespread public consultation exercise that had hundreds of contributions from a great number of groups, bodies and individuals.

Clearly the implementation of the Strategy is not down to any one organisation – as the Strategy states it is for all sections of society. Combating racism and racial inequalities is a task for everyone.

Stronger Together is a long established and highly regarded network within the sector and is currently in receipt of support through the Minority Ethnic Development Fund. Stronger Together currently has over 150 members representing BME Organisations and Groups, BME individuals, Community Sector, Volunteer Sector and Public Services Sector.

There is also the Racial Equality Subgroup which has been established to be the voice of minority ethnic people and migrants at the heart of government here. Its role is to support and drive forward work on racial equality and good race relations. The Subgroup has already met twice with another meeting planned for mid-December. Through this the BME community will have a voice that will be heard at the heart of Government that will articulate the causes of the entire sector.

**Mr Butler** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list each Ministerial Direction they have issued since May 2016, including (i) the date; (ii) its purpose (iii) whether they were overruling any concerns of officials either before or after the Direction; and (iv) whether each Direction was accompanied by a full business case.

**(AQW 7298/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** The First Minister and deputy First Minister have not issued any Ministerial Directions since May 2016.

**Dr Farry** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they intend to create a website for publishing the most recent data relating to indicators used in the Programme for Government, similar to 'Scotland Performs'.

**(AQW 7343/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** Yes. In the consultation document on the Programme for Government, we have given a commitment to transparency through the publication of the data supporting each outcome for public scrutiny. We have also committed to invest in the development of our data.

The 'Scotland Performs' model is one of several that we have examined – our ambition is to take the best from the existing models of reporting, and to build a system that will best support progress on achievement of our outcomes.

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the reasons for delays in short break grant payments from the Victims and Survivors Service; and (ii) how many people have been impacted.

**(AQW 7366/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** The Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) does not operate a scheme specifically for respite breaks and is not aware of any outstanding delays. The VSS, as always, encourages anyone with a query on an individual case to make contact to enable quick and early resolution.

In terms of general services, the VSS administers payments to individual victims and survivors through the Individual Needs Programme. This Programme consists of a range of funding schemes which provide assistance towards the cost of various goods and services. Awards issued under the Support for the Bereaved Scheme and Support for the Injured Scheme can be used towards bespoke and individual needs for each case. One of these needs may be a respite break.

Over the period 1 April 2016 – 31 October 2016, the VSS issued 7,359 awards to 5,216 individuals under this Programme.

The VSS is not aware of delays affecting payment in respect of valid claims made against the awards that have been issued. During October 2016, the average payment processing time was 14 days.

**Mr Lyons** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the actions they plan to take to promote Northern Ireland overseas.

**(AQO 693/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** Enhancing our reputation internationally is an important element of the new Programme for Government. Achieving the objectives of the Executive's International Relations Strategy will be pivotal to this.

The three Executive offices in Washington, Brussels and Beijing play a significant part in promoting our international objectives. Equally, the international visit programme of Executive Ministers is important in establishing our position globally.

The deputy First Minister visited Houston and Silicon Valley earlier this month to promote academic collaboration and inward investment. The work of the Washington Bureau and InvestNI will become increasingly important once we begin to see how the policies of the new US Administration might impact here.

The Brussels Office continues to influence European policy and legislation on behalf of the Executive and to build partnerships with other regions of Europe.

Our relationship with China, currently the world's second largest economy, is developing positively and, although our office has been operational for little more than two years, we are already seeing positive results.

We met recently with investors from China and the USA and have hosted Ministerial and economic delegations from a number of countries interested in developing mutually beneficial partnerships with us.

We will visit China next month. We are committed to undertake other overseas visits next year to build on these relations, and to work with our partner organisations, businesses, universities and others to realise our programme for government targets.

**Ms Hanna** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline any discussions they or their officials have had with the United Kingdom Treasury in relation to City Deals since May 2016.

**(AQO 697/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** Responsibility for frontline discussions with Treasury sits with the Department of Finance. Responsibility for frontline discussions on City Deals rests with the Department for Communities.

Neither Ministers nor officials in the Executive Office have had discussions with Treasury on this matter.

**Mr McGlone** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on funding allocations made under the Social Investment Fund.

**(AQO 699/16-21)**

**Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness:** All £80 million of the Social Investment Fund has now been allocated. The budgets have been allocated to the 69 projects prioritised by the nine Social Investment Fund Steering Groups. The project funding information is available on the Department's website at

<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/articles/social-investment-fund-projects>

## Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

**Mr Chambers** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how many times the water quality has been tested, including the results, in the Cottown River in the past twelve months.

**(AQW 6026/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs):** The Cottown River is the upper reaches of the Ballyholme River. In the past twelve months the monitoring station at Ballyholme Bridge has been sampled twelve times for chemistry parameters and twice for biology parameters. The most recent annual classification (2015) for water quality parameters is 'bad' ecological potential.

As part of the annual bathing water monitoring programme, the lower part of the Cottown River (or Ballyholme River, where it enters Ballyholme beach) is sampled and tested for microbiological parameters on 20 occasions between June and September each year. This is investigative (non-statutory) monitoring only and no classification is derived from the results. A small number of additional samples are also collected as part of on-going investigative work, where pollution events have occurred. In addition to this, a detailed catchment investigation looking at microbiological pollution sources with the Ballyholme catchment, including the Cottown River, is planned to commence in November 2016.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 4241/16-21 and given the challenges of long-term support, to outline (i) her long-term aim for the industry; and (ii) the long-term value for money.

**(AQW 6046/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** My long term aim for the industry is to promote a sustainable, competitive, high performing, knowledge-based agri-food sector that is prosperous and compliant. That means the sector will be more resilient to shocks and challenges, have high standards of animal health and welfare, deliver for the environment and have increased market access for agri-food products.

DAERA, like other Departments, has to consider if policies meet value for money conditions. This is done by assessing both the costs and benefits associated with any action and considering if the planned intervention will deliver on objectives such as promoting a sustainable, competitive, high performing, knowledge-based agri-food sector. Pursuant to AQW 4241/16-21, value for money is one of the factors I am taking into account when considering options for future support to Areas of Natural Constraint.

**Mr Smith** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail each budgetary pressure in her Department and its arm's-length bodies; and which of these pressures were raised with officials from the Department of Finance in advance of the October monitoring round.

**(AQW 6142/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** Any pressures raised with the Department of Finance are for the purpose of informing the Executive's deliberations in reaching an agreed Monitoring Round outcome and as such this information is not disclosed.

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for a copy of their departmental bid for additional allocations as stated in page 3 of the 2016-17 October Monitoring Round Statement made to the NI Assembly by the Minister of Finance on 25 October 2016.

**(AQW 6200/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** The approach now adopted by the Executive to the Monitoring Round process no longer requires the submission of bids by departments.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline her plans to protect the fishing fleet following the recent report by the Marine Accident Investigation Branch regarding the collision between the trawler and a submerged Royal Navy submarine on 15 April 2015.

**(AQW 6206/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** Safety at sea is a reserved matter for the Department for Transport, however the fishing industry face many dangers in their working environment and we must take action wherever possible to ensure that their safety is paramount.

Following the shortcomings identified in the recent Marine Accident Investigation Branch report into the snagging of the Ardglass trawler Karen B317, officers from the Royal Navy submarine squadron are to visit Northern Ireland to discuss lessons learned with fishermen. My Department will be represented at these discussions and my Department will provide whatever assistance is possible to improve safety in this area

**Ms Archibald** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on her plans for an extension to call for evidence for the Grocery Code Adjudicator's remit in the grocery food chain to include primary produces and farmers.

**(AQW 6210/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** Pursuant to my response to AQW 3860/16-21 the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) launched the formal review of the Groceries Code Adjudicator on 18 October 2016, with a closing date for responses of 10 January 2017.

As I have stated previously I strongly believe that those involved all along the supply chain should get a fair return for their work, including primary producers and farmers. I can assure you that I intend engaging with BEIS on the future role of the Groceries Code Adjudicator and the powers that the Adjudicator has available. I will want to see whether the extension of powers to enable the investigation of issues beyond those between the supermarkets and their primary suppliers would be appropriate.

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she (i) is aware of the recent increase in the theft of sheep in South Down; and (ii) would consider micro-chipping as a deterrent.

**(AQW 6216/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:**

- (i) Responsibility for livestock theft lies with the PSNI, however DAERA, through its Veterinary Service Enforcement Branch (VSEB) and CAFRE, works closely with the PSNI in relation to tackling the problem.

I am very aware of the real concerns about rural crime and livestock thefts across the farming community. 34 PSNI Officers from rural districts across Northern Ireland have now attended the VSEB "Livestock Crime" course which gives them amongst other things, the skills to check animal identities and movement documentation when they stop livestock transporters.

My Department is aware of recent thefts involving sheep in the South Down area. A number of joint operations involving VSEB and the PSNI have taken place and investigations are ongoing. PSNI Officers trained by VSEB are involved in these investigations.

DAERA continues to work with the DOJ, the PSNI and representatives of the farming community on a number of joint initiatives aimed at reducing rural crime and raising awareness of action that can be taken to help prevent rural crime, including Farm Watch, the Freeze-branding initiative and the Crimestoppers Campaign.

I would encourage farmers to participate in these initiatives and to do all they can to secure their properties. Anyone who has information which might help us combat this threat to rural businesses should report their suspicions to DAERA, the PSNI, the Garda Síochána or the Investigations Division of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

- (ii) While eartags are the most commonly used means of identifying sheep and goats, Council Regulation (EC) No 21/2004, which provides for the identification and traceability of sheep and goats, also permits the use of ruminal boluses and, in the case of animals not intended for intra-Community trade, injectable transponders.

My Department did not allow the use of injectable transponders when we introduced electronic identification (EID) in 2010 because of concerns that they can migrate within the animal's body and potentially impact on food safety. This reflected the position in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. My Department has, however, approved a bolus for use as an official identifier for both sheep and goats.

After consulting the sheep and goat sectors in England, Defra allowed the use of injectable transponders from early 2014 in goats not destined for export or for human consumption. Defra does not allow their use for the identification of sheep as representatives of the sheep industry were not supportive. Injectable identifiers are not currently in use in England as no supplier has yet submitted a model for Defra approval.

If a keeper is concerned that his or her sheep are at risk of theft they can decide to apply a bolus to some or all of their animals if they wish. The eartag applied to a sheep carrying a bolus must be light blue, which indicates that a bolus is present. Further information can be found on my Department's website at: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/ear-tag-information>.

I have no plans to approve the use of injectable identifiers in Northern Ireland given the potential risks to the food chain, the fact that animals bearing them cannot be moved to another Member State, and as boluses are available as an alternative.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) for her assessment on the European Horse Passport System; and (ii) to detail what estimated proportion of local horses are registered properly. (AQW 6265/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** The European Union Horse Passport System requires that all equines must have a horse passport that identifies the animal by its species and the passport must be kept with the animal at all times. The passport lasts the lifetime of the animal and must include the status on whether the meat of the animal is to be used for human consumption. Since 1 July 2009 all horses, when first identified, must also be microchipped and the number of the microchip must be recorded in the passport.

A new EU Equine Passport Regulation came into effect on 1 January 2016 which requires a Central Equine Database (CED) for each Member State. My officials are working with their counterparts in the other UK administrations to develop the UK CED in conjunction with Passport Issuing Offices (PIOs).

Since the introduction of the horse passport legislation, DAERA Veterinary Service has undertaken horse identity checks at ports and the horse abattoir at Oakdale, Lurgan (when it was operating as a horse abattoir). DAERA Veterinary Service also co-operates closely with other enforcement bodies in the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain, in investigations concerning both equine welfare and equine identification and movement. Horses leaving Belfast and Larne Ports are spot checked for accompanying passports. A small number of horses are checked with a scanner for the presence of corresponding microchips. Horses presented without passports have been refused permission to board. A detailed inventory of all equines passing through Larne and Belfast Ports is maintained by DAERA Portal Inspectors.

The latest statistics held by my Department (from 2015) indicate that there were 34,250 registered equines in Northern Ireland at that time.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for (i) an update on the implementation of the Council Directive 1999/74/EC on battery hens; and (ii) her assessment of whether it is equally applied across the European Union. (AQW 6267/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** Council Directive 1999/74/EC was adopted in 1999 and lays down minimum welfare standards for the protection of laying hens. The Directive banned the keeping of hens in conventional or 'battery cages' from 1 January 2012.

All egg producers in Northern Ireland have been fully compliant with the Directive since 2013.

The European Commission confirmed in 2014 that it no longer had pending complaint cases based on non-compliance with Directive 1999/74/EC.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail how many cross compliant penalties were (i) overturned at appeal; and (ii) withdrawn by her Department in 2016.

**(AQW 6374/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** Three cross compliance penalties reviews have been removed at Review of Decision and one reduced. Four cross compliance review of decision applications have been withdrawn by the applicants.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the cost of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency in each year since its formation; and to provide a breakdown of costs between administration and programmes.

**(AQW 6699/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), formerly the Environment & Heritage Service, came into existence on 1st July 2008.

The table below therefore shows the breakdown of costs between administration and programme expenditure covering the financial years 2008-09 to 2015-16. These figures are contained in the agency's published accounts.

**Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Operating Costs**

	2008-09 (£'000s)	2009-10 (£'000s)	2010-11 (£'000s)	2011-12 (£'000s)	2012-13 (£'000s)	2013-14 (£'000s)	2014-15 (£'000s)	2015-16 (£'000s)
Administration Cost	32,359	35,092	33,133	32,975	34,403	36,697	37,023	31,664
Programme Cost	27,311	26,436	20,263	26,663	22,667	24,708	19,601	8,108
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>59,670</b>	<b>61,528</b>	<b>53,396</b>	<b>59,638</b>	<b>57,070</b>	<b>61,405</b>	<b>56,624</b>	<b>39,772</b>

**Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to what extent her Department will guarantee replacement finance for the Basic Payment Scheme following a potential United Kingdom exit from the European Union.

**(AQW 6700/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** It is too early in the process to be able to provide financial guarantees.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline when the Marine Plan will be published for public consultation.

**(AQW 6767/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** It is intended to publish the draft Marine Plan and the accompanying Marine Mapviewer for public consultation in the New Year.

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail any capital projects within his Department that benefited from EU Funding, during each of the last ten years.

**(AQW 6792/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** The amount of EU Funding that the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs made available for capital projects in the last seven years is £142m. The table below details the capital projects which benefited from this funding.

**Projects Benefiting From EU Funding**

Programme	Project	EU Funding received per year (£'000)							Total
		09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	
EU INTERREG IVA - Theme 2.1B Rural Development	CASA Regeneration	0	0	15	407	276	37	0	736
EU INTERREG IVA - Theme 2.1B Rural Development	RiverLinks	0	0	41	145	158	519	23	887
EU INTERREG IVA - Theme 2.1B Rural Development	Harnessing Natural Resources	0	0	100	225	439	439	70	1,273
EU INTERREG IVA - Theme 2.1B Rural Development	RIVER	0	0	82	13	194	175	92	556

		EU Funding received per year (£'000)							
Programme	Project	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	Total
EU INTERREG IVA - Theme 2.1B Rural Development	Clones Erne East Blackwater	0	0	0	64	87	579	0	729
NIRDP Measure 1.1	Farm Family Options (CSL)	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	8
NIRDP Measure 1.1	Focus Farms	8	336	37	48	6	7	0	441
NIRDP Measure 1.2	Marketing & Development	0	0	0	108	21	0	0	129
NIRDP Measure 1.2	Processing & Marketing 07-13 NIRDP	1,552	2,605	2,116	2,140	4,006	2,073	0	14,492
NIRDP Measure 1.2	Processing & Marketing 14-20 NIRDP	0	0	0	0	0	959	4,737	5,695
NIRDP Measure 1.3	Farm Modernisation	2,857	615	4,916	33	4,384	1,332	0	14,137
NIRDP Measure 1.3	Manure Efficiency Technology	499	316	860	530	0	454	218	2,876
NIRDP Measure 1.4	Benchmarking (Non Training)	0	5	0	0	69	40	0	114
NIRDP Measure 1.4	Benchmarking (Non Training) CSL	0	0	0	4	7	0	0	11
NIRDP Measure 5.1	Axis 1 Agent Running Costs	27	6	0	0	0	0	0	33
NIRDP Measure 3.1	Axis 3 Project Costs - Farm Diversification	134	1,606	2,419	3,303	3,243	4,262	33	14,999
NIRDP Measure 3.2	Axis 3 Project Costs - Business Creation	92	1,771	2,570	2,002	1,619	1,527	104	9,686
NIRDP Measure 3.3	Axis 3 Project Costs - Rural Tourism	0	168	2,412	2,535	3,323	3,285	958	12,680
NIRDP Measure 3.4	Axis 3 - Rural Broadband	0	0	1,499	0	0	0	5,000	6,499
NIRDP Measure 3.4	Axis 3 Project Costs - Basic Services	0	156	1,426	3,866	10,340	7,731	857	24,376
NIRDP Measure 3.5	Axis 3 Project Costs - Village Renewal	0	0	254	661	2,178	5,204	1,020	9,317
NIRDP Measure 3.6	Axis 3 Project Costs - Conservation of Rural Heritage	0	0	152	1,143	864	1,904	476	4,539
NIRDP Measure 4.3	Axis 3 Running Costs	61	15	3	1	1	1	0	82
European Fisheries Fund	Axis 1 - Vessel Modernisation	12	122	107	80	237	0	0	559
European Fisheries Fund	Axis 1 - Small Scale Coastal	0	16	0	28	8	12	0	64
European Fisheries Fund	Axis 1 - Automatic Identification System	0	0	45	21	0	0	0	66
		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
European Fisheries Fund	Axis 1 - Seltra Trawl Scheme	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2

Programme	Project	EU Funding received per year (£'000)							
		09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	Total
European Fisheries Fund	Axis 2 - Productive investments in aquaculture	54	92	0	154	27	119	0	446
European Fisheries Fund	AXIS 2 - Investments in processing and marketing	255	153	227	289	477	20	0	1,419
European Fisheries Fund	Axis 3 -Collective Actions	674	563	11	42	269	106	0	1,665
European Fisheries Fund	Axis 3 - Protection and development of aquatic fauna and flora	750	0	0	0	400	0	0	1,150
European Fisheries Fund	Axis 3 - Ports, Harbours and Landings	780	827	157	0	1,719	0	0	3,483
European Fisheries Fund	Axis 4 - Sustainable Development of Fisheries Areas	0	0	0	0	900	171	0	1,071
Woodland Grant Scheme	Woodland Creation capital grant schemes	183	269	273	310	333	315	92	1,777
INTERREG IVA *	Tellus Border	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
INTERREG IVA *	Agricultural Need for Sustainable Willow Effluent Recycling	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	670
INTERREG IVA *	Halting Environmental Loss Project	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	609
INTERREG IVA *	Development of targeted ecological modelling tools for lake management	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
INTERREG IVA *	Integrated Aquatic Resources Management between Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland (IBIS project)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,458
INTERREG IVA *	Pontoon River Foyle **	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,128
INTERREG IVA *	Quay River Foyle **	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	292
INTERREG IVA *	Mellon near Omagh **	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	41
INTERREG IVA *	Gribben near Strabane **	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	185
INTERREG IVA *	Backwater near Strabane **	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	319
INTERREG IVA *	Benone near Limavady **	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	526
									<b>142,246</b>

\* A breakdown of EU Capital Funding by project, by individual financial years is not available.

\*\* Funding provided in Euros converted at rate of £1stg: €1.16

Due to the Department's document retention policy of 7 years, financial information for 2008/09 and earlier years is limited and has therefore been excluded.

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how many applications were (i) received for the Emergency Financial Assistance following the winter flooding in 2015/2016; and (ii) successful.  
**(AQW 6832/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** There were 564 applications received for the farmland element of the Scheme of Emergency Financial Assistance. 354 were successful (all payments issued) with a further 10 appeals upheld recently (with payments to issue shortly through the Councils).

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment on potentially reducing regulations for live cattle exports to the rest of the United Kingdom.  
**(AQW 6834/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** The requirements to be met when exporting live cattle from Northern Ireland to Great Britain are not set by DAERA, but by the relevant authorities in GB.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether Departmental contingency plans are in place in the event of severe weather conditions that could affect the agricultural sector.  
**(AQW 6845/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** My Department has an Agricultural Commodities Contingency Plan that can be activated in the event of severe weather conditions impacting on the agricultural industry.

Any significant emergency would be managed by the Corporate Support and Civil Contingencies Section of my Department using the Major Emergency Response Plan (MERP).

My Department's Development Advisers, based at the College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) are also able to provide advice to farm businesses on practical measures to mitigate the impact of extreme weather. I would encourage farmers who experience particular difficulties to speak to either their CAFRE Advisor or local farming organisation.

Furthermore, my Department's Veterinary Service has also issued a press release as an annual reminder to encourage farmers to prepare adequately for bad weather situations.

**Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the recent agri-food trade mission to China.  
**(AQW 6868/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** During my week-long visit to China, I worked hard to raise the profile of Northern Ireland's agri-food industry across a number of specialisms including trade, science and relationship building in Beijing, Yangling, Xi'an and Shanghai.

You will be aware that Government to Government liaison is an essential precursor to all collaborations with China. My itinerary included several one-to-one meetings with key senior members within both the central and provincial Chinese government. I also raised our provisional approval for the export of NI pork products to China at each of these meetings and my hope that final approval and the resulting exports will be forthcoming very soon.

In addition, I delivered a key-note address at the Opening Ceremony of a major agri-tech fair in Yangling. The audience of over 800 delegates included several high ranking Chinese Government officials and I am confident that the message of our innovative and sustainable industry was noted. In fact, the Conference host, Shaanxi Governor, Mr Hu, has himself visited Northern Ireland and spoke to me of his first hand knowledge of our clean, green landscape.

Furthermore, I was the senior UK representative at a China-UK Roundtable event run in conjunction with the agri-tech fair. Following my presentation to this forum on NI's innovative agri-food industry and our world leading science underpinning it, I took part in a discussion with senior Chinese Government representatives from Beijing Central Government and other UK participants. I was pleased that two scientists from the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) also attended to explore opportunities for scientific R&D collaborations with Chinese partners.

I concluded my trade mission in Shanghai where I undertook a number of diplomatic engagements including a meeting with the UK Consul General and supported a number of our companies on an Invest NI trade mission to Food Hotel China. I was privileged to address the Opening Ceremony of the 20th Food Hotel China exhibition and was also invited to address both the China British Business Council Reception and the Invest NI Buyers Reception alongside the UK Consul General and deputy Consul General. I am pleased to note some early successes as a result of the Invest NI trade mission with both Irwins and Tayto securing contracts at the exhibition.

I am confident that my visit helped to boost Northern Ireland's image in China and I look forward to the local agri-food sector continuing to build on its success there to date.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs when she will answer AQW 6045/16-21.  
(AQW 6986/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** I replied on 11th November 2016.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs when she will answer AQW 6044/16-21.  
(AQW 6987/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** AQW 6044/16-21 was answered on 14 November 2016.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the extra support she is offering local councils to allow them to process planning applications for projects also applying for support through Tier 2 of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme – Capital, in a timely manner.  
(AQW 7020/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** In Northern Ireland, the local councils have responsibility for determining planning applications, including those for projects related to applications for grant support through Tier 2 of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme – Capital.

My Department has no remit to offer councils extra support to deliver this function.

My officials have engaged with planning officials on the Scheme delivery and they are also participating in the series of information events that are currently being held across Northern Ireland.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail her legislative programme for this mandate.  
(AQW 7040/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** I refer the Member to the answer given to AQO 6/16-21 and published in the Official Report of 13 June 2016.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of the price that local milk processors pay farmers for their produce.  
(AQW 7098/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** The price farmers receive for their produce and that others pay, at any point in the food supply chain, is a commercial matter and therefore outside the remit of my Department.

However, I do believe that all along the supply chain should get a fair return for their work, including farmers. I therefore welcome a number of positive developments in the milk market this week, including price increases by some processors and a major retailer.

I welcome the Agricultural Markets Task Force Report that was presented to EU Member States at the AGRIFISH Council meeting on 15 November 2016 and will consider carefully its recommendations on improving the supply chain.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) to detail the specific impact on the development of policy within her Department from the implementation of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016; and (ii) what mechanisms are in place to achieve this.  
(AQW 7119/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** The provisions of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (the Act) will come into operation for Northern Ireland departments and district councils on 1 June 2017. It provides a statutory basis for an existing Executive commitment to undertake rural proofing of all new and revised policies and strategies across government.

The Act is designed to promote a fair and inclusive rural society by ensuring that, within the financial resources available, the consideration of rural needs is embedded within government's policy making and service delivery.

The policy objectives of the Act are:

- to ensure that rural proofing is carried out effectively across public bodies;
- to improve the availability and transparency of information on rural proofing and to provide a degree of accountability to the Assembly; and
- to create effectual collaboration and sharing of information and best practice between public authorities.

In advance of the Act coming into operation, DAERA will review and update the existing guidance for public authorities on rural proofing, "Thinking Rural: The Essential Guide to Rural Proofing". Similarly, DAERA will update the existing training course for NICS Departmental policy makers, "Think Rural", to reflect the requirements of the Act. This training will be made available in e-learning format.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs when she will answer AQW 6541/16-21.  
(AQW 7124/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** I can confirm that the response to 6541/16-21 was issued on 16th November 2016.

**Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) what steps have been taken to implement the Rural Needs Act at all levels within her Department; and (ii) what training and guidance has been provided to managers and officials within her Department on how to apply it.  
(AQW 7161/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** The provisions of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (the Act) are not yet in operation. The Act will come into operation for Northern Ireland departments and district councils on 1 June 2017.

The Act provides a statutory basis for an existing Executive commitment to undertake rural proofing of all new and revised policies and strategies across government. On 10 October 2016, I wrote to Executive colleagues reminding them of their responsibilities under the Executive commitment and referred to the current guidance on rural proofing.

In advance of the Act coming into operation, DAERA will review and update the existing guidance for public authorities on rural proofing, "Thinking Rural: The Essential Guide to Rural Proofing". Similarly, DAERA will update the existing training course for NICS Departmental policy makers, "Think Rural", to reflect the requirements of the Act. This training will be made available to public authorities in e-learning format.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline by what date the Executive will make a decision on each of the options for the Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme.  
(AQW 7185/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** I am still considering options in relation to future support to Areas of Natural Constraint.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs pursuant to AQW 5045/11-16, to detail the total cost of payments under the Voluntary Exit Scheme that have been made to staff that vacated posts that have since been refilled.  
(AQW 7186/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** The total cost of payments under the Voluntary Exit Scheme for the 5 posts vacated and backfilled within DAERA is £193,400.

The total cost of payments under the Voluntary Exit Scheme for the 6 posts vacated and backfilled within the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) is £189,378.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs pursuant to AQW 5045/11-16, to detail the proportion of posts left vacated after the Voluntary Exit Scheme that were refilled.  
(AQW 7187/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** The proportion of posts vacated after the Voluntary Exit Scheme that were backfilled in DAERA is 1.08%.

The proportion of posts vacated after the Voluntary Exit Scheme that were backfilled in the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) is 3.94%.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs pursuant to AQW 3612/16-21, to outline (i) how many posts transferred to Enniskillen have been filled; and (ii) the number of staff by grade who are using the tele-working facility.  
(AQW 7215/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:**

- (i) 40 posts transferred to Enniskillen and all are filled.
- (ii) All non-industrial staff have access to communication tools whereby they can work from all offices on the NICS network. 27 professional and more senior staff located in Inishkeen House telework periodically. Staff holding administrative posts below Deputy Principal level tele-work infrequently. There are currently 23 staff in this category based in Inishkeen House, Enniskillen.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether her Department has a long term commitment to the actions linked to Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation that could make a valuable contribution to the Programme for Government outcomes.  
(AQW 7284/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** The new Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework, entitled 'Supporting Rural Communities', was launched in March 2016 and continues to support and develop initiatives to address the three key TRPSI

Framework priorities of access poverty, financial poverty and social isolation. An opening budget of £4m was allocated to fund the TRPSI Programme for the current year (2016/17) and is on target to be fully invested.

Once the Executive agrees the parameters for the Budget 2016 exercise, my Department will firm up our proposals for all programmes including this one.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the consideration given to the implementation of a bottle return scheme; and what measures would need to be taken for such a scheme to operate.  
(AQW 7290/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** I understand that the potential for the introduction of a Deposit return system for drinks containers in Northern Ireland has been considered previously. It was concluded that it would not be feasible to introduce a mandatory scheme on a Northern Ireland only basis.

It was accepted that a deposit return system could help reduce litter and add to recycling rates. However, any system could have had a financial impact on local retailers and could duplicate Council household waste collections.

While it was not feasible to introduce a mandatory scheme on a Northern Ireland only basis it was felt that this could be reconsidered if there were proposals from other jurisdictions on a wider system.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to list each Ministerial Direction she has issued since May 2016, including (i) the date; (ii) its purpose (iii) whether she was overruling any concerns of officials either before or after the Direction; and (iv) whether each Direction was accompanied by a full business case.  
(AQW 7295/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** I can confirm that I have not issued any Ministerial Directions in the period since May 2016.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she intends to revisit modulation before 2017 regards funding for the Areas of Natural Constraint scheme.  
(AQW 7315/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** I do not intend to revisit a Pillar I to Pillar II transfer before 2017 with regards to funding for the Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether secondary legislation is required for the Waste Management Licensing Regulations Act (Northern Ireland) 2003.  
(AQW 7363/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** The Waste Management Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, are subordinate/secondary legislation made under Section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972 as well as powers contained within the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985, the Industrial Pollution Control (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and, in particular, the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she will ensure any new departmental waste policy development will include mandatory reporting requirements and recycling targets for commercial, industrial and construction waste.  
(AQW 7364/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** The Duty of Care provisions in the Waste and Contaminated Land (NI) Order 1997 contain mandatory reporting requirements for commercial, industrial and construction waste. Waste operators are required to provide information on the waste they handle through waste transfer notes.

There is a target for the recovery and recycling of construction and demolition waste (70% of non-hazardous waste by 2020). NIEA estimates that the construction and demolition waste recycling/recovery rate for 2012 was 79.1%.

Commercial waste collected by District Councils is monitored and reported through the WasteDataFlow system. There is no comparable system in respect of the commercial and industrial (C&I) waste which is privately collected. Previous, individual waste surveys on C&I waste arisings and recycling figures estimated that there was almost 1.3 million tonnes of C&I waste collected in Northern Ireland, of which 70% was diverted from landfill.

Developments in the system for monitoring the handing of waste may provide the quality of information to enable effective target setting for commercial and industrial waste. If that is the case I will consider options including mandatory recycling targets.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she will carry out a legislative review of waste legislation derived from the EU, to consider what is to be retained.  
(AQW 7375/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** My Department has carried out a legislative review of environmental legislation including that pertaining to waste management. My officials are currently liaising with the Departmental Solicitors Office to assess the scale of the legislative changes ahead.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how her Department intends to spend the £250million made available to prioritise the agri-food sector for support.  
(AQW 7396/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** The European Commission and the previous Northern Ireland Executive agreed to a budget of up to £623 million for the Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020, which includes up to £250 million for the Farm Business Improvement Scheme (FBIS) as requested by the Agri-Food Strategy Board in Going for Growth.

The FBIS consists of a package of measures to support the sustainable growth of our agriculture and horticulture sectors, and is being rolled out in a phased and co-ordinated way. The Knowledge Transfer elements (Business Development Groups and Farm Family Key Skills) were launched in the first phase and are well underway. The first tranche of the Capital Business Investment Scheme was launched on 31 October 2016. A second tranche is planned for Autumn 2017.

Further elements of the FBIS, focussing on Innovation and Co-operation are currently being finalised and will be open for application once the necessary business case approvals are in place.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for a breakdown on the source of funding for each tranche of the two Tiers of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme - Capital, Tier 1 and Tier 2, between the Executive and the European Commission.  
(AQW 7397/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** A budget of £40 million has been approved to cover both tiers for two tranches of the FBIS – Capital Scheme in its initial phase. Tier 1 will be co-financed with 20 percent EU monies and 80 percent national, and Tier 2 is 100 percent national funding.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the action she has taken to assist fishermen affected by the Ruling of the Republic of Ireland Supreme Court, that excludes them from fishing in the Republic of Ireland's coastal water.  
(AQW 7442/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** Following the Republic of Ireland's Supreme Court Judgement in October, I have had several discussions with Minister Michael Creed, the Irish Minister responsible for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. I have discussed with him the need for urgent action to be taken to allow the Voisinage Agreement to continue for the benefit of fishermen both in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Minister Creed has assured me that he intends to introduce legislation at the earliest opportunity in order to provide a constitutional basis in Irish Law to allow the Voisinage Agreement to continue. In the meantime, Minister Creed, and I, together with our officials, are remaining in close contact on the issue.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail how many 2015 Basic Payment Scheme applications remain outstanding.  
(AQW 7601/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** 64 eligible farm businesses have yet to receive their Basic Payment for the 2015 scheme year. However, 48 of these cases are not paid due to factors outside my Department's control such as probate proceedings & farmers not providing bank account details. Payment can only be made in these cases when the necessary information is provided.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) how many; and (ii) what proportion of successful applicants to the Young Farmer's Scheme received an early proportion of their 2016 Basic Payment.  
(AQW 7602/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** A total of 1780 Young Farmers' Payment applicants were successful in 2015. Of these, 1141 received an advance payment in October 2016. This represents over 64% of successful applicants from 2015.

A total of 773 applications for Young Farmers' Payment were received in 2016. Of these, 458 (59%) received an advance payment in October 2016.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs pursuant to AQW 1515/16-12, to detail the number of chemicals used in her Department treated as (i) confidential; and (ii) having a time frame before information can be released.  
(AQW 7608/16-21)

**Miss McIlveen:** Pursuant to the answer to AQW 1515/16-12, there are no chemicals used in my Department that are treated as (i) confidential; and (ii) having a time frame before information can be released, in relation to the requirements

of the Petroleum Production Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987 as amended by the Petroleum Production (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment on the implementation of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

**(AQW 7831/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** The provisions of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (the Act) are not yet in operation. The Act will come into operation for Northern Ireland departments and district councils on 1 June 2017.

The Act provides a statutory basis for an existing Executive commitment to undertake rural proofing of all new and revised policies and strategies across government. On 10 October 2016, I wrote to Executive colleagues reminding them of their responsibilities under the Executive commitment and referred to the current guidance on rural proofing.

In advance of the Act coming into operation, DAERA will review and update the existing guidance for public authorities on rural proofing, "Thinking Rural: The Essential Guide to Rural Proofing". Similarly, DAERA will update the existing training course for NICS Departmental policy makers, "Think Rural", to reflect the requirements of the Act. This training will be made available to public authorities in e-learning format.

DAERA will be holding a series of awareness raising seminars prior to the Act coming into effect to ensure that policy-makers and senior officials, including those in my own Department, are aware of their responsibilities under the Act.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs pursuant to AQW 6266/16-21, for a breakdown and explanation of the cases that are within the Department's control.

**(AQW 7931/16-21)**

**Miss McIlveen:** Following my response to AQW 6266/16-21, the number of outstanding 2015 applications within my Department's control has reduced to 15. All of these businesses had submitted Stage One Review of Decision applications which were ultimately successful. These applications are now going through the payment process and payment will issue shortly.

## Department for Communities

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities to outline why areas of North Down such as Kilcooley are not due to receive cavity wall extraction and cavity wall insulation from the Housing Executive when 146 houses in Whiterock have been earmarked for these actions.

**(AQW 7049/16-21)**

**Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities):** The Housing Executive has advised that dwellings identified with severely or critically inadequate cavity wall insulation will be addressed on a case-by-case basis through either NIHE's response maintenance service or its planned maintenance programme.

It has advised that the cavity wall insulation scheme in Whiterock is a planned maintenance scheme which is part of the Interim Investment Priorities Programme that commenced in 2015/16. The Scheme was initiated in response to specific problems that were identified in relation to kitchen extensions built on to the dwellings in the 1980s.

In other instances severely or critically inadequate cavity wall insulation will be addressed on a case-by-case basis through the Housing Executive's response maintenance service. This is the case for estates such as Kilcooley and Bloomfield, where the Housing Executive has carried out remedial work in the small numbers of properties where issues with cavity wall insulation have been found.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the funding Ardoyne, Bone and Ligoniel Heritage Association has received since 2009.

**(AQW 7076/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** My Department and the Housing Executive has provided no funding to the Ardoyne, Bone and Ligoniel Heritage Association.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Communities to detail the funding allocation to the providers supported through the Supporting People Programme, on a month by month basis over each of the last three years.

**(AQW 7080/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** Actual expenditure figure on a month by month basis over each of the last 3 years for the Supporting People programme as outlined in the table below.

Actual SP Programme Expenditure shown in table below

Month	2013-14 (£m)	2014-15 (£m)	2015-16 (£m)	2016-17 (£m)
April	5.2	5.0	5.0	5.7
May	5.5	5.7	6.5	6.2
June	5.3	5.2	5.8	6.0
July	5.4	6.0	5.9	6.2
August	5.3	5.7	6.0	6.3
September	5.3	5.8	5.6	6.3
October	6.2	6.2	6.3	6.2
November	5.4	5.8	5.9	
December	5.7	8.0	6.1	
January	5.8	6.8	6.4	
February	5.2	5.5	6.0	
March	6.6	6.4	7.5	
<b>Total</b>	<b>66.9</b>	<b>72.1</b>	<b>73.0</b>	<b>42.9</b>

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Communities (i) to detail the specific impact on the development of policy within his Department from the implementation of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016; and (ii) what mechanisms are in place to achieve this.

**(AQW 7121/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:**

- (i) The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 is not yet in operation. It will come into effect for Northern Ireland Departments on 1 June 2017. In advance of this my Department will continue to undertake rural proofing of all new and revised policies and strategies.
- (ii) In advance of the Act coming into operation mechanisms will be put in place to facilitate its implementation. DAERA will review and update the existing guidance for public authorities on rural proofing. Similarly DAERA will also update the existing training course to reflect the requirements of the Act and this training will be available in e-learning format for use by Departments, local councils and public authorities. DAERA will also be putting in place monitoring and reporting arrangements to support the publication of an annual monitoring report on the operation of the Act, which will be laid before the Assembly.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Communities to detail the percentage of fuel poverty in rural areas of north and east Antrim, broken down by electoral wards.

**(AQW 7162/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** I have been informed by NI Housing Executive that fuel poverty figures are calculated using data from the most recent House Condition Survey carried out in 2011. Due to sample size results were only available at Northern Ireland level which indicated that 42% of households were in fuel poverty.

However, in order to provide figures at a lower geographical level, NI Housing Executive contracted consultants to estimate, (using a statistical model), the fuel poverty figures for District Councils in Northern Ireland in 2011. Results were not available by constituency or electoral ward.

I am further informed that fuel poverty estimates for the 26 District Council Areas in 2011 were published in bands; the banded figures were as shown in the table below, (District Council Areas in North and East Antrim Assembly constituencies highlighted).

**Fuel Poverty Estimate 26 District Council Areas in Northern Ireland 2011**

District Council Area	% of households in Fuel Poverty
Antrim	38 - 42%
Ards	38 – 42%
Armagh	43 – 46%

District Council Area	% of households in Fuel Poverty
<b>Ballymena</b>	<b>47 – 51%</b>
<b>Ballymoney</b>	<b>52 – 56%</b>
Banbridge	38 – 42%
Belfast	32 – 37%
<b>Carrickfergus</b>	<b>43 – 46%</b>
Castlereagh	38 – 42%
Coleraine	52 – 56%
Cookstown	52 – 56%
Craigavon	38 – 42%
Londonderry	47 – 51%
Down	43 – 46%
Dungannon	47 – 51%
Fermanagh	52 – 56%
<b>Larne</b>	<b>52 – 56%</b>
Limavady	47 – 51%
Lisburn	38 – 42%
Magherafelt	47 – 51%
<b>Moyle</b>	<b>52 – 56%</b>
Newry & Mourne	43 – 46%
<b>Newtownabbey</b>	<b>38 – 42%</b>
North Down	38 – 42%
Omagh	52 – 56%
Strabane	52 – 56%

**Mr McAleer** asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) what steps have been taken to implement the Rural Needs Act at all levels within his Department; and (ii) what training and guidance has been provided to managers and officials within his Department on how to apply it.

**(AQW 7229/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:**

- (i) The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 is not yet in operation. It will come into effect for Northern Ireland Departments on 1 June 2017. In advance of this my Department will continue to undertake rural proofing of all new and revised policies and strategies.
- (ii) In advance of the Act coming into operation mechanisms will be put in place to facilitate its implementation. DAERA will review and update the existing guidance for public authorities on rural proofing. Similarly DAERA will also update the existing training course to reflect the requirements of the Act and this training will be available in e-learning format for use by Departments, local councils and public authorities. DAERA will also be putting in place monitoring and reporting arrangements to support the publication of an annual monitoring report on the operation of the Act, which will be laid before the Assembly.

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the number of claimants awaiting a decision; and (ii) the numbers waiting six months or more in relation to their Employment and Support Allowance claim, broken down by constituency.

**(AQW 7244/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:**

- (i) The number of claimants awaiting a decision on their initial claim to Employment and Support Allowance is 1,143; and
- (ii) There are no claimants waiting six months or more.

The number of claimants awaiting a decision broken down by constituency is not available.

**Mr Clarke** asked the Minister for Communities to detail the benefit costs for individuals with a vision impairment between (i) 0-25 years; and (ii) 25 years onwards.

**(AQW 7256/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The IT Systems used to administer disability benefits allows for information on what is known as the main disabling condition to be recorded. The table below shows the number of claimants with a vision impairment recorded as their main disabling condition, broken down by age group, and the associated benefit costs.

The information provided has limitations as other claimants may have a visual impairment but it may not have been recorded as their main disabling condition. It should be noted that individuals may be claiming more than one benefit e.g. Employment Support Allowance and Disability Living Allowance.

Benefit	Recipients		Total Weekly Benefit	
	0-25	26+	0-25	26+
Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)	40	600	£5,670	£83,240
Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA)	0	30	£0	£2,070
Disability Living Allowance (DLA)	440	1,880	£34,000	£143,960
Attendance Allowance (AA)	0	1,120	£0	£78,490
<b>Total</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>3,630</b>	<b>£39,670</b>	<b>£307,760</b>

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 the UK Statistics Authority.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the current status of the Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme.

**(AQW 7269/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** My Department has allocated a total of £437,000 in 2016/17 towards the Small Pockets of Deprivation (SPOD) programme. This year's funding has been fully allocated among the 17 areas across Northern Ireland to support a range of community development programmes aimed at addressing deprivation within each of the designated SPOD areas.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister for Communities to outline when the Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme's areas (i) were last assessed; and (ii) will be assessed again.

**(AQW 7270/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:**

- (i) Following an initial assessment in 2009, NIHE carried out a further evaluation of each Small Pockets of Deprivation area in 2014/15, based on Social Return on Investment.
- (ii) Departmental officials meet with the NIHE quarterly to monitor progress of the scheme. An evaluation will be carried out at the end of the programme.

**Mr T Buchanan** asked the Minister for Communities to outline how many new Technical Officers and Senior Grants Managers in Derry, Omagh and Fermanagh Grants Offices in the past five years have been (i) recruited; and of these how many have been (ii) on transfer or are agency staff, broken down by year, office and community background.

**(AQW 7333/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** NI Housing Executive provided details in the table below, of how many new Technical Officers have been recruited in their Londonderry and West Grants offices (Fermanagh & Omagh). It is noted that no new Senior Grants Managers have been recruited in these areas in the past five years. The information provided also includes agency staff. The NI Housing Executive does not collect information in relation to agency staffs' community background.

Neither have they have included community background details of NI Housing Executive staff, as identifying community backgrounds where there is a small number of staff, there is a risk of identifying individuals.

Year	Grants Office	Position	Employee	Total
2013	West Grants	Technical Officer	Agency	2
2014	West Grants	Technical Officer	Agency	1
2015	West Grants	Technical Officer	Agency	2
	West Grants	Technical Officer	Secondment	1
2016	West Grants	Technical Officer	Agency	2

Year	Grants Office	Position	Employee	Total
2015	Londonderry Grants	Technical Officer	Agency	1
	Londonderry Grants	Technical Officer	Secondment	2
2016	Londonderry Grants	Technical Officer	Agency	1
<b>Total new Technical Officers recruited in the past 5 years</b>				<b>12</b>

**Mr T Buchanan** asked the Minister for Communities to outline how many Technical Officers have been promoted in the past ten years in the Derry, Omagh and Fermanagh Grant's Offices, broken down by year, office and community background.  
(AQW 7334/16-21)

**Mr Givan:** No Technical Officers have been promoted in the past 10 years in the Londonderry, Omagh and Fermanagh Grants Offices.

**Ms Ní Chuilín** asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the response to the UN Report on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2016), particularly the sections of the report asking his Department to address the challenges to overcome persistent inequalities in housing for Catholic families in North Belfast.  
(AQW 7338/16-21)

**Mr Givan:** In respect of the UN Report on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2016), no formal response has been issued from my Department. The UK's written response forwarded to the UN did not contain input specific to the NI Executive.

However, in respect of the key challenges that face us today, as part of the draft Programme for Government, a proposed delivery plan is currently out for consultation. The draft plan aims to address (i) the number of households in housing stress and (ii) the gap between the number of houses we need, and the number of houses we have. The draft proposes a number of measures, including providing an additional 9,600 social homes and supporting 3,750 first time buyers into home ownership. It also includes a proposal to release more public sector land for housing development. I expect this work, alongside other actions in the delivery plan, to tackle the persistent inequalities currently faced by our society.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Communities pursuant to AQW 5302/16-21, to outline (i) when the Culture and Arts Strategy will be developed; (ii) the current stage of the Strategy; and (iii) whether the Strategy will have input from all Executive Departments.  
(AQW 7344/16-21)

**Mr Givan:** The public consultation on proposals for a Culture and Arts Strategy amassed more than 1700 responses which is a significant response. Officials have been analysing the detailed responses and a report on the Consultation analysis is nearing completion.

On consideration of the analysis I will take a decision on the way forward for the strategy.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Communities whether Personal Independence Payment application assessments are conducted prior to the receipt of requested medical reports; and if this is the case, would he consider switching these around, as reports could identify which cases which would require a home visit for assessment or no assessment at all.  
(AQW 7345/16-21)

**Mr Givan:** Capita Health & Wellbeing, the Assessment Provider for PIP in Northern Ireland, arrange for a Health Professional to conduct an initial review of the PIP claim to determine whether further evidence is required, if the claim can be assessed based on the paper evidence already held or if a face-to-face consultation is required. Where the Health Professional feels a medical report will add value to the assessment process and the quality of the advice provided to the Department it is requested at this stage.

Where the Health Professional decides that a face-to-face assessment is necessary they will also consider whether a home consultation is required. This is where a claimant indicates that they are unfit to travel to a consultation in a location other than their home or where travel would require high levels of support.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the Housing Executive maintenance schemes planned for Breezemount estate Bangor, over the next two financial years.  
(AQW 7357/16-21)

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Executive has advised that there are no maintenance schemes planned for Breezemount Estate, Bangor, in 2017/18.

Schemes from 2018/19 onwards will be programmed as part of the new 10 Year Investment Plan which is currently being prepared.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the Housing Executive maintenance schemes planned for Bloomfield estate in Bangor, over the next two financial years.

**(AQW 7358/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Executive has advised that a number of properties in Bloomfield estate, Bangor, are included in a heating scheme currently programmed for early 2017/18.

Schemes from 2018/19 onwards will be programmed as part of the new 10 Year Investment Plan which is currently being prepared.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the Housing Executive maintenance schemes planned for Kilcooley estate in Bangor, over the next two financial years.

**(AQW 7359/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Executive has advised that a number of properties in Kilcooley estate are included in an External Cyclical maintenance scheme planned for early 2017/18, and 115 properties in the estate are in a kitchen replacement scheme planned for early autumn 2017.

Schemes from 2018/19 onwards will be programmed as part of the new 10 Year Investment Plan that is currently being prepared.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the Housing Executive maintenance schemes planned for Whitehill / Lisnabreen estate in Bangor, over the next two financial years.

**(AQW 7360/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Executive has advised that there are no maintenance schemes currently planned for Whitehill/ Lisnabreen estates in 2017/18. Schemes from 2018/19 onwards will be programmed as part of the new 10 Year Investment Plan that is currently being prepared.

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister for Communities to outline how many occasions the Charity Commission's (i) Audit and Risk Assurance Committee has met since March 2016, including whether the Minutes of the meetings will appear on the Commission's website; and (ii) Board has met since June 2016, including whether the Minutes of the meetings will appear on the Commission's website.

**(AQW 7361/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee has met on three occasions since March 2016 (10 May 2016, 29 September 2016 and 15 November 2016). The minutes of its meetings appear on the website after they have been agreed by the committee and adopted at a Board meeting.

The Board has met twice since June 2016 (19 September 2016 and 7 November 2016) and the minutes are published on the Commission's website following adoption at a subsequent Board meeting.

**Mr Clarke** asked the Minister for Communities for the cost of access to work for individuals with a visual impairment within the fares to work scheme, under the Disability Employment Service.

**(AQW 7389/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** In the financial year, 2015/16, Access to Work (NI) supported 84 people with a visual impairment with travel to work assistance, at a cost of £98,780.

In addition to this element, 75 visually impaired participants were supported through the provision of Special Aids and Equipment or Support Worker assistance, costing an extra £158,940. Some of these individuals may have received one or more of these important elements of support provided by the programme.

Therefore, the total cost to the Access to Work (NI) programme budget in 2015/16, to support people with a visual impairment to move into work or to retain their job, was £257,720.

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister for Communities (i) for an update on the Urban Development Grant; (ii) when he expects to make an announcement on the outcome of the current process; and (iii) to detail any plans, including potential budget, for a fresh call in 2017/2018.

**(AQW 7395/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** I refer the member to the previous Assembly Question AQW 5156/16-21.

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister for Communities how much is being invested in the Appeal Tribunal Services as a direct result of the introduction of The Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016.

**(AQW 7414/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** In anticipation of an increase in tribunal appeals as a result of changes introduced by The Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, a funding formula has been developed to ensure that Appeal Tribunal Services are adequately resourced in the coming years. The funding arrangement is predicated on an increase in the volume of appeals and a corresponding uplift in future year funding as part of the scheduled transfer of statutory responsibility for The Appeals Service (TAS) from the

Department for Communities to the Department of Justice with effect from 1st April 2017. A significant capital investment has also been made in facilities used by TAS in Belfast through the extensive refurbishment of their city centre base at Cleaver House.

Following a series of recent recruitment campaigns, the bank of legally-qualified, medically-qualified and disability-qualified Tribunal Panel members has also been augmented to support the effective future delivery of Appeal Tribunal Services.

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister for Communities to detail the percentage of fuel poverty in West Tyrone, broken down by electoral wards.

**(AQW 7419/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** I have been informed by NI Housing Executive that the fuel poverty figures are calculated using data from the most recent House Condition Survey carried out in 2011. Due to sample size results were only available at Northern Ireland level which indicated that 42% of households were in fuel poverty.

However, in order to provide figures at a lower geographical level, NI Housing Executive contracted consultants to estimate, (using a statistical model), the fuel poverty figures for District Councils in Northern Ireland in 2011. Results were not available by constituency or electoral ward.

Fuel poverty estimates for the 26 District Council Areas in Northern Ireland in 2011 were published in bands; the banded figures for all District Council Areas were as shown in the table below, (District Council Areas in West Tyrone constituency highlighted).

**Fuel Poverty Estimates for the 26 District Council Areas in Northern Ireland in 2011**

District Council Area	% of households in fuel poverty
Antrim	38 - 42%
Ards	38 - 42%
Armagh	43 - 46%
Ballymena	47 - 51%
Ballymoney	52 - 56%
Banbridge	38 - 42%
Belfast	32 - 37%
Carrickfergus	43 - 46%
Castlereagh	38 - 42%
Coleraine	52 - 56%
Cookstown	52 - 56%
Craigavon	38 - 42%
Londonderry	47 - 51%
Down	43 - 46%
Dungannon	47 - 51%
Fermanagh	52 - 56%
Larne	52 - 56%
Limavady	47 - 51%
Lisburn	38 - 42%
Magherafelt	47 - 51%
Moyle	52 - 56%
Newry and Mourne	43 - 46%
Newtownabbey	38 - 42%
North Down	38 - 42%
<b>Omagh</b>	<b>52 - 56%</b>
<b>Strabane</b>	<b>52 - 56%</b>

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment on Schedule 11 of the Immigration Act 2016; and its implications for Northern Ireland.

**(AQW 7420/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** I should explain that while the housing entitlement of non-British citizens is an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and therefore lies outside my Department's remit, the Housing Executive has a contractual arrangement with the Home Office to provide accommodation for asylum seekers while their claims or appeals are being considered. The Home Secretary also has power under section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 to make arrangements with housing providers for the provision of temporary accommodation for persons whose claims for asylum have been refused.

Paragraph 3A of Schedule 2 to the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 provides that persons placed in accommodation provided by the Housing Executive under arrangements made with the Home Office, including arrangements made under section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, are not secure tenants of the Executive. When Schedule 11 to the Immigration Act 2016 comes into operation it will repeal section 4 and create a new power for the Home Secretary to support failed asylum seekers and their dependants if they can demonstrate that they are destitute and that they face a genuine obstacle to leaving the UK at the point their appeal rights are exhausted. Consequential to the repeal of section 4, paragraph 2(b)(ii) of Schedule 11 to the Immigration Act 2016 provides for an amendment to paragraph 3A of Schedule 2 to the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 that would remove the redundant reference to section 4. The provision in paragraph 3A that a tenancy is not a secure tenancy will continue to apply to any accommodation provided under the Home Secretary's powers to support asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers.

In the circumstances, Schedule 11 to the Immigration Act 2016 has no significant implications for those housing matters that are transferred to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the Housing Executive maintenance schemes planned for the Redburn estate in Holywood, over the next two financial years.

**(AQW 7428/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Executive has advised that there are no maintenance schemes currently planned for Redburn estate in Holywood in 2017/18. Schemes from 2018/19 onwards will be programmed as part of the new 10 Year Investment Plan that is currently being prepared.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the Housing Executive maintenance schemes planned for the Loughview estate in Holywood, over the next two financial years.

**(AQW 7429/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Executive has advised that there are no maintenance schemes planned for the Loughview estate in Holywood in 2017/18. Schemes from 2018/19 onwards will be programmed as part of the development of the Housing Executive's new 10 Year Investment Plan that is currently being prepared.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the Housing Executive maintenance schemes planned for the Springwell estate in Groomsport, over the next two financial years.

**(AQW 7430/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Executive has advised that there are 19 properties in the Springwell estate, Groomsport included in a kitchen scheme currently programmed for September 2017. Schemes from 2018/19 onwards will be programmed as part of the new 10 Year Investment Plan that is currently being prepared.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the Housing Executive maintenance schemes planned for the Strand in Holywood, over the next two financial years.

**(AQW 7431/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Executive has advised that there are no maintenance schemes currently planned for the Strand in Holywood in 2017/18. Schemes from 2018/19 onwards will be programmed as part of the new 10 Year Investment Plan that is currently being prepared.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the Housing Executive maintenance schemes planned for Conlig Village, over the next two financial years.

**(AQW 7432/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Executive has advised that there are no maintenance schemes currently planned for Conlig village in 2017/18. Schemes from 2018/19 onwards will be programmed as part of the new 10 Year Investment Plan that is currently being prepared.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Communities pursuant to AQW 6862/16-21, to outline (i) how the lead officials in his Department and the Department of Finance are in contact regarding the reclassification of housing associations; and (ii) how

the lead officials in his Department ensures that other staff are kept updated as to the progress of the request to the Treasury for derogation.

**(AQW 7456/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:**

- (i) Face to face meetings have taken place between senior officials from my Department and the Department of Finance in relation to the reclassification of housing associations on 28 June 2016 and 28 September 2016. There have also been regular telephone conversations and email correspondence between lead officials in DfC and DoF since the ONS announcement on 29th September 2016.
- (ii) Lead officials ensure that progress updates are provided to relevant senior management meetings, where information can be cascaded to relevant staff.

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister for Communities how many welfare appeals are expected to be lodged in (i) 2016-17; (ii) 2017-18; (iii) 2018-19; and (iv) 2019-20.

**(AQW 7468/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The table below summarises the current forecast number of appeals for the years in question:

Year	Current Appeals Forecast
2016-17	11,834
2017-18	32,523
2018-19	41,007
2019-20	23,792

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister for Communities to outline the action his Department has taken to ensure individuals will have access to tribunal representation when an appeal is made to the Appeals Tribunal Service.

**(AQW 7469/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** My Department provides funding of £1.6M to councils to support frontline independent advice services, including appeals representation, across Northern Ireland. The eleven local councils provide an additional £1.9M and are responsible for commissioning advice services, including representation, for their areas.

On the 27th of September I announced further funding of £2.5 million for the Welfare Reform Advice Services Consortium (Citizens Advice, AdviceNI and the Law Centre NI). This funding will support an additional 35 advisers to provide face to face assistance, which includes tribunal representation for customers appealing the impact of welfare changes on their benefit entitlement.

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister for Communities when AQW 821/16-21, as revised in AQW 2220/16-21 and AQW 5158/16-21 will be answered using most up to date information available.

**(AQW 7480/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** In relation to AQW821/16-21, no timetable has been confirmed for the publication of the final report.

In relation to AQW 2220/16-21, eight Directors or Trustees have resigned and this has been reflected in amendments made to Hansard for AQW 821/16-21.

In relation to AQW 5158/16-21, the attached table – Annex A provides details about the number of freedom of information requests made to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland to date in 2016/17 and how they have been processed.

#### Annex A

Year	Total Number of Requests Received	No of Requests fully answered	No of requests partially answered	No of requests not answered deemed vexatious
2016-17	44	5	9	1

- 1 For the 2016-17 year to date 29 FOI requests were dealt with through; withdraws, closed after no response, no information covered by request held, or deemed exempt under the relevant exemptions used.

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) how many cases the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI) has opposed the Attorney General, from September 2015 to date; (ii) how many of these cases were lost or conceded to by CCNI (iii) for how much CCNI has been sued for costs in these cases; and (iv) whether all costs will be met from the Charity Commission's budget.

**(AQW 7481/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:**

- (i) The Commission has defended its position in two cases since September 2015 where the Attorney General has appealed decisions of the Charity Tribunal.
- (ii) One of the cases was lost and the other conceded by the Commission.
- (iii) Costs were awarded to the Attorney General in the case which the Commission lost although no claim has yet been received.
- (iv) Costs will be met from the Commission's budget.

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister for Communities to detail the support his Department has given to support Tribunal Representation as part of the Welfare Reform Mitigation package.

**(AQW 7493/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** As part of the Fresh Start Agreement, £8m funding was committed over four years to put additional independent advice services in place for Welfare Reform.

On the 27th of September I announced funding of £2.5 million for the Welfare Reform Advice Services Consortium (Citizens Advice, AdviceNI and the Law Centre NI).

From the 1st November 2016 this money is funding a free phone helpline (resourced with 9 additional advisors) and an additional 35 advisers to provide face to face assistance, which includes tribunal representation for customers appealing the impact of the welfare changes on their benefit entitlement.

The advisers are based across all 11 council areas in Northern Ireland located in local Citizens Advice and Advice NI offices.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities to detail how many cases of damp have been reported to the Housing Executive, over the past four years.

**(AQW 7498/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Executive has advised that 25,150 cases of damp have been reported to it during the period from 1 November 2012 to 31 October 2016.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Communities to publish the full sectoral audit conducted by his Department identifying possible impacts, risks, opportunities and contingencies which may arise from Brexit; and whether he has approved same.

**(AQW 7514/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** This information will be used to inform our input to the UK Government's negotiations. It would not be appropriate to publish it at this time.

**Mr Allen** asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) how many NIHE properties are currently under review in relation to asbestos in their premises and; (ii) in how many of the cases has access to aspects of the property, including lofts been restricted as a result.

**(AQW 7583/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Housing Executive has advised that:

- (i) It continually reviews its stock in relation to asbestos where planned works are proposed. There are currently 4,769 Housing Executive properties under review in relation to asbestos.
- (ii) There are 326 properties which currently have restrictions in place. With regards to these properties the Housing Executive is in the process of arranging for this asbestos to be removed.

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister for Communities to outline his proposals for the location of sites to process Job Seeker's Allowance and Income Support.

**(AQW 7866/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The introduction and roll out of Universal Credit in Northern Ireland will increasingly impact on the workloads in the Department's Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support Benefit Processing Centres. The Universal Credit Programme has been working with colleagues in benefit operations to best manage this impact to ensure a viable and sustainable solution is in place going forward.

The decisions on the future delivery arrangements for Job Seeker's Allowance and Income Support including the impact on the current delivery sites will be announced in early December.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Communities whether he lodged a protest with FIFA in respect of it opening disciplinary procedures against the IFA over the display of poppies and a minute's silence held on the Armistice Day game against Azerbaijan.

**(AQW 7901/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** I am very disappointed that Football's World Governing Body, FIFA, has taken the decision to levy charges against The Irish Football Association (IFA) regarding incidents of the act of remembrance and display of poppy symbols.

I understand that the FIFA has commenced investigations and that the IFA are due to respond to these charges. The IFA will be rigorously defending the decision it took to respectfully mark Armistice Day. I have offered my full support to the IFA should they face any sanction from FIFA in respect of this matter.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the review of the Caravans Act (Northern Ireland) 2011; and when he will publish the results of the review.

**(AQW 8064/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** The Department is currently finalising the review of the Caravans Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

It is anticipated that the review will be complete before Christmas and I will ensure that you receive a copy of the findings.

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) whether he is aware of any cases in Northern Ireland where Tax Credits haven't been paid accurately to families with a disabled child/children due to a lack of proper information exchange with the social security agency; and (ii) what action his Department has taken with HMRC to (a) identify how many cases are affected; and (b) to resolve those cases.

**(AQW 8074/16-21)**

**Mr Givan:** Administration of Tax Credits is not a matter for my Department. It is the responsibility of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). The Department for Communities uses Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) systems to administer Disability Living Allowance, which can enable families to get a higher award of Child Tax Credit (CTC). Since becoming aware of an issue regarding the data-feed between DWP and HMRC, both have worked to address the issue and ensure the relevant information sharing process is working effectively going forward.

## Department of Education

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the status of the Childcare Strategy 2015-25.

**(AQW 7019/16-21)**

**Mr Weir (The Minister of Education):** I hope to bring forward the final version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken account of the many consultation responses received, the Programme for Government and the new opportunities that now exist to align childcare and Early Years initiatives.

The budget for the final Childcare Strategy will be determined in the context of this process, along with the Executive's agreement of the overall 2017-18 Budget. When agreed by the Executive, the Strategy may include further funding opportunities for a range of childcare provision to be supported.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister of Education whether he plans to give organisations that provide childcare more funding security.

**(AQW 7024/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** I hope to bring forward the final version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken account of the many consultation responses received, the Programme for Government and the new opportunities that now exist to align childcare and Early Years initiatives.

The budget for the final Childcare Strategy will be determined in the context of this process, along with the Executive's agreement of the overall 2017-18 Budget. When agreed by the Executive, the Strategy may include further funding opportunities for a range of childcare provision to be supported.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister of Education whether the final Childcare Strategy will include ring-fenced funding for (i) specific organisations; or (ii) types of childcare provision.

**(AQW 7025/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** I hope to bring forward the final version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken account of the many consultation responses received, the Programme for Government and the new opportunities that now exist to align childcare and Early Years initiatives.

The budget for the final Childcare Strategy will be determined in the context of this process, along with the Executive's agreement of the overall 2017-18 Budget. When agreed by the Executive, the Strategy may include further funding opportunities for a range of childcare provision to be supported.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Education to detail his legislative programme for this mandate.  
(AQW 7039/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** I am not yet in a position to detail the legislative programme that I intend to bring forward over the current mandate. It is essential that my Department's legislative proposals reflect and support the priorities in the Programme for Government (PfG) and that the programme is developed in tandem with this process. You will be aware that consultation on the PfG opened on 28 October and runs until 23 December 2016. My department is leading on the development of two of the fourteen delivery plans which will identify the key actions to deliver the PfG.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Education how much funding has his Department given the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools during the current financial year.  
(AQW 7056/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** The amount of Resource funding given by my Department to the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools in the current financial year is £3,675,000. This figure is based on allocations made to date.

To date no Capital funding has been provided to CCMS in the 2016-17 financial year.

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Education whether his Department has any plans to carry out major improvements to St Mary's Primary School, Barr.  
(AQW 7058/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** A major improvement planned for St Mary's Primary School, Barr is the provision of additional accommodation in the form of two prefabricated modular classroom units. These will relocate a P3 classroom and provide a designated SEN classroom. Other associated works are planned to convert an existing room for resource use and to convert a classroom used as the dining area, solely for dining use. Work is expected to commence around March/April 2017.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of school crossing patrol officers employed in (i) Dungannon; (ii) Enniskillen; and (iii) Omagh.  
(AQW 7065/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority has advised that the number of school crossing patrol officers employed in (i) Dungannon; (ii) Enniskillen; and (iii) Omagh is as follows:

- Dungannon – 18
- Enniskillen – 1
- Omagh – 13

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister of Education to detail what steps his Department is taking to (i) educate; and (ii) protect school boards of governors with regards to their rights and responsibilities for special educational needs provision in schools.  
(AQW 7100/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** Articles 8 and 9 of the Education (NI) Order 1996, as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005, provide for the statutory duties of Boards of Governors in regard to special educational needs (SEN) provision in schools.

The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of SEN and the Supplement to the Code provides guidance to Boards of Governors on their roles and responsibilities towards pupils with SEN.

The Code also advises that schools and the Education Authority should consider the particular training needs of, among others, Boards of Governors in the light of the Code.

School Boards of Governors are corporate bodies in their own right and as such are legally liable for their actions. A school governor who acted honestly or in good faith will not incur any personal liability arising from his or her duties and responsibilities as a member of a school's Board of Governors.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the specific effect on the development of policy within his Department arising from the implementation of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016; and (ii) what mechanisms are in place to achieve this.  
(AQW 7123/16-21)

**Mr Weir:**

- (i) The provisions of the Rural Needs (Northern Ireland) Act 2016 are not yet in operation. The Act will come into operation for Executive Departments and district councils on 1 June 2017 and for the remaining public authorities listed in the schedule to the Act on 1 June 2018.
- (ii) The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) is currently considering the implications of the Act across Departments. In the meantime, the Executive has an ongoing commitment to undertake rural proofing of all new and revised policies and strategies across government.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the new build of the Gaelscoil in Strabane.  
(AQW 7128/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh was announced to advance in planning in 2013, to provide a new build seven class primary school and single nursery unit. A site search exercise and feasibility study was carried out and a preferred site for the new school was identified. Unfortunately the purchase of the site fell through, resulting in the need to carry out a fresh site search in March 2015. A new site was identified and the purchase of this new site has only recently been completed.

Now that a new site has been secured, Central Procurement Directorate is taking forward the procurement of the Integrated Consultant Team, which we expect to issue to the procurement framework in the coming weeks. A professional team will be in place early in the New Year.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Education whether his Department plans to carry out essential maintenance works at St Mary's Primary School, Cloughcor.  
(AQW 7129/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority (EA) is responsible for maintenance at St Mary's Primary School. The Department has allocated £14m to the EA for maintenance in 2016/17, which will enable the EA to undertake statutory and emergency response maintenance and address Health and Safety issues in all controlled and maintained schools. It is unlikely however that any funding will be available for planned preventative maintenance works.

I will continue to identify funding pressures for maintenance and seek to identify additional resources to support the commitment to reducing the levels of maintenance backlog in the estate and addressing various Health and Safety issues.

The Department of Education has received three minor works applications from St Mary's Primary School Cloughcor, which would be funded from the capital budget. These applications are for fire safety works, works to roof structure and access control to modular buildings and are currently being scoped by the EA.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Education how he plans to progress integrated education rather than shared education.  
(AQW 7130/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** It is not a question of integrated rather than shared education.

I am conscious of my duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education and will continue to do so alongside the advancement of shared education.

Through shared education, schools of all management types, including integrated schools, are encouraged to partner collaboratively with other schools in order to realise social, educational and economic benefits.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Education whether he has set up a working group to consider the future of former school sites following completion at the Strule Campus.  
(AQW 7131/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** Recognising the strategic significance of the school sites to Omagh town, I have established a Vacated Sites Working Group to examine the issues involved ahead of the completion of the Strule Campus. The first meeting of the Group took place on 15 November 2016.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Education when he will answer (i) AQW 6363/16-21; and (ii) AQW 6364/16-21.  
(AQW 7132/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** AQW 6363/16-21 was answered on 17 November 2016 and AQW 6364/16-21 was answered on 11 November 2016.

**Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) what steps have been taken to implement the Rural Needs Act at all levels within his Department; and (ii) what training and guidance has been provided to managers and officials within his Department on how to apply it.  
(AQW 7154/16-21)

**Mr Weir:**

- (i) The provisions of the Rural Needs (Northern Ireland) Act 2016 are not yet in operation. The Act will come into operation for Executive Departments and district councils on 1 June 2017 and for the remaining public authorities listed in the schedule to the Act on 1 June 2018.
- (ii) Training needs will be considered as part of the plans for implementation of the provisions of the Act.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) the rationale behind the decision to close (a) Delamont Outdoor Education Centre, Killyleagh; (b) Bushmills Outdoor Education Centre, County Antrim; (c) Ardnabannon Outdoor Education Centre, County Down; and (d) Killowen Outdoor Education Centre, County Down; and (ii) any consultation the Education Authority engaged in with schools and service users prior to taking the decision to close the centres; and (iii) the estimations as to the yearly budgetary implications to both the Education Authority and to schools.

**(AQW 7174/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority's (EA) Review of Residential and Outdoor Education Centres provides proposals, rather than decisions, which are subject to public consultation.

The EA Review is in line with the Departmental policy as set out in Priorities for Youth (Oct 2013). The EA has advised that the proposals to close four out of the eleven statutory OECs were based on the following rationale:

- the need to review provision, following the establishment of the EA, to address duplication and over provision, to ensure the effective deployment of resources and to continue to work to meet the needs that are associated with front line service delivery;
- the need to ensure that the model of service delivery for residential and outdoor education is consistent with other government directives, including the new Programme for Government and the future revised Children's Strategy with an enhanced focus on the outcomes for our children and young people;
- the need to deliver savings so that the remaining centres can be developed to make a sustainable contribution to youth provision in the future;
- the need to target resources more effectively against assessed needs; and
- the proximity of the proposed closures to more economically viable centres.

As part of the Review process the EA consulted with a wide range of schools and service users as follows:

- meetings with 15 user schools comprising a range of management types;
- focus groups were held with 132 young people in seven of the statutory centres and five voluntary sector centres;
- meetings with organisations representing young people (Youth Action, Youth Forum and Duke of Edinburgh Awards);
- meetings in the centres with accompanying teachers and leaders;
- an on-line survey of users (596 responses);
- an on-line survey of parents and guardians (269 responses);
- an on-line survey of accompanying teachers, youth workers and leaders (252 responses);
- an on-line survey of schools (304 responses); and
- an on-line survey of the general public (871 responses).

Initial estimations would indicate that £1.3 million of recurrent savings will be realised.

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Education (i) how much Sure Start funding has been invested in Upper Bann; and (ii) for his assessment of the Mourneview Ward Sure Start programme.

**(AQW 7177/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:**

- (i) Three Sure Start projects provide services in the Upper Bann constituency: Blossom, Splash and Star. The catchment areas for these projects cover several electoral wards.

The table below shows a breakdown of the funding allocated to Sure Start projects in Upper Bann<sup>1</sup> for the 2016/17 financial year.

**Sure Start Funding – Upper Bann Constituency (2016/17)**

Childcare Partnership Area	Sure Start Project	2016/17
Southern	Blossom	£652,429
Southern	Splash	£755,363 <sup>2</sup>
Southern	Star	£269,248
		<b>£1,677,040</b>

- 1 As Sure Start budgets are not allocated on a per ward basis, allocations have been presented on a Sure Start project allocation basis for the three projects that are in the Upper Bann constituency.
  - 2 Includes £100k for expansion (£14,500 of which is capital funding)
- (ii) Mourneview is incorporated within the Splash Sure Start project which previously covered four Wards and one Super Output Area in Lurgan and two Wards in Brownlow, and the housing area of Parkmore (Kernan Ward).

Funding has been allocated for the expansion of Sure Start services to the Mourneview Ward, which will also enable the creation of an additional Sure Start Developmental Programme for 2-3 Year Olds.

Families living within the Mourneview ward are already benefitting from Sure Start services with registrations continuing to increase.

**Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of Education how many children with visual impairments are in the education system; broken down by Education Authority area.  
(AQW 7178/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** In 2015/16, there were 655 pupils in schools in Northern Ireland who have 'blind' or 'partially sighted' recorded as any one of their special educational needs.

As the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) were replaced by the single Education Authority from 1 April 2015, a regional breakdown is no longer applicable.

**Source:** NI school census

**Notes:**

- 1 Figures include funded children in voluntary and private preschools, nursery schools, primary (including nursery, reception and year 1-7 classes), post-primary and special schools.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Education, further to the decision to close four outdoor pursuit centres, for his assessment of impact this would have on the general fitness and health opportunities afforded to school children, especially for children with (i) autism; (ii) attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; (iii) medical conditions and (iv) behavioural difficulties.  
(AQW 7183/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority's (EA) Review of Residential and Outdoor Education Centres provides proposals, rather than decisions, which are subject to public consultation.

The EA has confirmed, should the recommendation to close four Outdoor Education Centres proceed, that there will not be a negative impact on schools given that adequate provision and places will be provided in the remaining statutory and voluntary centres.

The EA has also outlined that the proposed increase of peripatetic services will be targeted within local communities and schools, to ensure that outdoor learning is more accessible, with increased opportunities for the participation of children and young people.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education what is the average cost of childcare.  
(AQW 7207/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** The average weekly cost of a full-time childcare place, according to the latest Employers for Childcare Northern Ireland Childcare Cost Survey, is £164 per week. This average cost relates to formal childcare settings (day nurseries and childminders).

A copy of this report can be accessed at the following link: <http://www.employersforchildcare.org/report/childcare-costs-survey-2015/>

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Education to outline why he does not support a 1 per cent pay increase for teachers for 2015-16.  
(AQW 7216/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** Teachers' terms and conditions, including pay, are negotiated through the forum of the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC). It is not appropriate for me to intervene in teachers' terms and conditions matters.

The NI Executive Pay Policy guidance sets a 1% cap for increases to public sector pay, including teachers (to include cost of living, as well as any contractual entitlement to incremental progression). As I stated in my response to your question (AQW 6695/16-21) on 11 November, as Minister of Education I have to work within these parameters and in doing so ensure that a balance is struck between acknowledging the contribution that individual teachers make to our education system with protecting as many teaching jobs as possible and while addressing the not inconsiderable financial pressures being faced by schools. With a finite budget this is not a simple task.

It is in all our interests that teachers receive recognition for the immense contribution they make to society. Every 1% increase in teachers' pay is approximately £10 million of the Education budget.

Management Side of the TNC recommended a 1% cost of living increase for teachers in 2016, in addition to incremental progression already paid to teachers for 2015, which was 0.82%, and 2016, which was 0.79%. The overall pay deal for 2015 and 2016 is therefore for 2.61% over 2 years.

The Management Side recommendation followed intense negotiations where earlier and better offers were made to the teaching unions, which they rejected and advised Management Side that the negotiations had formally ended; therefore, a pay remit business case was prepared on the basis of the 2.61% deal. This received formal approval by Department of Finance in October 2016 and teachers will receive the pay award in their November salaries.

**Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Education how parents who have not secured a pre-school place for their child can access the Big Bedtime Read resources.

**(AQW 7218/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Early Intervention Transformation Programme (EITP) is a NI Executive / Atlantic Philanthropies Delivering Social Change Signature Programme. The programme aims to improve outcomes for children and young people across Northern Ireland. Workstream 1 of the EITP utilises the strength of universal midwifery, health visiting and pre-school education services to equip all parents with the skills needed to give their child the best start in life.

The 'Big Bedtime Read' is one of four themes within 'Getting Ready to Learn' (GRtL). GRtL is an application-based programme open to all funded pre-school settings, and reception classes delivering the pre-school curriculum. The Education Authority (EA) manages the implementation of GRtL and whilst the Department and the EA encourage applications from all eligible settings, it is not compulsory. The EA will actively promote and encourage the uptake of the GRtL over the next few years, but not all settings may choose to offer the 'Big Bedtime Read' theme. The EITP overall will deliver key messages to parents about the important role they play in their children's development and offer support to parents through the delivery of 'Getting Ready for Baby and 'Getting Ready for Toddler'.

Officials will continue to work with colleagues in the Public Health Agency and Libraries NI to ensure that parents can access support and resources outside of the DSC programmes.

Although pre-school is non-compulsory over 92% of parents avail of the offer of a funded pre-school education place. With regard to the 2016/17 academic year, 99.9% of children whose parents stayed with the admissions process received the offer of a funded pre-school place in a setting of their parents' preference by the end of the pre-school admissions process. The Education Authority advised that there were places remaining available in all areas at the end of the pre-school admissions process and parents can apply for these if they wish by contacting those settings directly.

**Mr Lyons** asked the Minister of Education to detail the average spend by his Department per pupil in (i) controlled schools; (ii) maintained schools; (iii) integrated schools; and (iv) Irish-medium schools.

**(AQW 7220/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Department does not hold information on average spending per pupil. Such information would require disaggregation of central costs – e.g. administration and services such as transport, meals, Curriculum Advisory and Peripatetic Service etc. - which are not disaggregated at school or phase levels. In addition, overall expenditure will include grant-aided recurrent funding (and other non-public funds including voluntary contributions etc.), as well as capital expenditure - which, by its nature, is not regular or consistently applied across schools from year-to-year.

Every grant-aided school covered by the Common Funding Scheme receives a fully delegated budget for its day-to-day recurrent funding needs, distributed under the current Common Funding Formula arrangements. A breakdown of the budget allocations for the requested groups in the current financial year is provided below:

**2016-17 Formula funding for schools \***

Sector	Per Capita
Controlled <sup>(1)</sup>	3,480
Maintained <sup>(2)</sup>	3,560
Integrated <sup>(3)</sup>	3,898
Irish-medium <sup>(4)</sup>	3,880

\* Data source: Common Funding Formula 2016-17 including Transition and Budget Addition - excludes Voluntary Grammar schools

Notes:

- (1) Includes nursery, primary, secondary and grammar - excludes Irish Medium controlled school
- (2) Includes nursery, primary, secondary and 'Other Maintained' - excludes Irish Medium Catholic maintained schools
- (3) Includes primary and secondary, Grant-Maintained and Controlled Integrated schools
- (4) Includes primary and secondary Maintained Irish-medium, Controlled and Catholic Maintained IM schools

**Mr Lyons** asked the Minister of Education to detail his Department's spend on Special Educational Needs provision in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 7221/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The table below provides the total departmental spend on Special Education Needs provision in each of the last five years.

	2011-12 £m	2012-13 £m	2013-14 £m	2014-15 £m	2015-16* £m
<b>Total</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>252</b>

\*The 2015-16 Resource Accounts for the EA are yet to be finalised and as such may be subject to change.

The above figures include spend on statemented pupils in mainstream schools, pupils in special schools and home to school transport for statemented pupils attending primary, post-primary and special schools. The table also includes funding provided for Middletown Centre for Autism and a number of capacity building initiatives within the Review of SEN and Inclusion.

Schools are also responsible for meeting any additional needs of pupils within the first three states of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of SEN. Such funding is not separately identified from within the overall delegated budget distributed to schools, nor is it separately reported on. The level of spend by schools for these pupils cannot be disaggregated from the schools' overall expenditure.

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Education to detail all projects on the Capital Programmes Scheme for East Londonderry. **(AQW 7223/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** There are several ongoing capital programmes to improve accommodation across the schools' estate from the Department's capital budget. The Fresh Start Agreement also provides an additional earmarked funding stream for new shared and integrated education capital projects.

The following schools in the East Londonderry constituency have been announced to progress in planning.

- Rossmar Special School, Limavady
- Our Lady of Fatima, Londonderry
- Roe Valley Integrated Primary School, Limavady
- Millstrand Integrated Primary School, Portstewart
- North Coast Integrated College, Coleraine
- Limavady Share Education Campus

In addition, there is a substantive programme of work progressing under the Minor Capital Works Programme across the schools' estate. Due to the reactive nature and the volume of these works it is not possible to give a breakdown of planned projects. At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act are progressing to delivery.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Education to detail the timeline for completion of (i) each school within the Strule Shared Education Campus; and (ii) the service areas, such as playing fields.

**(AQW 7234/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The first school to be delivered as part of the Strule Shared Education Campus was Arvalee School and Resource Centre which opened on 6 September 2016.

The remainder of the campus is being delivered through three separate works packages; Site Preparation Works, Main Works Contract and Grass Pitches Contract. The campus is scheduled to be delivered for occupation and full use by all schools in September 2020.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Education, in relation to funds being made available to promote Shared Education, to outline how controlled grammar schools that are naturally shared can be assisted to avail of funding opportunities which they are currently being denied due to restrictions in the criteria.

**(AQW 7237/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** A pre-requisite to avail of funding earmarked for Shared Education is that the definition for Shared Education is met. The 2016 Shared Education Act requires the "working together and co-operation of two or more relevant providers", hence precluding a single school fulfilling the definition for Shared Education. Funding criteria for the DSC Shared Education Signature Project reflects the legislative definition.

A single school, working in isolation (including a school which attracts pupils of different religious belief and socio-economic background) cannot fully achieve the benefits that collaboration has on improved educational outcomes. However, the involvement of such schools within a partnership can be beneficial and facilitate sharing of good practice. There is no restriction on such schools working in partnership and hence availing of funding opportunities.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Education how he plans to ensure that schools in the Southern Education Authority area will have the capacity to meet future intake, based on the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency statistics on live births and population projections.

**(AQW 7243/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority's draft strategic Area Plan entitled "Providing Pathways", which is subject to public consultation from 17 October 2016 until 12 December 2016, identifies strategic priorities for action at Local Government District planning area level.

Those strategic priorities are derived from an examination of NISRA statistics on live births and population projections alongside other pertinent information available to inform the area planning function including the number and location of available places.

An Annual Action Plan will supplement the strategic Area Plan. It will contain details of the work programme of the planning and managing authorities to address specific issues at a local level.

The process of area planning is designed to ensure that there are sufficient schools of the right size and in the right place to ensure that all pupils can access educationally sustainable and financially viable schools.

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Education (i) to outline his commitment to addressing bullying; and (ii) whether he will endorse the work carried out by the NI Anti-Bullying Forum.

**(AQW 7247/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Department of Education has always been fully committed to tackling bullying in any form and whatever its motivation.

This commitment is illustrated by the funding we have provided for the last 10 years to support the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF), helping it to raise awareness of bullying and provide a range of practical support, resources and guidance to schools, parents and pupils. It can also be seen in our efforts to bring forward and complete the passage of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act 2016 during the last Assembly mandate.

The new Act had its origins in one of the recommendations of the NIABF's 2013 review of anti-bullying practice in Northern Ireland. This review was undertaken at the request of the then Education Minister and our willingness to assign this task to the Forum, and to subsequently pursue primary legislation as a direct result of its recommendations, reflects the value we attach to the Forum and the expertise of its member organisations.

My confidence in the Forum is illustrated by my recent decision to commit core funding for the Forum for 2017/18. This commitment was crucial in allowing it to successfully conclude the recruitment of a new Regional Co-ordinator for its activities.

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Education to outline why his Department (i) provides the NI Anti-Bullying Forum with a budget of only £83k per annum; and (ii) requires it to make an annual bid for funding.

**(AQW 7248/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Department provides funding for the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF) based on an agreed costed annual work programme. This programme reflects the Forum's own priorities for the year and any specific objectives the Department wishes it to take forward. In every year, the majority of the funding supports the salary of the NIABF Regional Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator.

The NIABF has had a budget underspend in each of the last five years, the largest of which was in 2015/16 and for the first six months of the current financial year, the post of Regional Co-ordinator has been vacant.

With the agreement of the Department, some of the Co-ordinator's roles were temporarily covered by staff from the National Children's Bureau (NCB). The full duties of the post have not, however, been carried out during this time.

In recognition of this, the Department reduced the funding offered to £83,000 but we do not believe this reduction will adversely impact on delivery of the agreed work programme.

In recent years Departmental budgets have been agreed on an annual basis and therefore, this has made it difficult for the Department to enter into multi-year commitments. Nonetheless, in recognition of the importance I attach to the NIABF, I recently committed to provide core funding for the Forum for the next financial year.

This decision was crucial in allowing the Forum to successfully complete the recruitment of the new Regional Co-ordinator, who took up post on 10 November 2016.

**Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the implementation of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act 2016.  
**(AQW 7249/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill received Royal Assent on 12 May 2016, becoming the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016.

This legislation will:

- Provide a common definition of bullying;

- Require all schools to centrally record incidents of bullying, their motivation and their outcome; and
- Require the Board of Governors collectively to take responsibility to the development, implementation, monitoring and periodic review of the school's anti-bullying policies and procedures

Before these provisions can be brought into force, several pieces of additional work must be undertaken. These are:

- The preparation of supporting guidance for schools, Boards of Governors, parents, and pupils clarifying how the new duties will be applied and what can be expected from schools in response to an incident or complaint.
- Training for school staff and Governors in how they discharge their duties and record each incident; and
- The creation of a new standardised recording system to be made available to all schools via the Classroom 2000 SIMS system.

My officials are working to meet these commitments and we currently expect the new provisions to be in force in time for the commencement of the 2017-18 academic year.

**Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Education to detail the amount of funding received by the NI Anti-Bullying Forum in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 7250/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF) has received funding over the last five years as follows:

- 2012/13 Total allocation up to £86,518.91, total claimed £86,494.21
- 2013/14 Total allocation up to £113,000, total claimed £112,893.41
- 2014/15 Total allocation up to £113,000, total claimed £106,872.70
- 2015/16 Total allocation up to £113,000, total claimed £92,092.99
- 2016/17 Total allocation up to £83,000, total claimed to date (for Q1 and Q2) £35,432.01

**Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown of statistics on the academic achievement of visually impaired young people compared to sighted young people relating to (i) passing GCSE at grade C or above; and (ii) progression to further/higher education, over the last five years.

**(AQW 7258/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** My Department collects information on the qualifications and destinations of all school leavers in Northern Ireland.

The below tables provide attainment and destination data for school leavers from mainstream schools whose special educational need was 'Blind' or 'Partially Sighted'. Data for all other school leavers is also included.

- (i) Number and percentage of school leavers achieving at least 1 GCSE Grade C or above (including equivalent qualifications), 2010/11– 2014/15<sup>(1)(2)(3)</sup>

Year	School leavers achieving at least 1 GCSE Grade C or above (including equivalent qualifications)			
	Blind or Partially Sighted pupils		All other pupils	
	Number	%	Number	%
2014/15	32	94.1	21769	97.5
2013/14	24	92.3	21828	96.5
2012/13	32	97.0	21876	95.2
2011/12	29	87.9	21226	94.2
2010/11	29	80.6	21225	91.8

- (ii) Number and percentage of school leavers whose main destination was Higher or Further Education, 2010/11 – 2014/15<sup>(1)(2)(3)</sup>

Year	School leavers whose main destination was Higher or Further Education			
	Blind or Partially Sighted pupils		All other pupils	
	Number	%	Number	%
2014/15	29	85.3	17265	77.3
2013/14	17	65.4	17457	77.2
2012/13	23	69.7	17706	77.1
2011/12	26	78.8	17339	76.9

Year	School leavers whose main destination was Higher or Further Education			
	Blind or Partially Sighted pupils		All other pupils	
	Number	%	Number	%
2010/11	28	77.8	17175	74.3

**Source:** School Leavers survey

- 1 Excludes special and independent schools.
- 2 School leavers detailed in the above tables may have other special educational need types in addition to, or in isolation of, visual impairment.
- 3 Percentages derived from base numbers of less than 100 should be viewed with caution to avoid drawing unwarranted conclusions from the data.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Education for an update on talks with National Association of Schoolmasters and Women Teachers over teachers' pay.

**(AQW 7278/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Matters in relation to Teachers' Terms and Conditions, including pay, are for the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC) as the recognised negotiating machinery, at which I am represented on the Management Side.

Management Side regularly meet with the NASUWT as part of their work on TNC and I understand a meeting took place on Tuesday 22 November 2016.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the new Strabane Academy site.

**(AQW 7279/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Strabane Academy was included in the capital investment statement of 22 January 2013 as one of 22 primary and post-primary schools to advance in planning.

A Business Case was approved in January 2014 to build a new post-primary school for 700 pupils at an estimated cost of £21.5m.

Design work is well underway and procurement documentation is being prepared to tender for a Contractor to take forward the construction work. The Pre-Tender Estimate was submitted to the Department for consideration in October and it is anticipated that the project will come before the Planning Committee early January 2017.

Following approval of the PTE and receipt of planning approval the tender process is expected to commence January 2017. The tender report is due to be submitted to DE towards the end of March 2017 and work is expected to commence on site May 2017 with project completion October 2019.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Education to list each Ministerial Direction he has issued since May 2016. including (i) the date; (ii) its purpose (iii) whether he was overruling any concerns of officials either before or after the Direction; and (iv) whether each Direction was accompanied by a full business case.

**(AQW 7293/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Since coming into office I have not issued any Ministerial Directions.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education to detail what his Department is doing to address non-attendance in post-primary schools.

**(AQW 7310/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Departmental Circular 2015/02 Attendance Guidance & Absence Recording by Schools sets out guidance for schools on the management of pupil attendance. This circular includes a sample school attendance policy and good practice advice for schools.

Within each school's attendance policy, it is recommended that they clearly document their approach to managing absenteeism. This will allow them to take account of the individual circumstances of each school. In circumstances where a school's efforts are unsuccessful in improving the attendance record of a pupil with a high level of absenteeism, they are able to refer the pupil to the Education Authority's Education Welfare Service.

The Department funds the Education Welfare Service (EWS) through the Education Authority to provide assistance and support to schools, pupils and parents on attendance matters. The EWS are involved in the delivery of a number of pro-active interventions to assist pupils in making the transition to post-primary schools.

The Department are currently developing an Improving Pupil Attendance Strategy and it is anticipated that it will be published in the coming weeks. The Department also continues to promote school attendance with a new leaflet being issued to all

pupils/parents in the coming weeks and will continue to engage with other Departments and Agencies to promote pupil attendance.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage of pupils achieving five GCSEs at grades A\* to C (and equivalents) not including GCSE English and Maths for each year over the last three years, broken down by local council area. **(AQW 7313/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** My Department collects information on the qualifications and destinations of all school leavers in Northern Ireland.

For each of the past three years, the below tables detail the number and percentage of school leavers in each district council who achieved:

- (a) at least five GCSEs at grades A\* to C (including equivalents)  
 (b) at least five GCSEs at grades A\* to C (including equivalents) including GCSE English and Maths.

**(a) Number and percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs A\*-C (including equivalent qualifications), 2012/13– 2014/15<sup>(1)</sup>**

District Council <sup>(2)</sup>	School Leavers achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications)					
	2012/13		2013/14		2014/15	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Antrim and Newtownabbey	1361	81.3	1313	78.1	1285	80.9
Ards and North Down	1347	76.0	1356	76.6	1327	76.9
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	2046	78.1	1942	76.3	1940	81.1
Belfast	2750	74.2	2667	75.9	2792	79.2
Causeway Coast and Glens	1411	80.2	1469	82.7	1385	82.3
Derry City and Strabane	1688	80.8	1688	76.4	1767	82.0
Fermanagh and Omagh	1253	85.7	1272	83.7	1199	82.4
Lisburn and Castlereagh	1355	81.8	1396	84.2	1383	85.8
Mid and East Antrim	1256	75.0	1302	82.0	1389	82.1
Mid Ulster	1531	78.8	1444	77.6	1581	81.7
Newry, Mourne and Down	1915	79.5	1820	77.2	1974	80.2
Invalid/Missing/Unknown Postcodes	151	63.7	124	78.5	111	81.0
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>18064</b>	<b>78.5</b>	<b>17793</b>	<b>78.6</b>	<b>18133</b>	<b>81.1</b>

**Source:** School Leavers survey

- 1 Excludes special and independent schools.  
 2 District Council of pupil residence is based on the residential postcode of each individual pupil and the 2014 Local Government District boundaries.

**(b) Number and percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs A\*-C (including equivalent qualifications) including GCSE English and maths, 2012/13– 2014/15<sup>(1)</sup>**

District Council <sup>(2)</sup>	School Leavers achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications) including GCSE English and maths					
	2012/13		2013/14		2014/15	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Antrim and Newtownabbey	1029	61.5	1014	60.3	1061	66.8
Ards and North Down	1135	64.1	1146	64.7	1151	66.7
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	1614	61.6	1615	63.4	1630	68.1
Belfast	2030	54.8	2028	57.7	2121	60.2
Causeway Coast and Glens	1088	61.9	1140	64.2	1031	61.3

District Council <sup>(2)</sup>	School Leavers achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications) including GCSE English and maths					
	2012/13		2013/14		2014/15	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Derry City and Strabane	1281	61.3	1296	58.7	1363	63.2
Fermanagh and Omagh	1028	70.3	1075	70.8	1009	69.3
Lisburn and Castlereagh	1151	69.5	1239	74.8	1187	73.6
Mid and East Antrim	1020	60.9	1062	66.9	1145	67.7
Mid Ulster	1243	64.0	1139	61.2	1284	66.4
Newry, Mourne and Down	1574	65.3	1535	65.1	1702	69.2
Invalid/Missing/Unknown Postcodes	110	46.2	84	53.2	69	50.4
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>14303</b>	<b>62.2</b>	<b>14373</b>	<b>63.5</b>	<b>14753</b>	<b>66.0</b>

Source: School Leavers survey

- 1 Excludes special and independent schools.
- 2 District Council of pupil residence is based on the residential postcode of each individual pupil and the 2014 Local Government District boundaries.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage of pupils achieving five GCSEs at grades A\* to C (and equivalents) including GCSE English and Maths in each of the last three years, broken down by local council area.

**(AQW 7314/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** My Department collects information on the qualifications and destinations of all school leavers in Northern Ireland.

For each of the past three years, the below tables detail the number and percentage of school leavers in each district council who achieved:

- (c) at least five GCSEs at grades A\* to C (including equivalents)
- (d) at least five GCSEs at grades A\* to C (including equivalents) including GCSE English and Maths.

**(a) Number and percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs A\*-C (including equivalent qualifications), 2012/13– 2014/15<sup>(1)</sup>**

District Council <sup>(2)</sup>	School Leavers achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications)					
	2012/13		2013/14		2014/15	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Antrim and Newtownabbey	1361	81.3	1313	78.1	1285	80.9
Ards and North Down	1347	76.0	1356	76.6	1327	76.9
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	2046	78.1	1942	76.3	1940	81.1
Belfast	2750	74.2	2667	75.9	2792	79.2
Causeway Coast and Glens	1411	80.2	1469	82.7	1385	82.3
Derry City and Strabane	1688	80.8	1688	76.4	1767	82.0
Fermanagh and Omagh	1253	85.7	1272	83.7	1199	82.4
Lisburn and Castlereagh	1355	81.8	1396	84.2	1383	85.8
Mid and East Antrim	1256	75.0	1302	82.0	1389	82.1
Mid Ulster	1531	78.8	1444	77.6	1581	81.7
Newry, Mourne and Down	1915	79.5	1820	77.2	1974	80.2
Invalid/Missing/Unknown Postcodes	151	63.7	124	78.5	111	81.0
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>18064</b>	<b>78.5</b>	<b>17793</b>	<b>78.6</b>	<b>18133</b>	<b>81.1</b>

Source: School Leavers survey

- 3 Excludes special and independent schools.
- 4 District Council of pupil residence is based on the residential postcode of each individual pupil and the 2014 Local Government District boundaries.

**(b) Number and percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs A\*-C (including equivalent qualifications) including GCSE English and maths, 2012/13– 2014/15<sup>(1)</sup>**

District Council <sup>(2)</sup>	School Leavers achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications) including GCSE English and maths					
	2012/13		2013/14		2014/15	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Antrim and Newtownabbey	1029	61.5	1014	60.3	1061	66.8
Ards and North Down	1135	64.1	1146	64.7	1151	66.7
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	1614	61.6	1615	63.4	1630	68.1
Belfast	2030	54.8	2028	57.7	2121	60.2
Causeway Coast and Glens	1088	61.9	1140	64.2	1031	61.3
Derry City and Strabane	1281	61.3	1296	58.7	1363	63.2
Fermanagh and Omagh	1028	70.3	1075	70.8	1009	69.3
Lisburn and Castlereagh	1151	69.5	1239	74.8	1187	73.6
Mid and East Antrim	1020	60.9	1062	66.9	1145	67.7
Mid Ulster	1243	64.0	1139	61.2	1284	66.4
Newry, Mourne and Down	1574	65.3	1535	65.1	1702	69.2
Invalid/Missing/Unknown Postcodes	110	46.2	84	53.2	69	50.4
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>14303</b>	<b>62.2</b>	<b>14373</b>	<b>63.5</b>	<b>14753</b>	<b>66.0</b>

**Source:** School Leavers survey

- 3 Excludes special and independent schools.
- 4 District Council of pupil residence is based on the residential postcode of each individual pupil and the 2014 Local Government District boundaries.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister of Education whether he is aware that as a result of an ongoing landlord dispute, Blackwater Integrated College has nearly half a million pounds in rent sitting in a bank account.

**(AQW 7318/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Officials from my Department and the Education Authority continue to engage in relation to Blackwater Integrated College.

Grant funding of £487k, based on rental valuations provided by Land and Property Services, was allocated to Blackwater Integrated College in respect of the rental of school premises for the period 1 September 2008 to 31 March 2012. The College has been advised by my Department to hold this funding in reserve, pending receipt of agreed rental invoices from the Landlord.

**Mr McGrath** asked the Minister of Education to detail the deficit or surplus position per the submitted three year financial plan that Principals make each year for every primary school in each year since 2013.

**(AQW 7339/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

The information provided is in respect of Controlled/Maintained schools only. Similar data is not available for Grant-Maintained Integrated (GMI) schools, for which my Department is the Funding Authority. GMI schools are not reported on in the same way as each other (the same accounting policies are not used by all) or in the same way as Controlled/Maintained schools for which the Education Authority (EA) (formerly Education and Library Boards) is the Funding Authority.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister of Education how much has been spent on legal fees on cases related to the assessment of Special Educational Needs from 2011 to 2016.

**(AQW 7340/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** From 2011 to date, Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST) cases have been handled on an in-house basis by either Education Authority (EA) Solicitors or officers in Special Education within the EA. Solicitors' fees have not therefore been incurred.

Counsel, however, has been instructed in a small number of special educational needs (SEN) cases where appeals have been lodged with SENDIST. Figures indicate that to date, £33,839.65 (including VAT where appropriate) has been incurred by the EA / former Education and Library Boards in Counsel's fees, in regard to a number of SENDIST cases since 1 April 2011.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister of Education to detail how many legal cases relating to Special Educational Needs are currently (i) in progress; or (ii) pending against the Education Authority.

**(AQW 7341/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The number of legal cases against the Education Authority, relating to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST), are as follows:

- (i) 36 cases are in progress, i.e. registered with SENDIST but not yet heard; and
- (ii) 15 cases are pending, i.e. cases have been heard and awaiting outcome.

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Education how many gateway reviews have been completed into the Education Authority.

**(AQW 7342/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** A Gateway review of the Education Authority Implementation Programme was completed in March 2015. It is intended that there will be a further review early in the New Year.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Education for an update on all capital works to be completed at Saint Mary's Primary School, Cloughcor.

**(AQW 7352/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** There are currently no Capital works to be completed at St Mary's Primary School. However, my Department received three Minor Capital Works applications from the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) in June 2016. These included works for fire safety, roof structure and access control to modular buildings. The three applications have all been prioritised as Category 1 schemes (that is minor works schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health & Safety, Fire Protection and our statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act) and are currently with the Education Authority (EA) for scoping and an estimate of costs.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education to detail the religious background of people availing of Sure Start Services.

**(AQW 7381/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Sure Start Provision is non-sectoral and is accessible to all children aged under four years and their families, from all backgrounds, living within the 25% most disadvantaged areas<sup>1</sup> in Northern Ireland.

Participation in the Sure Start Programme is a matter of parental choice.

The Department of Education does not routinely collate information on the religious background of those availing of Sure Start Services and the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), which administer Sure Start on DE's behalf, advises that recording of religion is not a mandatory requirement for Sure Start registration.

The table below shows a breakdown provided by HSCB detailing the available religious background data of adults, as self-reported, availing of Sure Start Services as at 31 March 2016<sup>2</sup>.

As it is not mandatory for Sure Start users to provide details of their religion, the figures may not be comprehensive. The Department is therefore unable to validate or confirm the accuracy of the information within the table, or how representative it is of the Sure Start programme as a whole.

Religious Background - those Availing of Sure Start Services\*

Religion of Adult Attending	31/03/2016
Catholic	19058
Protestant	6114
Other Christian	564
Hindu	157

1 as identified by the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures (NIMDM 2010).

2 HSCB advises that the figures are a snapshot of registered users as at 31st March 2016, it does not include users who were deregistered during the year. Children figures also include 4 years olds who were registered, it is not possible to separate religion figures for 0-3 year olds.

Religion of Adult Attending	31/03/2016
Buddhist	24
Muslim	236
Islam	53
Other Religion	278
Atheism	79
Not known/Not provided	9907
Other	67
<b>Total</b>	<b>36537</b>

\* **Source:** HSCB Sure Start Play Database.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education to detail how his Department measures the impact of Sure Start Services.  
(AQW 7382/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** The Department of Education (DE) has overall responsibility for policy and funding of the Sure Start Programme. The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has operational responsibility for the delivery of Sure Start, through the Childcare Partnerships in each of the Trust areas.

The DE Sure Start Outcomes Framework was developed during 2014/15 which established a set of high level objectives for the Programme. The Outcomes Framework provides the basis for measuring the effectiveness and impact of Sure Start in terms of:

- Improved Language Skills
- Early Identification of Developmental Delay
- Enhanced Parenting Skills
- Improved Access to Services
- Effectively Integrated Services.

Targets are agreed between DE and HSCB at the beginning of each financial year related to achievement of the outcomes. HSCB is required to provide six monthly updates to DE on progress.

DE provides funding to the HSCB for the Sure Start database 'Sure Start Play'. This facilitates effective monitoring of activity and service delivery within Sure Start projects, on a consistent and regional basis.

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Education to detail all maintenance works which have been carried out in schools across the Strabane district in the past year.  
(AQW 7404/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority (EA) is responsible for undertaking maintenance work in controlled and maintained schools. Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated Schools are responsible for their own maintenance; therefore the Department does not hold information on maintenance works carried out in these schools.

The following table details maintenance works carried out by the EA in the Strabane district in the 2015/16 financial year.

School Name	Description of Works
Altishane Primary School (PS)	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
Ardstraw PS	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works including external decoration
Artigarvan PS	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
Bready Jubilee PS	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
Castleberg HS	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
Donemana PS	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
Edwards PS	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works including oil storage facility
Erganagh PS	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
Evish PS	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works including redecoration
Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works

School Name	Description of Works
Killen PS	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works including boiler modification
Knockavoe Special School	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
Loughash PS	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works including oil storage facility
Newtownstewart Model PS	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works including oil storage facility
Sion Mills PS	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
St Brigid's PS, Cranagh	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works including oil storage facility
St Caireall's PS	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
St Catherine's PS, (Barrack Street site)	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
St Catherine's PS (Newtownkennedy Street site)	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works including roofing and oil storage facility
St Columba's PS, Clady	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
St Eugene's PS, Victoria Bridge	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
St Joseph's PS, Glenmornan	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
St Mary's Nursery, Strabane	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
St Mary's PS, Cloughcor	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
St Mary's PS, Strabane Junior Site	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
St Mary's PS, Strabane Senior Site	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
St Patricks PS, Castledearg	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
St Patrick's PS, Dunamanagh	Architect Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
St Patrick's PS, Newtownstewart	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works including roofing and oil storage facility
St Peter's, Plumbridge	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works including oil storage facility, convector heaters and lighting upgrade
St Theresa's PS, Glebe	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works including oil storage and resurfacing
Strabane Academy, Derry Rd	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
Strabane Academy, Liskey Road	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works
Strabane PS	Statutory and General Response Maintenance works including redecoration

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Education to detail what funding is available for schools in West Tyrone that are looking to pursue Shared Education initiatives.

**(AQW 7405/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** Schools in West Tyrone that meet the eligibility criteria can apply for funding from the £25m Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project.

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Education to detail all maintenance works planned for schools across the Strabane district for the next year.

**(AQW 7406/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority (EA) is responsible for undertaking maintenance work for the controlled and maintained schools estates.

The EA has advised that within its budget allocation, maintenance works in the current financial year are restricted to statutory and emergency response maintenance and urgent health and safety works e.g. servicing of gas installations, asbestos surveys, legionella management and day to day requests for urgent emergency repairs such as heating breakdown. As such, there is no planned programme of works.

Maintenance works in 2017/18 will be subject to available budget. If budget is available for planned works, then a prioritised programme will be identified from the current condition surveys / maintenance backlog and implemented accordingly across Northern Ireland.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Education what assistance is provided to (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools to provide pupils with in-school access to suicide prevention and awareness campaigns.

**(AQW 7423/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Department of Education is very aware of the pressures facing young people today and works closely with schools to promote positive mental health and wellbeing of pupils and has provided a range of support. This includes:

- Suicide prevention guidance for schools was published in March 2016 which focuses on supporting schools in reducing the incidence of suicide and self-harm. Additional resources on suicide and self-harm have also been developed and issued to schools in September 2016.
- A "Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools" along with a supporting DVD was published on 10 February 2014 to help schools be prepared for a critical incident and to ensure effective management and support before, during and after the event.
- The Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS) offers support for pupils of post-primary age and provides in excess of 39,000 counselling sessions annually.
- The Revised Curriculum for primary and post-primary schools has elements designed to develop the young person as an individual and to make them aware of the stressors in their lives and help build their capacity to deal with them.
- The "iMatter" Programme includes resources intended to support the entire school community to be engaged in promoting resilient emotional health for all pupils. The resources are designed for young people in post-primary school and provide hints and tips on coping with emotional issues, including useful telephone numbers, websites and details of organisations that can provide assistance for particular problems.
- The Department of Education is a member of and funds the local Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF) which brings together local statutory and voluntary organisations to help schools and organisations working with young people to develop appropriate strategies to prevent and deal with bullying behaviours.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Education to publish the full sectoral audit conducted by his Department identifying possible impacts, risks, opportunities and contingencies which may arise from Brexit; and whether he has approved the same.

**(AQW 7448/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** This information will be used to inform our input to the UK Government's negotiations and it would not be appropriate to publish it at this time.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Education, in relation to funds being made available to promote Shared Education how much funding has been (i) allocated; (ii) unallocated to schools; and (iii) to detail the cut-off date for applications to the Shared Education Signature Project.

**(AQW 7466/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:**

- (i) Total expenditure to end of September for the Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project is £3.097m. £2,432,721 has been made available to schools;
- (ii) £21.003m remains unallocated to cover administration and support roles, a capacity building strategy as well as funding to schools for the remaining period of their projects;
- (iii) There is no cut-off date for applications to the Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project, although the programme is due to end June 2019.

**Ms Bunting** asked the Minister of Education, regarding the Education Authority's consultation document on Outdoor Education Centres in which the Centres were ranked, with four listed for closure and four for retention, to outline (i) what criteria were used to rank the centres; and (ii) how these were applied to determine the overall rank.

**(AQW 7576/16-21)**

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority has provided the following information in relation to the criteria used to determine the proposed rationalisation of Outdoor Education Centres:-

- Maintenance Backlog;
  - Percentage Residential Occupancy;
  - Percentage Net Costs;
  - Proximity to Nearest Statutory and Voluntary Centres; and
  - Education and Training Inspectorate Report Assessment.
- (ii) In order to determine the overall rank, each Centre was ranked on a scale of 1 to 8 and awarded a score on the following basis:
    - Maintenance Backlog - the centre with the greatest need was ranked highest and the centre with least need marked lowest;

- Percentage Residential Occupancy - the centre with the highest occupancy (in percentage terms) of school users was ranked lowest and the centre with the least occupancy ranked highest;
- Percentage Net Costs - centres were ranked on the percentage Net Cost of Operation with the centre with the least net cost being ranked lowest and the centre with the greatest net cost highest;
- Proximity to Nearest Voluntary and Statutory Centres - each centre was ranked separately on the proximity to another Statutory Centre and the closest Voluntary Centre. The centre furthest away from another Statutory Centre was ranked lowest, the closest ranked highest. Similarly the centre furthest away from a Voluntary Centre was ranked lowest while the closest centre was ranked highest;
- Education and Training Inspectorate Report assessment - centres were ranked on their most recent ETI Report, the centre with the highest assessment was ranked lowest while the centre with the lowest assessment report was ranked highest.

To calculate the overall score, and ranking, a tally of the individual centre scores was completed and the centre with the lowest total was ranked 1 and the centre with the highest total was ranked 8.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Education when will he answer AQW 6555/16-21.  
(AQW 7777/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** I refer the member to AQW 6555/16-21 which was answered on 22 November 2016.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Education, in relation to his discussions with the Welsh Education Minister; (i) whether he asked her about the recent introduction of a statutory presumption against rural school closures in Wales; and (ii) what advice or guidance did she give him on the issue.

(AQW 8018/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** I met with the Welsh Education Secretary Kirsty Williams and a number of officials following the British Irish Council Summit in Wales on Friday 25th November.

The meeting was arranged to establish and foster ongoing engagement between the devolved administrations. It was agreed that there were benefits to sharing emerging policy and best practice on a range of mutual education matters.

Whilst we had an opportunity to discuss issues at a strategic level, we did not have an opportunity to discuss any one policy area in more detail. I look forward to engaging with Ministers in Wales and other administrations in the future.

**Mr Aiken** asked the Minister of Education pursuant to AQW 7164/16-21, to detail the total number of Outdoor Education Centres.

(AQW 8025/16-21)

**Mr Weir:** The Education Authority (EA) have provided the following information:

There are eleven Statutory Outdoor Education Centres of which 8 are catered and 3 are self-catered.

There are 7 Voluntary Outdoor Education Centres of which 5 are catered and 2 are self-catered.

**Statutory Outdoor Education Centres (Catered):**

- |                |                     |
|----------------|---------------------|
| ■ Ardnabannon; | ■ Killowen;         |
| ■ Bushmills;   | ■ Killyleagh;       |
| ■ Delamont;    | ■ Shannaghmore; and |
| ■ Gortatole;   | ■ Woodhall.         |

**Statutory Outdoor Education Centres (Self-catered):**

- |               |              |
|---------------|--------------|
| ■ Ballyhome;  | ■ Derganagh. |
| ■ Corick; and |              |

There are 7 Voluntary Outdoor Education Centres of which 5 are catered and 2 are self-catered.

**Voluntary Outdoor Education Centres (Catered):**

- |                  |              |
|------------------|--------------|
| ■ Crawfordsburn; | ■ Lorne; and |
| ■ Ganaway;       | ■ Share.     |
| ■ Greenhill;     |              |

**Voluntary Outdoor Education Centres (Self-catered):**

- Rocky Mountain; and
- Shepherd's Lodge.

## Department for the Economy

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister for the Economy whether there are legislative measures that banks must follow when proposing to close rural bank branches, especially when it is the last remaining branch in a particular rural area.

**(AQW 2380/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy):** Banks are a financial service and as such this is a reserved issue, falling within the remit of the HM Treasury.

**Mr Aiken** asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the review of the Strategic Energy Framework.

**(AQW 2462/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** I am currently considering how best to progress a Northern Ireland energy strategy that will seek to address our short and medium term needs but also positions us to meet the longer-term challenges to 2030 and beyond.

**Mr Aiken** asked the Minister for the Economy how many wind farms were connected to the Northern Ireland electricity grid between April 2011 and September 2016.

**(AQW 2463/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** Grid connection is a matter for NIE Networks who retain the information requested. They have advised, however, that the data would take a significant amount of time and resources to collate.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister for the Economy how his Department is attracting jobs to Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

**(AQW 2471/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** Invest NI continues to work closely with all relevant Councils to support the development of Community Plans and assist the identification of unique propositions to help attract investment into Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

Invest NI's Regional Office in Omagh acts as a focal point for Invest NI's activity in the Western Region, including Fermanagh and South Tyrone offering advice and support to businesses in the area helping them to grow and create more jobs. The Regional Office also provides a link and input to the Invest NI overseas sales teams to assist in their inward investment promotion work.

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister for the Economy whether he is aware of any evidence that windfarms interfere with television reception.

**(AQW 2839/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** I am not aware of any evidence with regard to this issue.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister for the Economy what plans are in place to promote golf tourism.

**(AQW 2897/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** Tourism NI is leading on a new Golf Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland, which aims to grow the value of golf tourism to £50 million a year by 2020.

Tourism NI promotes golf tourism on its website [www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com), and through blogs and social media and media publications. Tourism NI also delivers a programme of familiarisation visits for both media and travel trade. Northern Ireland's quality assured clubs also feature in Tourism Northern Ireland's campaign in the Republic of Ireland market which includes television, outdoor, press and online advertising.

Tourism NI will also promote the 2017 Dubai Duty Free Irish Open in preparation for The Open Championship in 2019.

Tourism Ireland also has an extensive programme of promotions under way this year, to highlight our world-class golf and encourage more people to consider a golfing holiday in Northern Ireland. For example, in the US, Tourism Ireland's 30-second 'Home of Champions' advertisement highlighted our world-class golf (including the fact that Royal Portrush will host The Open in 2019) on the hugely popular NBC Golf Channel during the Ryder Cup.

Tourism Ireland engages in co-operative advertising campaigns in GB, in partnership with top online golf tour operators Your Golf Travel and Golfbreaks.

Working with overseas travel, lifestyle and special interest media is an important element of Tourism Ireland's overseas golf promotional programme. For example, the Strand Course at Portstewart appears on the cover of the autumn edition of a leading American golf magazine, called LINKS, following the visit of a journalist from the publication earlier this year. A sample itinerary provided in the article suggests playing Ardglass, Castlerock, Portstewart, Ballyliffin, Royal Portrush and Royal County Down.

Tourism Ireland has an annual presence alongside Northern Ireland industry partners at major international golfing events such as the PGA Golf Merchandise Show in Orlando and the BMW PGA Championship at Wentworth.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for the Economy to ensure that his Department engages fully and meaningfully with Irish Central Border Area Network on the Fibre at a Crossroads Report.

**(AQW 3403/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** Officials from my Department have met with representatives from the Irish Central Border Area Network on several occasions regarding this report. I also met with representatives from this group on 24th October for a briefing on the findings and recommendations of the Report. My officials will continue to follow-up with those relevant stakeholders where an outcome that contributes to the Programme for Government can be clearly achieved.

**Mr Chambers** asked the Minister for the Economy how much the tourism sector contributed to the local economy during the past five calendar years, represented as a percentage.

**(AQW 3548/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:**

Year	Tourism Contribution to the local economy %
2011	4.5% of NI GVA*
2012	Figure not available**
2013	5.2% of total NI GDP*** 4.4% of NI GVA*
2014	Figure not available****
2015	Figure not available****

\* Source: Office for National Statistics

\*\* ONS did not release regional level (NI) estimates in 2012

\*\*\* Source: Deloitte, 'Tourism: Jobs and Growth. The economic contribution of the tourism economy in the UK', 2013

\*\*\*\* ONS has not yet produced tourism economic impact figures for 2014 or 2015. TSAs are based on UK National Accounts and these do not become available until 18 months or more after the end of year reference date.

**Note:** Gross Domestic Product (GDP) equates to Gross Value Added (GVA) plus taxes on products and services minus subsidies on products and services

**Mr Smith** asked the Minister for the Economy in how many European research projects are local universities currently involved.

**(AQW 3693/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** The Department does not hold this collective information.

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister for the Economy whether his Department is due to achieve the target of 40 per cent of energy generation being from renewable sources by 2020.

**(AQO 320/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** The latest official figure published by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency shows that during the 12 month period between April 2015 and March 2016, 25.4% of our electricity consumption was from renewable sources such as wind, solar photovoltaic, combined heat and power and hydro.

With a further 700 megawatts of committed renewables projects with grid connection offers, plus 200 megawatts of offers still to be made, I am confident the Executive's 2020 target of 40% can be achieved over the next few years.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister for the Economy how much the Executive has drawn down from European funding in support of agri-food innovation over each of the last three years; and to detail the targets for draw down for the next two years.

**(AQW 4487/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** Invest NI via the Grant for R&D scheme, which was part funded with European Regional Development Funds drew down the following amounts of European Funding relating to agri-food innovation:

- 2013/14 £326,422
- 2014/15 £642,726
- 2015/16 £373,738

Invest NI has offered a further £1,564,330 of EU funded grant for R&D to companies to support agri-food innovation, for projects due to complete by 2020.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister for the Economy how many females left their apprenticeship before completion in (i) 2013-14; (ii) 2014-15; and (iii) 2015-16.

**(AQW 4647/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** The table below details the number of females who left ApprenticeshipsNI in each of the academic years 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015 /16 and of these, the number and percentage who left without achieving their targeted qualification.

**Female ApprenticeshipsNI Leavers, 2013/14 - 2015/16**

	<b>Total Female Apprenticeships</b>	<b>Females Who Left Before Gaining Targeted Qualification</b>	
2013/14	3,165	879	28%
2014/15	2,235	717	32%
2015/16	1,669	588	35%

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the value of exports to other European Union regions or countries generated by companies from (i) Omagh; and (ii) Strabane which his Department has supported, in each of the last five years.  
**(AQW 4738/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** My Department does not hold this information for the areas, or time period, requested.

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on EnergyWise Scheme, including a breakdown of the costs incurred in each year since its introduction.

**(AQW 5071/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** The EnergyWise scheme has not been introduced.

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the number of tourist visitors to each county in the last financial year.  
**(AQW 5104/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** Figures for counties are not available. The 2015 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency statistics for visits by Local Government District give the most up to date local data and are available at <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/economy/Local-Government-District-Publication-2015-%28July-2016%29.pdf>

**Mr McAleer** asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the Fibre At A Crossroads report commissioned by Irish Central Border Area Network; and what plans his Department has to work with BT to ensure Fibre to the Premises is rolled out.

**(AQW 5307/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** I met with the Irish Central Border Area Network on 24th October for a briefing on the findings and recommendations of the 'Fibre at a Crossroads' Report.

I welcome the effort and enthusiasm of the group in studying this complex matter and the contribution this report will make to consideration of the range of issues involved in making future plans. The types of issues raised affect many people across Northern Ireland and I would also encourage the group to use these findings to contribute to the current Programme for Government consultation.

The telecommunications market in Northern Ireland, as in other regions of the UK, is fully privatised and independently regulated. Decisions on where and when to invest are taken on a commercial basis. My Department has limited powers to intervene only where it can be demonstrated that the market has failed, but it must comply with European Union competition rules and regulations.

My Department is managing the delivery of the Superfast Roll-out Programme. It is expected that, by 31 December 2017, this will provide access to superfast broadband, with speeds of at least 24 Megabits per second, to around 39,000 premises, primarily in rural areas. This includes Fibre to the Premises technology.

The Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project will further extend broadband coverage and provide access to standard 2Mbps broadband to 96% of premises and 24 Mbps to around 85% of premises. This project was due to complete in March 2016 but the availability of specific reinvestment funds will allow it to continue into 2017. The total project value is £23.68m with £19.3m of public sector funding and £4.38m funding from BT.

The intervention areas for my Department's current projects on improving broadband are identified through complex engineering models prepared by BT under their contracts with the Department. The aim is always to ensure value for money, while maximising the number of premises that benefit from the funding available. The deployment of Fibre to the Premises technology is used where it represents value for money. Even should new funding be made available it will be important to ensure that appropriate technology is used where it represents value for money.

It is important to recognise that there are alternative technologies that can be used to deliver broadband services. The Department provides support under the Better Broadband Scheme, with the cost of installing a basic broadband service (using satellite or wireless technology), from a list of registered suppliers. Aimed at premises that cannot access services greater than 2Mbps, this scheme ensures that no eligible household or business need pay more than £400 to access a basic broadband scheme, over a 12 month period. Further details can be found on DfE's website at:

<http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-better-broadband-scheme>

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister for the Economy how much of the £70,000 InvestNI funding drawn down by Armaghdown Creameries was used for the Banbridge creamery; and what level of support was provided for capital investment in Banbridge.

**(AQW 5309/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** All of the £70,000 funding was drawn down against investment at the Armaghdown Creamery in Banbridge.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister for the Economy how his Department has helped fund the cost of market intelligence and statistics for the agri-food sector, particularly in consumer food markets.

**(AQW 5391/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** My Department, through Invest NI, funds the cost of market intelligence by providing, free of charge, access to research for all major food sectors including sector market intelligence reports, and Mintel and Canadean analysis of consumer market sizes, forecasts and trends.

More specifically, Invest NI also funds the Dunnhumby Market Intelligence Service which is based on Tesco Club card data. Invest NI will pay the £193K cost per annum for 3 years, and the consumer market intelligence outputs will be provided free of charge to participating Agri-Food businesses.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for the Economy whether his Department consulted Invest NI and InterTrade Ireland before making its input into the Executive's negotiations on the outcome of the referendum on membership of the European Union.

**(AQW 5469/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** My officials are contributing to the work of an Inter-departmental Coordinating Group established to support and advise the Executive on preparations for the UK leaving the European Union. Their task is to ensure that issues falling within my Department's responsibilities are properly addressed.

Arrangements have been put in place to ensure that all business areas from across my Department and its Arms Length Bodies (including Invest NI and IntertradeIreland) feed into our assessment and analysis of the implications of referendum outcome.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the driving qualifications required for ministerial drivers when employed by (i) his Department; and (ii) himself or his party.

**(AQW 5572/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** All Ministerial drivers must possess a current driving licence entitling them to drive in accordance with the Road Traffic Act (Northern Ireland) 1970.

Neither myself, nor my party, employs a driver to allow me to carry out my official duties as Minister for the Economy.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for the Economy what steps his Department intends to take to ensure that maximum spend is achieved from the European Social Fund 2014-2020.

**(AQW 5574/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** My Department aims to commit the full financial allocation for the Programme through a second call for applications.

For priority Axes 1 & 2, the current financial commitment extends to March 2018. The Department intends to commence preparatory work and issue a further call for applications in 2017 with a view to having projects approved for April 2018 and committing the entirety of the remaining funding allocation up to 2022.

For Priority Axis 3, the existing Letter of Offer (in respect of Apprenticeships NI) covers the period up until March 2017. Additional government programmes will be incorporated in early 2017. It remains the Department's intention to commit the remainder of its Priority 3 allocation (circa £145m) in 2017-2018.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister for the Economy what actions his Department is taking to address the gaps in rural broadband in areas like Kearney and Quinton Bay outside Portaferry or Castle Meadows Cloughy.

**(AQW 5577/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** Telecoms is a reserved matter and the market is fully privatised and independently regulated. My Department cannot compel a provider to invest in infrastructure or deploy services. Public intervention can be used to encourage

investment. However, these are ultimately business decisions taken by providers. Using the limited powers afforded under the Communications Act 2003, my Department has made significant investments in initiatives aimed at increasing the quality of broadband infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

Under my Department's Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project, BT has reported, at 30 June 2016, that some 3,226 premises in the Strangford Constituency have benefited, of which 853 have taken up new broadband services delivered through this project. The contract, with BT, has a mechanism which requires funding to be returned for re-investment when take up of service exceeds a certain threshold. This will allow more premises to see improvements, including in the Strangford Constituency.

My Department is also currently delivering the Superfast Roll-out Programme. This project is expected to provide access to superfast broadband, with speeds of at least 24 Megabits per second, to a further 39,000 premises by 31 December 2017 including the Strangford constituency. Details of the current roll-out plans at 5 digit postcode level can be found at <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/superfast-rollout-programme-phase-2>.

It is important to recognise that there are alternative technologies that can be used to deliver broadband services. The Department provides support under the Better Broadband Scheme, with the cost of installing a basic broadband service (using satellite or wireless technology), from a list of registered suppliers. Aimed at premises that cannot access services greater than 2Mbps, this scheme ensures that no eligible household or business need pay more than £400 to access a basic broadband scheme, over a 12 month period. Further details can be found on DfE's website at:

<http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-better-broadband-scheme>

You will also be aware that the NI Executive's draft Programme for Government (PfG) includes an Indicator to improve internet connectivity. The outcome of the PfG and related budget discussions will dictate the nature and scale of DfE's future telecommunications intervention.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the (i) number of job losses; and (ii) value of export losses, broken down by sector, partially caused by exchange rate differences between sterling and the Euro, and with particular regard to the border region, since the result of the EU referendum in June.

**(AQW 5584/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** Since the EU referendum, the Northern Ireland claimant count is continuing its downward trajectory. In June 2016 there were 36,700 claimants in receipt of unemployment related benefits in Northern Ireland, whilst this has reduced by 1,800 people to 34,900 people in September 2016. That trend is largely mirrored across Northern Ireland, including in the border region.

Recent employer surveys in Northern Ireland indicate that job creation is either being maintained or picked up, signalling confidence for the future.

I believe that we must seize all the opportunities open to us to grow the NI economy including in border regions. In that regard, research shows that there has been a significant increase in the flow of shoppers from the Republic of Ireland following the recent depreciation of Sterling. That is providing a welcome boost for our retail sector.

The Regional Trade Statistics, as produced by HMRC, provide the value of Northern Ireland trade in goods exports and imports. The latest data available only up to end of June 2016 and cannot be broken down by sector or regions within Northern Ireland. However, the latest Purchasing Managers Index for October 2016 indicates that our exporters are performing extremely well, the latest figures showing that export orders had expanded at their second highest rate since the survey began.

**Mr Aiken** asked the Minister for the Economy when his Department will respond to the recommendations contained in the Energy and Manufacturing Advisory Group Report.

**(AQW 5605/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** The Energy and Manufacturing Advisory Group (EMAG) report put forward twenty-four recommendations, covering a range of energy matters, not all of which fall within my Department's remit.

I propose shortly to set out my thoughts on energy priorities with a view to initiating a wider debate on future energy policy in Northern Ireland. I will be giving consideration to the EMAG recommendations as part of this process.

**Mr Clarke** asked the Minister for the Economy to list the ten companies that employ the highest number of staff; and the number of staff each employ.

**(AQW 5732/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** My Department does not hold this information. The Equality Commission publishes a list of private companies operating in Northern Ireland and the numbers they employ.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for the Economy whether he will revisit the list of projects from the European Social Fund 2014-2020 that passed the threshold for funding but did not receive a letter of offer.

**(AQW 5738/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** The current call ends in March 2018. It would not be practical to revisit the list at this stage as there is not sufficient funding to cover each priority area equitably for those projects that had passed the threshold. Equally there would not be enough time before the next call for projects to get up and running to deliver the outcomes expected.

However, it is my intention to ensure that all unallocated funding is committed through a further call.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for the Economy on how many occasions, in each of the last three calendar years, has the Health and Safety Executive (i) attended; (ii) carried out an investigation; and (iii) compiled a report following an incident in HMP Maghaberry.

**(AQW 6195/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** The figures below detail HSENI's interactions with HMP Maghaberry:

**Incidents at HMP Maghaberry / HSENI**

	(i) Attended	(ii) Carried out an investigation	(iii) Compiled a report
2013	2	1	1
2014	0	0	0
2015	2	1	0
2016	0	0	0

**Dr Farry** asked the Minister for the Economy to outline his priorities for capital investment.

**(AQW 6326/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** My capital investment priorities for 2016-17 mainly comprise of investment in the following business areas;

- Further Education;
- Higher Education;
- Invest NI;
- Tourism NI; and
- Telecommunications.

Priorities for each of the four years from 2017-18 to 2020-21 will be agreed as part of the Budget 2016 process.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for the Economy in light of the ongoing judicial reviews being progressed by Tamboran, whether there is any impediment to the area previously licenced to Tamboran Resources in Fermanagh from being offered for petroleum exploration.

**(AQW 6511/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** Petroleum Licence PL2/10 determined on 30 September 2014. Consequently, as far as the Department is concerned, the area covered by that Licence is currently unlicensed for petroleum exploration. The decision of the Department to determine the licence is, however, under challenge. The position is, therefore, subject to the outcome of those legal proceedings.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on an enterprise zone for Ballygawley.

**(AQW 6630/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** There are currently no plans for an Enterprise Zone in Ballygawley. The Enterprise Zone announced by the Chancellor in his Budget statement in March 2014 was for a pilot project in the Coleraine area focusing specifically on Enhanced Capital Allowances. The necessary legislation was put into place in August this year to enable the pilot Enterprise Zone to become established.

A plan for evaluation will be put in place once the pilot Enterprise Zone is operational, the findings of which will inform any future rollout of Enterprise Zones to other areas across Northern Ireland, if appropriate.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the range and type of Open University courses being pursued at present by 133 students from West Tyrone.

**(AQW 6683/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** The table below sets out West Tyrone domiciled students enrolled at the Open University in academic year 2014/15, which is the most recent data available, broken down by level of study and subject area. The figures only include students whose postcode was known and the constituency boundary is based on the 2008 definition.

Subject Area	Level of Study			
	First Degree	Other undergraduate	Postgraduate	Total
Subjects allied to medicine	5	5	0	10
Biological sciences	15	0	0	15
Physical sciences	5	0	0	5
Mathematical sciences	5	0	0	5
Computer science	15	0	0	20
Engineering & technology	5	0	0	5
Social studies	10	0	0	15
Law	5	0	0	5
Business & administrative studies	15	0	0	15
Languages	10	0	0	10
Historical & philosophical studies	10	0	0	10
Creative arts & design	0	0	0	0
Education	5	0	5	10
Combined	20	5	0	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>150</b>

Figures were sourced from the Higher Education Statistics Authority. To prevent the identification of individuals, figures have been rounded to the nearest 5, in line with HESA rounding strategy, with 0, 1 and 2 rounded to 0.

Due to rounding the sum of the column may not match the total.

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister for the Economy to outline his engagement with the NUS-USI since June 2016.  
(AQW 6716/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** I have not yet met with the National Union of Students-Union of Students in Ireland (NUS-USI) due to diary commitments, although I hope to be in a position to do so in the future.

My officials continue to meet with representatives from NUS-USI on a regular basis to discuss a wide range of issues affecting the higher and further education sectors in Northern Ireland.

**Mr Dickson** asked the Minister for the Economy whether his Department or any of its arm's-length bodies has helped fund the sale of the former JTI Gallaher site to Wright Group.  
(AQW 6775/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** The sale of the former JTI Gallaher site to the Wrights Group is a transaction between the two parties without any funding from my Department or any of its arm's-length bodies.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on improving rural broadband services in West Tyrone.  
(AQW 6872/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** Under my Department's Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project, BT has reported, at 30 June 2016, that some 5,629 premises have benefitted in West Tyrone, of which almost 1,300 have taken up new broadband services delivered through this project. The contract, with BT, has a mechanism which requires funding to be returned for re-investment when take up of service exceeds a certain threshold. This will allow more premises to see improvements across Northern Ireland.

My Department is also currently delivering the Superfast Roll-out Programme. This project is expected to provide access to superfast broadband, with speeds of at least 24 Megabits per second, to a further 39,000 premises by 31 December 2017 including the West Tyrone constituency. Details of the current roll-out plans at 5 digit postcode level can be found at <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/superfast-rollout-programme-phase-2>.

It is important to recognise that there are alternative technologies that can be used to deliver broadband services. The Department provides support, under the Better Broadband Scheme, with the cost of installing a basic broadband service (using satellite or wireless technology), from a list of registered suppliers. Aimed at premises that cannot access services

greater than 2Mbps, this scheme ensures that no eligible household or business need pay more than £400 to access a basic broadband scheme, over a 12 month period. Further details can be found on DfE's website at:

<http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-better-broadband-scheme>

You will also be aware that the NI Executive's draft Programme for Government (PfG) includes an Indicator to improve internet connectivity. The outcome of the PfG and related budget discussions will dictate the nature and scale of DfE's future telecommunications intervention in this privatised and independently regulated sector.

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the progress of the Enterprise Zone at Coleraine; and to detail his plans for the allocation of further capital as outlined in the Chancellor's budget.

**(AQW 6917/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** The necessary legislation was put into place in August this year to enable the pilot Enterprise Zone to become established. Causeway Coast and Glens Council is currently working with relevant stakeholders to finalise arrangements in the coming weeks.

In addition, in his Budget statement in March 2016, the Chancellor also announced that the government will ensure that all Enterprise Zones are able to offer Enhanced Capital Allowances (ECA) for eight years from the establishment of relevant sites.

The pilot Enterprise Zone in Coleraine will benefit from this extension. It is the only area in Northern Ireland to offer ECAs as an incentive which permits 100% first year allowances for qualifying plant and machinery expenditure.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister for the Economy to list each individual act of Ministerial oversight of the Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme since its introduction, including the date.

**(AQW 6934/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** Ministers have been involved in each stage of the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) schemes, including policy and business cases, changes to the Non Domestic Scheme and the suspension of both schemes.

Responsibility for the detailed design and ongoing oversight of the RHI schemes rest with Departmental officials.

**Mr Anderson** asked the Minister for the Economy his assessment of the higher education provision being provided by the Open University.

**(AQW 6968/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** The Open University plays an important role in the provision of higher education in Northern Ireland. In 2014/15, it enrolled over 3,700 students on higher education programmes, accounting for approximately 7% of all enrolments at Northern Ireland higher education institutions. It has a broad portfolio of teaching and research across eleven faculties.

The University's provision of flexible, part-time higher education contributes to the up-skilling of Northern Ireland's workforce and, in terms of widening access, the Open University has a particular role in meeting the needs of non-traditional learners and older students.

The Open University scores consistently highly in terms of student satisfaction, and their performance in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework exercise shows that research undertaken at the Open University is both world-leading and has impact in the real world. 72% of the Open University's research was assessed as world-leading or internationally excellent.

**Mr Anderson** asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the total number of students in Upper Bann that availed of courses offered by the Open University; and (ii) for a breakdown of the courses studied by Open University students from Upper Bann, in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 6969/16-21)**

**Mr Hamilton:** My Department does not hold information on specific courses. However, the table below sets out Upper Bann domiciled enrolments at the Open University by subject grouping for academic years 2011/12 to 2014/15. Comparable data is unavailable for academic year 2010/11.

Subject Grouping	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Nursing	5	5	5	5
Other subjects allied to medicine	5	5	5	5
Biology & related sciences	5	5	5	5
Psychology	20	25	25	20
Physical science	5	5	10	5
Mathematical sciences	10	10	10	10
Computer science	20	25	25	25

Subject Grouping	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Mechanically-based engineering	5	5	5	10
Technology	5	0	0	0
Sociology, social policy & anthropology	15	15	10	10
Social work	30	20	20	20
Law	5	5	5	10
Business	15	15	20	10
Management	10	5	5	5
Finance & accounting	5	0	0	5
English-based studies	5	5	5	5
European languages & area studies	5	5	5	5
History & archaeology	15	15	10	10
Education studies	15	15	25	25
Combined	100	80	85	70
Initial teacher training	0	0	5	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>270</b>

**Source:** Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

To prevent the identification of individuals figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 in line with HESA rounding strategy, with 0, 1 and 2 rounded to 0. Due to rounding the sum of columns may not match the total shown. Figures relate to Northern Ireland domiciled students at the Open University whose postcode was known.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for the Economy whether his Department will request compensation from the Student Loans Company for the 31 postgraduate students impacted by withdrawn awards.  
(AQW 6979/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** As the Northern Ireland domiciled student's postgraduate loan applications were incorrectly approved by Student Finance England, any compensation payment would be a matter for them and the Student Loans Company to decide.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for the Economy what role his Department has in the allocation of financial support for students.  
(AQW 6980/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** My Department has policy and funding responsibility for the allocation of higher education student financial support for Northern Ireland domiciled students attending undergraduate courses in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

My Department also has policy and funding responsibility for postgraduate studentship awards for students attending postgraduate courses in Northern Ireland.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for the Economy when his Department became aware of the human error that resulted in the Student Loans Company awarding financial support for 31 postgraduate students.  
(AQW 6981/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** My officials were made aware of the error on Monday 26 September 2016.

**Mr Clarke** asked the Minister for the Economy to detail (i) how many individuals with visual impairment are categorised as Not in Education, Employment or Training benefit cost, over the last five years and; (ii) what is the cost per person.  
(AQW 7180/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** This information is not held by my Department.

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the Enterprise Zone in Coleraine.  
(AQW 7259/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** The necessary legislation was put into place in August this year to enable the pilot Enterprise Zone to become established. Causeway Coast and Glens Council is currently working with relevant stakeholders to finalise arrangements.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for the Economy whether the proposed Legislative Consent Motion: Higher Education and Research Bill will link Teaching Excellence Framework ratings to student tuition fees in Northern Ireland.  
(AQW 7393/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** I have no plans to link Teaching Excellence Framework ratings to tuition fee levels in Northern Ireland.

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister for the Economy when the fault in Public Access WiFi in Kilkeel will be repaired.  
(AQW 7418/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** My Department has no role in the provision of Public Access WiFi in Kilkeel. I understand that responsibility rests with Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and that council officials are seeking a resolution to the difficulties.

**Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister for the Economy what discussions have taken place with the British Government on securing unhindered access to the single market for Northern Ireland.  
(AQW 7525/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** The Joint Ministerial Council (Europe Negotiations)(JMC (EN)) is the main mechanism under which discussions with the Government are taking place on the UK's approach to and objectives for negotiations with the European Union. The First Minister and deputy First Minister are leading discussions on behalf of the Executive, setting out the key priorities for Northern Ireland. In parallel to JMC (EN) meetings, officials from my Department and Invest Northern Ireland are engaging with the Department for International Trade, the Department for Business Energy & Industrial Strategy and the Department for Exiting the EU to analyse key enablers emerging from the EU exit and other issues.

**Mr McGrath** asked the Minister for the Economy what support has been offered to ensure that local universities can continue to access European research networks.  
(AQW 7542/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** My Department provides funding for the Higher Education - European Union Framework Support Fund, which funds the Northern Ireland Contact Point network to provide direct support to potential applicants, across industry, academia and the public sector, in applying for funding from Horizon 2020, the European Union's Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

**Mrs Little Pengelly** asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on Invest NI's recent record in attracting inward investment.  
(AQO 710/16-21)

**Mr Hamilton:** In the past 5 years (2011-12 to 2015-16) Invest NI has been extremely successful in attracting inward investment to Northern Ireland. According to the Department of International Trade (DIT), Northern Ireland has tended to punch well above its weight, securing a 4.3% share of all new FDI jobs attracted to the UK, far in excess of what could be considered a typical or pro rata share.

During this period Invest NI has made nearly 1,600 offers of support to externally-owned businesses located here.

This support amounted to £213m of assistance and contributed towards plans to invest £1.7bn in the local economy and created almost 17,300 new jobs.

This support included 87 businesses that were new to Northern Ireland promoting over 4,300 new jobs between them.

This period of success has been typified by the 2014-15 financial year, which has seen the most assistance ever offered by Invest NI to inward investment projects (£83m) and the largest number of jobs promoted (5,659).

This pattern of success has been continuing. From April 2016, 506 jobs have been announced from investors including Moola Systems, Crossvale, Metaswitch Networks, Blackduck Software and Tullet Prebon indicating that the core NI sales proposition of Talent and Value continue to deliver high value jobs

In addition, the new corporation tax rate of 12.5% planned for April 2018 will make the overall investment proposition even more attractive, opening up opportunities to attract projects which are tax sensitive.

## Department of Finance

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Finance to outline the protocols employed by his Department when arranging ministerial constituency visits.  
(AQW 4769/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance):** I would refer the Member to the answer provided to AQW 24726/11-15 outlining procedures agreed by Executive Ministers and notified to the Speaker on 12 February 2008, subsequently brought to the attention of the Business Committee at its meeting on 19 February 2008. Members will be contacted by my Private Office to inform them of appropriate visits in their constituency.

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Finance to outline the protocols and procedures in place in his Department to inform MLAs of their constituency visits and of visits by VIPs and Royalty.

**(AQW 5739/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I would refer the Member to the answer provided to AQW 24726/11-15 outlining procedures agreed by Executive Ministers and notified to the Speaker on 12 February 2008, subsequently brought to the attention of the Business Committee at its meeting on 19 February 2008. Members will be contacted by my Private Office to inform them of appropriate visits in their constituency.

Regarding Royal Visits, these are the responsibility of the NIO. There are no Executive protocols for VIP visits, arrangements for which are made on a case by case basis.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance further to his comments in the Assembly on 25 October 2016 on the Renewable Heat Incentive, whether there are any contractual obligations with the end users which will inhibit the ability to curb the scheme.

**(AQW 6183/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** You asked the Minister of Finance whether there are any contractual obligations with the end users which will inhibit the ability to curb the scheme. This has been passed to me to reply. As indicated by the Minister of Finance, I am considering all the options that may be available to reduce the costs of the scheme in the future, and I will bring proposals to the Assembly in due course.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Finance to detail the terms of reference for the Community Regeneration Fund.

**(AQW 6455/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** The Community Regeneration Fund is aimed at funding infrastructure projects in our most deprived and marginalised communities, seeking to maintain momentum on peace building and enhance our diverse heritages.

Projects that benefit should be capital in nature and supported by an approved business case, with spend taking place in the 2016-17 financial year.

**Ms Hanna** asked the Minister of Finance to detail the discussions that he had with the European Investment Bank in August.

**(AQW 6457/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I had a constructive meeting with European Investment Bank (EIB) Vice-President Jonathan Taylor on 30 August 2016. We discussed a range of issues including the proposed Investment Fund, framework loans for local councils and wider lending here.

The EIB confirmed that direct delivery and management of the Investment Fund is outside of usual EIB 'core' business. Following the EU Referendum result it cannot therefore commit to taking on this role. However, the Bank has also confirmed that it will continue to provide advisory services in the delivery of the Fund. As such work to deliver the Fund is continuing with EIB advisory support.

The EIB also confirmed that they will honour any existing loans made here and would positively consider an approach from our Councils seeking a framework loan facility.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Finance for a breakdown of the £1bn extra funding for the Health Service pledged prior to the 2016 Assembly Election.

**(AQW 6605/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** The two Executive parties have stated their commitment to provide extra funding to the Health Service over this Mandate. However, this must go hand in hand with the restructuring and reforms required to ensure a high quality sustainable Health Service going forward.

The Executive will consider the response to the Bengoa Report in allocating funding to Health as part of Budget 2016 and subsequent Budgets.

**Mr K Buchanan** asked the Minister of Finance to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of businesses in Mid Ulster receiving small business rate relief.

**(AQW 6731/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Information is available on the number of properties, not individual businesses, receiving Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR).

- (i) As at 31st October 2016, 1,600 non-domestic properties in the Mid Ulster constituency were benefitting from SBRR.
- (ii) This represents 37.8% of all non-domestic properties in the Mid Ulster constituency.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Finance, given his recent comments regarding the rates system, to outline (i) how he plans to make the current rates regime fairer for all retailers; and (ii) any communication he has had with retailers regarding this issue.

**(AQW 6754/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** As the member will be aware I made a statement to the Assembly on my plans for this area of rating policy on 22nd November 2016.

Those proposals were framed on foot of active engagement with organisations representing retailers, such as various Chambers of Commerce and the NI Independent Retail Traders Association. This will continue over the coming weeks and months as the policy proposals go out to consultation.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance what percentage of annual imports are from (i) the rest of the UK; (ii) the Republic of Ireland; (iii) the remainder of the EU; and (iv) the rest of the world.

**(AQW 6815/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** HMRC Regional Trade Statistics indicate that the value of imported goods was £6.1 billion in 2015. Of this 27.0% came from the Republic of Ireland; 28.3% came from the remainder of the European Union; and 44.7% came from the Rest of the World. HMRC Regional Trade Statistics does not include data on the trade of goods within the UK.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance what percentage of annual exports are to (i) the rest of the UK; (ii) the Republic of Ireland; (iii) the remainder of the EU; and (iv) the rest of the world.

**(AQW 6816/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** HMRC Regional Trade Statistics indicate that the value of exported goods was £6.3 billion in 2015. Of this 33.5% went to Republic of Ireland; 21.6% to the rest of the European Union; and 44.9% to the Rest of the World.

HMRC Regional Trade Statistics excludes trade in goods within the UK. However based on local business surveys it is estimated that the value of goods and services sold by local companies to Great Britain was £12.7 billion in 2014.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Finance pursuant to AQW 5942/16-21, whether he has received any response from the Treasury to his formal request for derogation; and what was the content of this response.

**(AQW 6861/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** A response has not been received from Treasury yet. However, HMT has already confirmed that the external borrowings of Housing Associations will not impact on the Executive's budget in 2016-17.

**Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Finance to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of businesses in (a) Portadown; (b) Lurgan; and (c) Banbridge that received small business rate relief in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 6975/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Information is available on the number and percentage of properties, not businesses receiving Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) in Portadown, Lurgan and Banbridge.

The (i) number; and (ii) percentage of non-domestic properties in the Upper Bann parliamentary constituency that benefitted from Small Business Rate Relief in each of the last five years is shown in the following table:

Number and Percentage of Non-Domestic Properties Benefitting from Small Business Rate Relief in Upper Bann Parliamentary Constituency from 2011/12 to 2015/16

	Number of Non-Domestic Properties Benefitting from SBRR	Percentage of Non-Domestic Properties Receiving SBRR
2011/12	1,107	25.2%
2012/13	1,581	35.8%
2013/14	1,632	36.8%
2014/15	1,665	37.3%
2015/16	1,665	37.3%

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance to detail (i) the persons or bodies to whom his Department has provided hospitality; and (ii) the cost of providing this hospitality, in each of the last twelve months.

**(AQW 6990/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** The Department of Finance provides hospitality to clients, delegates or external guests during meetings, working lunches and training courses.

To ensure a high level of scrutiny all hospitality expenditure is required to be approved at Grade 7 or above. In authorising this type of expenditure the approver is confirming it is in line with the guidelines which require appropriate justification (that is, in the direct interest of the Department), proportionate to the needs of the occasion and value for money.

The Department of Finance has spent £25k on hospitality in the twelve months, November 2015 to October 2016. A breakdown of this expenditure, by month, is provided in the table below.

Month	£'000
October 2016	2
September 2016	1
August 2016	0
July 2016	2
June 2016	5
May 2016	1
April 2016	1
March 2016	4
February 2016	2
January 2016	2
December 2015	2
November 2015	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>

The Department continues to focus on reducing areas of discretionary expenditure including hospitality. In the twelve months prior to the period in question expenditure exceeded £31k. The like for like reduction is 18.7% (based on non-rounded figures).

**Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of Finance whether retail businesses, which have a Post Office located within them, are exempt from paying business rates.

**(AQW 7117/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Retail businesses, which have a Post Office located within them, may be eligible for Enhanced Small Business Rate Relief; this is based on the Net Annual Value (NAV) of the business premises.

There are three bands of Enhanced Small Business Rate Relief these are:

Net Annual Value	Percentage Relief
£0 to £ 9,000	100%
£9,001 to £12,000	50%
£12,001 to £15,000	20%

Retail businesses where the Net Annual Value of the premises is over £15,000 are not eligible for any Small Business Rate Relief; this is irrespective of whether there is a Post Office located with-in them. Implementation of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016

**Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Finance to detail (i) what steps have been taken to implement the Rural Needs Act at all levels within his Department; and (ii) what training and guidance has been provided to managers and officials within his Department on how to apply it.

**(AQW 7160/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 comes into effect on 1 June 2017. The Act provides a statutory basis for commitments made by the Executive in 2002, and reaffirmed in 2009, to undertake rural proofing of all new and revised policies and strategies across government.

Rural proofing is firmly embedded in the policy development process within my Department. We carry out rural proofing of new policies and strategies, in line with the guidance for public authorities on rural proofing provided by DAERA (formerly DARD), "Thinking Rural: The Essential Guide to Rural Proofing". Departmental officials will adhere to the revised guidance which DAERA will issue in due course to take account of the new statutory requirements.

It is understood that DAERA officials will also be revising the existing training course for Departmental policy makers to reflect the requirements of the Act. Both the new guidance and the availability of the revised e-learning course will be publicised in

my Department, and made available to all policy makers. In addition, relevant staff will attend briefing seminars which DAERA will be organising.

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Finance to detail the number of new start businesses in Upper Bann in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 7192/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** The attached table shows the number new businesses registering for VAT and/or a PAYE scheme (referred to as 'business births') in the Upper Bann Assembly Area from 2010 to 2015.

**Table: Business Births<sup>1,2</sup> in the Upper Bann Assembly Area, 2010 to 2015**

Period	Business Births <sup>1</sup>
2010	250
2011	195
2012	200
2013	280
2014	240
2015	300

**Source:** Office for National Statistics (ONS), Inter Departmental Business Register

**Note:** All figures are rounded to avoid disclosure.

- 1 A birth is identified as a business that was present in year t, but did not exist in year t-1 or t-2.
- 2 Businesses not registered for PAYE or below the VAT threshold are not included.

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister of Finance what additional funds he will receive as Barnett consequentials of the UK government's commitment to invest £56 billion in HS2: North West and Yorkshire rail service.

**(AQW 7204/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** I expect to receive full Barnett consequentials on any public funding spent on the HS2 project.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance (i) to detail the specific impact on the development of policy within his Department from the implementation of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016; and (ii) what mechanisms are in place to achieve this.  
**(AQW 7261/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 comes into effect on 1 June 2017. The Act provides a statutory basis for commitments made by the Executive in 2002, and reaffirmed in 2009, to undertake rural proofing of all new and revised policies and strategies across government.

Rural proofing is firmly embedded in the policy development process within my Department. We carry out rural proofing of new policies and strategies, in line with the guidance for public authorities on rural proofing provided by DAERA (formerly DARD), "Thinking Rural: The Essential Guide to Rural Proofing". Therefore, the implementation of the Rural Needs Act should not have a markedly different effect on the development of Departmental policies.

Departmental officials will adhere to any revised guidance which DAERA will issue to take account of the new statutory requirements.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Finance for a breakdown of the proposed £250m support for the agri-food sector, as committed to by the Executive.

**(AQW 7444/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** It is for the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to advise on the level and nature of financial support for the agri-food sector.

**Mr Smith** asked the Minister of Finance for his assessment of the claims that Cerberus paid the legal firm Brown Rudnick a fee for a service that included access to the Executive in advance of the sale of the National Assets Management Agency portfolio

**(AQW 7476/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** The very serious allegations surrounding NAMA's "Project Eagle" sale are currently being investigated by the relevant authorities here, in the South of Ireland, Britain and the United States. It is absolutely vital that the full truth of the NAMA-Cerberus deal is revealed and those investigations have my full support.

I view the latest claims very seriously and look forward to a successful conclusion to the various investigations into the NAMA controversy.

**Ms Hanna** asked the Minister of Finance what reviews on the impact of a Brexit are underway in his Department.  
(AQW 7535/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** All departments are currently undertaking a detailed assessment of the potential impact of the EU Referendum, the details of which will feed into negotiations going forward.

**Ms Hanna** asked the Minister of Finance what efforts have been made to secure current investment plans with the European Investment Bank.

(AQW 7536/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Since I became Finance Minister I have engaged extensively with the European Investment Bank (EIB) on a range of issues.

I met with EIB Vice-President Jonathan Taylor on 30 August 2016 to discuss the EIB's current investment plans here and a number of other issues. As a result of our discussion, Vice-President Taylor confirmed that all current EIB investments here would be honoured. Mr Taylor also assured me that EIB core lending business would continue as usual until there was clarity on our future relationship with the EU and the bank itself.

**Ms Hanna** asked the Minister of Finance what consideration has been given to the impact of a Brexit on the establishment of cross-border inquiries and investigations.

(AQW 7537/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** All departments are currently undertaking a detailed assessment of the potential impact of the EU Referendum, the details of which will feed into negotiations going forward.

While the issue you have raised is not one that falls specifically to my Department, clearly it will be vitally important that where inquiries and investigations need to take place on a cross-border basis, these can continue unimpeded.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance what the NI Resource and Capital allocations are from 2017-18 onwards; and what changes the Chancellor's Autumn Statement makes to those allocations.

(AQW 7747/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** The Executive's Non Ring-fenced Resource DEL and Capital DEL budgets are outlined in the table below:

	£million			
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Non Ring-fenced Resource DEL	9,930.0	9,936.3	9,951.9	-
Capital DEL	1,091.0	1,155.1	1,224.7	1,271.4
Financial Transactions Capital DEL	101.4	77.1	67.8	55.7

This includes the Autumn Statement additions of:

	£million			
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Non Ring-fenced Resource DEL	19.0	14.9	6.0	-
Capital DEL	42.2	66.5	80.7	86.7
Financial Transactions Capital DEL	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7

**Ms Bunting** asked the Minister of Finance to detail the amount of uncollected rates in each of the last five years.  
(AQW 7750/16-21)

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** The total amount of uncollected rates at the end of each of the last five years for which information is available is shown in the table below.

Rating Year	End of Year Debt relating to unpaid rates
2015/16	£142.7M*
2014/15	£156.6M

Rating Year	End of Year Debt relating to unpaid rates
2013/14	£162.1M
2012/13	£168.3M
2011/12	£160.8M

\* 2015/16 figure is subject to audit assurance.

Land & Property Services (LPS) takes a serious view of non-payment of rates and rigorously pursues all debt.

However, we must accept that we are in a challenging economic environment and many people are struggling to pay their bills. LPS balances action to recover debt against assisting ratepayers who are genuinely struggling and require some additional flexibility to help pay their rate bills.

LPS will engage with ratepayers allowing them to pay smaller amounts, over a longer period of time. This inevitably increases the level of rating debt at the end of the rating year.

While LPS will make efforts to support those who are struggling to pay, they must, and will, rigorously pursue those who don't pay. Where ratepayers fail to pay, do not enter into payment arrangements or break those arrangements, LPS will take Court action and seek to recover the debt through the Enforcement of Judgements Office or will instigate bankruptcy proceedings.

It is worth noting that the 2012/13 debt figure of £168.3 million has reduced to £142.7 million\* at the end of the 2015/16 rating year. This has provided additional income that can be invested in critical front line services such as health and education.

**Ms Bunting** asked the Minister of Finance for how long rates must remain outstanding before Land and Property Services no longer pursues payment.

**(AQW 7752/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** Land & Property Services (LPS) rigorously pursues payment of all rating debt. This is done through the legal recovery process which includes limitations on when debt can be pursued.

In cases of non-payment LPS takes action to obtain a Judgment in the Magistrate's Court. Under the provision of the Limitation (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, such action can only be taken within six years of when the rates first became due.

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Finance to outline the number of jobs created in Upper Bann in the last five years.

**(AQW 7809/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** NISRA collects information on the number of employee jobs in the Business Register and Employment Survey. However, the survey is not designed to provide separate estimates of job creation (or losses) and robust estimates at the required level of disaggregation are only available biennially.

The table overleaf shows the number of employee jobs in the Upper Bann Assembly Area and net changes for the relevant years from September 2009 to September 2015.

**Table: Employee jobs in the Upper Bann Assembly Area, September 2009 to September 2015**

Period	Total employee jobs	Net change
September 2009	44,644	
September 2011	43,947	-697
September 2013	45,397	1,450
September 2015	46,935	1,538

**Source:** Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES)

1 The sample size and sampling methodology for BRES 2010, 2012 and 2014 are not designed to support disaggregation by Assembly Area. Thus only figures for 2009, 2011, 2013 and 2015 have been provided.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Finance pursuant to AQW 7443/16-21, whether the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs sought £40m for the initial scheme; or whether his Department chose to make £40m available in the initial scheme.

**(AQW 7842/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs' capital funding requirements for the period 2017-18 to 2020-21 will be considered by the Executive as part of the current budget process.

**Mr Smith** asked the Minister of Finance to detail the projected 2016-17 expenditure on a Voluntary Exit Scheme across the public sector.

**(AQW 7957/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** As part of the Budget 2015-16 process and Stormont House Agreement, the Executive agreed to adopt a comprehensive programme of Public Sector Reform and Restructuring.

The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan confirmed the flexibility to use up to £200 million of borrowing in 2016-17 to fund voluntary exit schemes. Allocations of £117.6 million were made to departments in Budget 2016-17 in respect of their proposed schemes. Revised allocations of £75m were made as part of October Monitoring. A breakdown per department is available at Annex 1.

#### Annex 1

#### Transformation Fund Reallocations

Dept	Scheme	Original Allocation	October Monitoring Reallocation
DE	Teaching	£14,200,000	£8,200,000
	Non-Teaching	£23,400,000	£23,400,000
	Investing in Teaching Workforce	£33,080,000	£8,080,000
DfE	Consumer Council NI	£109,493	£368,493
	Invest NI	£486,611	£387,871
	Tourism NI	£313,000	£0
	NI Screen	£47,693	£47,693
	FE Colleges	£15,673,485	£7,291,485
	Stranmillis College	£229,452	£229,452
	Construction Industry Training Board	£103,764	£49,764
DfC	Sport NI	£231,493	£987,854
	National Museums NI	£1,821,652	£1,270,920
	Libraries NI	£2,646,930	£1,683,000
	Arts Council NI	£193,275	£28,025
	Armagh Observatory & Planetarium	£222,695	£162,401
	NI Housing Executive	£9,100,000	£9,100,000
	Charity Commission NI	£8,242	£0
	USEL	£0	£160,000
	NI Commissioner for Children and Young People	£96,930	£80,302
NIAO	Northern Ireland Audit Office	£565,000	£565,000
DoJ	PSNI	£12,000,000	£5,570,000
	Police Rehabilitation & Retraining Trust	£150,939	£150,939
	Criminal Justice Inspection	£87,239	£37,000
	PACWAC	£177,384	£0
NIAC	NI Assembly Commission	£370,000	£0
TEO	Equality Commission NI	£418,000	£146,000
DfI	NI Water	£500,000	£200,000
	Translink (NITHCo)	£1,399,172	£2,120,126
DoH	NIFRS	£0	£336,906
	HSC	£0	£4,379,200
<b>Total</b>		<b>£117,632,449</b>	<b>£75,032,431</b>

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Finance to outline (i) the training or advice provided to officials within his Department and each of its Arm's Length Bodies in relation to outcomes-based accountability; (ii) who delivered the training; (iii) an overview of each session including the number of people in attendance and themes covered; (iv) the total paid to each individual or organisation involved in the delivery of training up to 28 November 2016; and (v) the projected costs to be paid to each individual or organisation involved in the delivery training in 2016/17.

**(AQW 8032/16-21)**

**Mr Ó Muilleoir:** NISRA staff seconded to The Executive Office delivered Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) Training to 126 NISRA statisticians, who are Department of Finance staff, over 5 training sessions held between 18 January 2016 and June 2016. The training sessions considered the OBA Model and examples of how it had been used within government.

There were no costs incurred on NISRA as a result of the provision of this training and they have no further plans to deliver this training in 2016/17.

This training was also provided to Programme for Government Senior Responsible Officers and their teams, and to policy officials with a particular identified requirement. In addition, OBA familiarisation sessions have been provided, focusing on specific areas of outcomes-focused practice, at meetings of senior officials involved in Programme for Governments implementation across Departments.

The Centre for Applied Learning (CAL), the key provider of generic training to the NICS, also offer an eLearning package entitled 'Outcomes Based Accountability – Mark Friedman Presentation' which was launched on 13 September 2016. 46 completions of this package were recorded by 28 November 2016, 12 of whom are staff from my department. The package contains a video presentation by Mark Friedman, split into four sessions, providing an explanation of OBA key terms and methodology. It outlines a range of practical techniques and how they can be used to support an increased focus on outcomes within public policy.

CAL is currently developing a second eLearning package to provide awareness on the use of OBA in the NICS, using content provided by NISRA statisticians seconded to the Executive Office. Development costs for the production of this eLearning package are £8,625.

CAL is the key provider of generic training to the NICS and is part of the Enterprise Shared Services (ESS) which is a directorate within my Department. CAL is centrally funded by the NICS departments and the cost of the provision of these eLearning packages is included in the department's up-front contribution for 2016/17.

## Department of Health

**Ms Hanna** asked the Minister of Health whether she will undertake an equality audit of Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency and its treatment of trainee doctors taking, and returning from, maternity leave.

**(AQW 3253/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health):** The NI Medical and Dental Training Agency facilitates all maternity leave in line with statutory requirements, I have no plans to undertake an equality audit of the Agency's arrangements on these matters.

If the member has any particular area of concern she may want to contact NIMDTA or myself.

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Health how she is reducing the waiting time for urgent surgery in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

**(AQW 3855/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Western Health and Social Care Trust is continuing to work with the Health and Social Care Board to minimise waiting times for urgent surgery within the resources available. Patients are treated on the basis of clinical urgency, with patients of equal clinical priority being seen in chronological order.

I will publish a plan in January 2017 setting out a comprehensive approach for addressing waiting lists as referred to in Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together. This will address not only what will be done in the short term to improve current waiting times, but also what must happen to transform the system so that the HSC is able to meet the future demand for elective care.

**Ms Bradshaw** asked the Minister of Health for an update on transitional support to be provided to voluntary and community sector organisations affected by the loss of the Revenue Grant Scheme.

**(AQW 4445/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The current core revenue grant funding scheme will end in March 2018. The intention to close of the Scheme in its current form was announced in June 2015 and, in an effort to minimise any negative impact on funded organisations, it is being withdrawn gradually over 3 years. Funded organisations will receive £3.4m in 2016/17 and £2.2 in 2017/18. We have also sought to minimise impacts as funding is withdrawn by replacing the current annual application process with one spanning two financial years.

My Department intends to introduce a new HSC Innovation Scheme, in 2017 which will be open to all voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations. This scheme will recognise, support and strengthen the sectors capacity to develop innovative approaches to health and social care challenges.

I have also asked officials to develop proposals on how best to support the sector in its role of advocacy, co-design and connecting the voice of service users to the Department.

**Mr K Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health to detail the land owned by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust in Mid Ulster, including (i) the address; (ii) the size in acres of each site; and (iii) for what purpose each site is used.

**(AQW 4512/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Northern HSC Trust owns the Mid Ulster Hospital site at 59 Hospital Road, Magherafelt, which consists of 41.20 hectares. Situated on this site is the Pharmacy Department; Ambulatory Paediatrics; Day Surgery; Minor Injuries; Outpatient Services; Community Hospital; Adult Centre; Day Centre and Children Mental Health Therapy Centre.

The Trust also owns the Mid Ulster Community Services Site at 62 Hospital Road, Magherafelt, which consists of 0.69 hectares. Situated on this site are the Children's Residential Home; Family Centre; Physiotherapy Department and Community Services Centre.

**Mr K Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health to detail the (i) number; and (ii) use of buildings and sites in Mid Ulster that the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (a) own; and (b) lease; and to list the buildings owned by the Trust in the area that are currently decommissioned.

**(AQW 4513/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Northern HSC Trust owns 35 buildings in the Mid Ulster area. These include 13 buildings located on the Mid Ulster Hospital site; 4 Office and Support buildings; 3 Adult Centres; 3 Community Facilities; 3 Health Centres; 2 Support Facilities; Children's Home; Day Centre; Family Centre; Residential Unit; Storage Facility; Patient Residential Accommodation and Staff Residential Accommodation.

The Trust currently leases 12 buildings in the Mid Ulster area. Of these buildings 8 are used as Health Centres with the remaining 4 being used a Community Facilities.

There are currently no decommissioned buildings in the Mid Ulster area.

**Mr K Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health (i) how the Northern Health and Social Care Trust waiting list panel operates; (ii) who is on the panel; and (iii) how it decides who gets an appointment.

**(AQW 4514/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Integrated Elective Care Protocol governs the management of waiting lists across all Health and Social Care Trusts rather than a panel type arrangement. The Protocol sets out the principle that patients will be treated on the basis of their clinical urgency with urgent patients seen and treated first. The definition of clinical urgency is defined by specialty, procedure and/or service. Patients with the same clinical priority will be treated in chronological order on grounds of fairness, and to minimise the waiting times for all patients.

**Mr K Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health to detail the current (i) number of people on waiting lists; and (ii) waiting times for domiciliary care packages in Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

**(AQW 4515/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** As of 6th October 2016, the Northern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust had 83 service users waiting for a full domiciliary care package. The average waiting time for these packages was 8 weeks.

**Mr K Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health to detail the waiting lists for children's autism services in Mid Ulster.

**(AQW 4516/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Figures are not available at constituency level. Figures in Table 1 detail the number children in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust waiting for the commencement of specialised intervention following an autism assessment, at 31 August 2016.

**Table 1**

Waiting time (weeks)				Total
0 – 4	>4 – 8	>8 – 13	>13	
95	61	30	11	197

**Source:** Health and Social Care Board

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health how many people are on the waiting list for (i) urgent; and (ii) routine heart surgery in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

**(AQW 4534/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** There is no cardiac surgery service within Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

**Mr M Bradley** asked the Minister of Health what is the average waiting time for a knee replacement operation in each Health and Social Care Trust.

**(AQW 4535/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Information on the average waiting time for knee replacement operations (including revisions) at 30th June 2016, the most recent quarter for which official statistics are available, is shown in the table below.

HSC Trust	Average Number of Weeks Waiting
Belfast	29.1
South Eastern	-
Southern	25.0
Western	43.6

**Source:** DoH Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

Knee replacement operations are not carried out within the Northern HSC Trust.

Knee replacement procedures were identified using the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys tabular list of operations and procedures (OPCS – 4.7) codes W40, W41 and W42. The figures in the answer refer to the intended primary procedure.

**Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Health to detail the (i) location; and (ii) number of dementia care beds in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

**(AQW 4569/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) holds information on all registered residential and nursing care homes. The RQIA publish a register of these services, including the location, maximum approved places and categories of care, online.

The latest available information (as at 30 September 2016) can be found at the web link below.

<https://www.rqia.org.uk/what-we-do/register/services-registered-with-rqia/>

**Ms Bradshaw** asked the Minister of Health for a breakdown of the number of refused asylum seekers undergoing social service assessments in each Health and Social Care Trust in the (i) 2010/11; (ii) 2011/12; (iii) 2012/13; (iv) 2013/14; (v) 2014/15; and (vi) 2015/16 financial year.

**(AQW 4582/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The requested figures are not centrally available and to provide them would require a manual trawl of hundreds of files. They therefore cannot be provided due to disproportionate cost.

**Ms Bradshaw** asked the Minister of Health for a breakdown of the number of children from families refused asylum that underwent assessment under the Children (NI) Order 1995 in each Health and Social Care Trust in the (i) 2010/11; (ii) 2011/12; (iii) 2012/13; (iv) 2013/14; (v) 2014/15; and (vi) 2015/16 financial year.

**(AQW 4583/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The requested figures are not centrally available and to provide them would require a manual trawl of hundreds of files. They therefore cannot be provided due to disproportionate cost.

**Ms Bradshaw** asked the Minister of Health how much revenue residential care homes received from residents in the financial year 2015/16.

**(AQW 4585/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Neither the Health and Social Care Board nor the Health and Social Care Trusts hold this information.

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Health how much has it cost the Ambulance Service to maintain vehicles in each Division in the 2016/17 financial year to date.

**(AQW 4607/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The table below provides the costs of vehicle maintenance and repair which includes maintenance, recovery, servicing, tyres, windscreens, vehicle tail lift maintenance and other costs associated with vehicles' repairs and maintenance. Separating out the costs for vehicle maintenance and vehicle recovery could only be done at disproportionate cost.

Vehicle Maintenance & Repairs	2011/12 £	2012/13 £	2013/14 £	2014/15 £	2015/16 £	April to August 2016/17 £
Belfast Area	153,198	186,416	140,374	141,640	121,893	55,425
Northern Area	393,530	425,397	439,546	423,654	450,192	175,554
Southern Area	253,012	264,986	268,978	250,589	282,771	106,173
South Eastern Area	165,765	182,727	194,458	198,002	178,547	80,300
Western Area	290,344	253,542	304,180	266,077	268,790	131,171
Regional Vehicles	140,652	215,667	154,128	138,987	333,481	55,177
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,396,500</b>	<b>1,528,736</b>	<b>1,501,663</b>	<b>1,418,950</b>	<b>1,635,674</b>	<b>603,801</b>

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Health how much it has cost the Ambulance Service to recover vehicles in each Division in the 2016/17 financial year to date.

**(AQW 4608/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The table below provides the costs of vehicle maintenance and repair which includes maintenance, recovery, servicing, tyres, windscreens, vehicle tail lift maintenance and other costs associated with vehicles' repairs and maintenance. Separating out the costs for vehicle maintenance and vehicle recovery could only be done at disproportionate cost.

Vehicle Maintenance & Repairs	2011/12 £	2012/13 £	2013/14 £	2014/15 £	2015/16 £	April to August 2016/17 £
Belfast Area	153,198	186,416	140,374	141,640	121,893	55,425
Northern Area	393,530	425,397	439,546	423,654	450,192	175,554
Southern Area	253,012	264,986	268,978	250,589	282,771	106,173
South Eastern Area	165,765	182,727	194,458	198,002	178,547	80,300
Western Area	290,344	253,542	304,180	266,077	268,790	131,171
Regional Vehicles	140,652	215,667	154,128	138,987	333,481	55,177
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,396,500</b>	<b>1,528,736</b>	<b>1,501,663</b>	<b>1,418,950</b>	<b>1,635,674</b>	<b>603,801</b>

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Health how much has it cost the Ambulance Service to maintain vehicles in each Division in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 4609/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The table below provides the costs of vehicle maintenance and repair which includes maintenance, recovery, servicing, tyres, windscreens, vehicle tail lift maintenance and other costs associated with vehicles' repairs and maintenance. Separating out the costs for vehicle maintenance and vehicle recovery could only be done at disproportionate cost.

Vehicle Maintenance & Repairs	2011/12 £	2012/13 £	2013/14 £	2014/15 £	2015/16 £	April to August 2016/17 £
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Vehicle Maintenance & Repairs	2011/12 £	2012/13 £	2013/14 £	2014/15 £	2015/16 £	April to August 2016/17 £
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**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Health how much it has cost the Ambulance Service to recover vehicles in each Division in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 4610/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The table below provides the costs of vehicle maintenance and repair which includes maintenance, recovery, servicing, tyres, windscreens, vehicle tail lift maintenance and other costs associated with vehicles' repairs and maintenance. Separating out the costs for vehicle maintenance and vehicle recovery could only be done at disproportionate cost.

Vehicle Maintenance & Repairs	2011/12 £	2012/13 £	2013/14 £	2014/15 £	2015/16 £	April to August 2016/17 £
Belfast Area	153,198	186,416	140,374	141,640	121,893	55,425
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Regional Vehicles	140,652	215,667	154,128	138,987	333,481	55,177
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,396,500</b>	<b>1,528,736</b>	<b>1,501,663</b>	<b>1,418,950</b>	<b>1,635,674</b>	<b>603,801</b>

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health to detail how many suspected breast cancer patients in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust that were not seen within the target of 14 days in June 2016 were subsequently given a breast cancer diagnosis.

**(AQW 4703/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** In June 2016, 209 suspected breast cancer patients waited longer than 14 days to be seen by a breast cancer specialist in the Southern HCS Trust. 12 of these patients had a confirmed diagnosis of Breast Cancer (94.3% did not have a cancer diagnosis).

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of older people that have experienced financial abuse over the past two years in Strabane.

**(AQW 4813/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Western Health and Social Care Trust does not hold the relevant data for the past two years. However, for the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016 there were five referrals in relation to financial abuse to the Trust's Adult Protection Gateway Team. All referrals were from the Strabane area.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health how her Department will address the waiting time for a senior citizen in West Tyrone that has been told he must wait until 2018 for a knee operation.

**(AQW 4829/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Tackling excessive waiting times is high on my agenda for delivering improvement in the health service and I have stated on many occasions that long waiting times for treatment is completely unacceptable to me. However, I will need time, new investment and radical change in how we deliver services to create the conditions for a sustainable health service and the better outcomes that we all want to see.

The recent review of the orthopaedic medical workforce highlighted the current shortfall in Trauma and Orthopaedic consultant posts and a range of appointments have been made across the Trusts to address this including a locum Orthopaedic consultant post in the Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCT). The Trust has also received approval for capital building to increase day case theatre capacity. This work is due to be completed by end of 2017 and will provide additional elective orthopaedic day case capacity.

My Department is working closely with the Health and Social Care Board in developing an elective care plan to arrest the decline in elective waiting times and deliver sustainable improvements in the medium to longer term across all specialties.

In the meantime the WHSCT is focusing its current capacity towards the clinically urgent patients in the first instance, in line with the Integrated Elective Access Protocol. The remaining available capacity is then directed, as appropriate, to routine long waiting patients. Age will be taken into account by the clinical staff where it impacts on the patient's clinical condition.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health to detail all clinical disciplines facing staffing pressures across each Health and Social Care Trust.

**(AQW 4849/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** All Trusts across the North face pressure recruiting into medical disciplines in which there are national or international shortages. Of particular note are the disciplines of Radiology, Emergency Medicine and Paediatrics.

Medical training programmes in Obstetrics & Gynaecology and Core Medical Training, provided through NIMDTA, also have a heightened vacancy rate.

**Ms Bailey** asked the Minister of Health what percentage of people accessing genito-urinary medicine clinics, in each of the last ten years, were men who have sex with men.

**(AQW 4858/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The percentage of first attendances for a new episode of care at a genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinic in the North of Ireland which are attributed to men who have sex with men (MSM), from 2006 to 2015 are detailed in the table below.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015*
% of attendances <sup>1</sup> attributed to MSM	2.2	2.3	2.2	4.8	7.6	7.8	9.6	9.1	10.0	13.2

**Source:** KC60 Part C

1 Information refers to attendances for a new episode of care and not to individuals, as a person may have more than one episode of care.

\* Figures for 2015 are based on data from 4 of the 5 HSC Trusts.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health the services available for people in North Down that are considering self harm or suicide.

**(AQW 4900/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** A range of suicide prevention services are provided regionally which are available to people from the North Down. These include: Lifeline 24/7 helpline and associated support services; Self Harm Intervention Service; bereavement support; mental health services; psychological therapies; addiction services; and training on suicide/mental health awareness.

The Public Health Agency and South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust fund a number of organisations to deliver suicide and self harm prevention services in North Down. Organisations that are supported include: Hollywood Family Trust; Belfast Central Mission; LINK Family & Resource Centre; New Life Counselling; CRUSE Bereavement Care; and North Down YMCA.

In addition, community emergency response plans have been developed to respond to potential suicide clusters in the area.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health whether medical staff in all the Northern Ireland Prison Service facilities are trained in, and utilise STORM assessments.

**(AQW 4903/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The SEHSCT has advised that all mental health staff have been trained and utilise STORM assessments. Given the high turnover in Primary nurses a rolling programme of training is in place for staff in that area.

**Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of Health how her Department is monitoring the uptake in HIV self-testing kits; and what mechanisms are in place to ensure people who self-test and receive a positive indication are accessing support services.

**(AQW 4915/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Department does not routinely monitor the sale and uptake of HIV self-testing kits. My Department has liaised with the manufacturer of the CE-approved self-testing kit to signpost those from the north of Ireland to local GUM clinics for confirmatory testing and support services.

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the research finding published by the Northern Ireland Association of Social Workers that unpaid hours worked by social workers represent an annual saving of £11.4 million to the health and social care sector.

**(AQW 4918/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I welcome the Workload Survey Report provided by NIASW and agree with the report's recommendation for employers to undertake an audit to establish the number of additional unpaid hours worked by social work staff. This will

establish an accurate assessment of the scale of the problem and employers' compliance with Human Resource policies in regard to working additional hours.

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Health whether a dietician or vegetarian food are available for all psychiatric inpatients. (AQW 4930/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** All psychiatric inpatients have access to vegetarian menu options. Special dietary requirements are assessed on admission and patients are referred to dietetics as required.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health to outline her Department's strategy for overcoming health inequalities experienced by ethnic minorities and newcomer patients, with particular reference to training provision for relevant health professionals accessing interpreting services for appointments.

(AQW 4934/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Health and Social Care Trusts have a range of regional and trust-specific initiatives and good relations strategies dedicated to overcoming health inequalities experienced by ethnic minorities and newcomer patients. These include:

- Mandatory equality and human rights training for staff;
- Development of a multi-cultural and beliefs handbook – a regional resource designed to assist staff in ensuring they provide culturally sensitive services in their day to day work;
- Translated welcome packs for inpatients and training for staff on how to use the packs;
- Development of Communication Support guidelines which provide detail on all interpreting options and providers as well as information on how to obtain interpreters/translations; and
- NI New Entrants Service (Southern HSC Trust) – this is a nurse-led service for new entrants offering screening, health education and signposting to other services.

In addition HSC organisations have in place a regional contract for translation of the written word into other languages. Management of the face to face and telephone interpreting service is carried out by the Business Services Organisation.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health whether she will work with the Western Health and Social Care Trust to provide an interim building enhancement and associated ICT provision at Carrickmore Health Centre.

(AQW 4935/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Enhancement of the existing Carrickmore health centre is not considered possible as the Carrickmore site is land locked and there is no scope for an extension of either the car park or the building itself. Provision of a new facility in Carrickmore is the long term solution to the premises issues in the health centre but ultimately this is dependent on budget availability.

**Ms Bailey** asked the Minister of Health how many sexual health consultants are employed in local health and social care; and how this compares to the number of sexual health consultants in the UK and the Republic of Ireland, per head of population.

(AQW 4981/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Information on the number of sexual health consultants in each Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust is detailed in the table below.

HSC Trust	Sexual Health Consultants
Belfast	4 (4.00 WTE) GUM consultants
Northern	An in-reach service of one session per week is provided by a consultant from Belfast HSC Trust
South Eastern	0.5 WTE Medical Consultant
Southern	Visiting service of a sexual health consultant from Belfast HSC Trust for 2 sessions per week.
Western	1 (1.00 WTE) GUM / HIV consultant
<b>Total</b>	<b>5.50 WTE</b>

**Source:** HSC Trusts

The population at 30 June 2015 is estimated to be 1,851,621 (NI mid-year estimates, NISRA), equating to 2.97 whole time equivalent (WTE) sexual health consultants per million population.

My Department does not hold information on staffing levels in other administrations.

**Ms Bailey** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the recommendations of the Regulatory and Quality Improvement Authority's Review of Specialist Sexual Health Services, conducted in 2013.

(AQW 4982/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Public Health Agency and Health and Social Care Board have established regional groups involving Health Trust Specialist Sexual Health Services and commissioners to consider specific areas in taking forward implementation of the RQIA report's recommendations within the context of the long term vision for the service. Progress in some areas is dependent on the availability of additional resources.

Progress has been reported by some, but not all, of the Trusts in implementing a number of recommendations at local level, including staff training, partner notification arrangements and provision of information about services.

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Health to detail the (i) type; (ii) amount; and (iii) location of adult learning disability respite care beds in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

**(AQW 5268/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Information on adult learning disability respite care beds, supplied by the Belfast Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust, can be found in Table 1. The Trust stated that one bed in Mertoun Park is reserved for emergency use, however other beds will be used where availability allows in addition to spot purchasing beds from the independent sector.

**Table 1. Number of adult learning disability respite beds in the Belfast HSC Trust.**

Home	Location	Type	No. of Respite Beds
Trench Park	West Belfast	Residential	2
Rigby Close	North Belfast	Residential	2
611 Ormeau Road	South Belfast	Residential	2
8 Hanna St	North Belfast	Residential	2
Wheatfield Crescent	North Belfast	Residential	2
Ardcora	Downpatrick	Residential	1
Mertoun Park	East Belfast	Residential	6
80 Malone Road	South Belfast	Residential	3
Croft Community	Bangor	Residential	1
Aaron House	Dundonald	Residential	2
Somerton Road	North Belfast	Nursing	1

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Health to outline the (i) number; and (ii) location of emergency adult learning disability respite care beds in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

**(AQW 5269/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Information on adult learning disability respite care beds, supplied by the Belfast Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust, can be found in Table 1. The Trust stated that one bed in Mertoun Park is reserved for emergency use, however other beds will be used where availability allows in addition to spot purchasing beds from the independent sector.

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Ardcora	Downpatrick	Residential	1
Mertoun Park	East Belfast	Residential	6
80 Malone Road	South Belfast	Residential	3
Croft Community	Bangor	Residential	1
Aaron House	Dundonald	Residential	2
Somerton Road	North Belfast	Nursing	1

**Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of Health (i) how many specially modified buses were disposed of by her Department and its arm's-length bodies in each of the last seven financial years; (ii) how much revenue was raised by the disposal of these buses in each financial year; and (iii) whether there are plans to purchase any specially modified buses in this financial year.

**(AQW 5308/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The table below details (i) how many specially modified buses were disposed of by the Department and its arm's-length bodies in each of the last seven financial years and (ii) proceeds raised by these disposals;

Year	Number of specially modified buses disposed of each year	Proceeds raised by these disposals £
2015/16	17	68,922
2014/15	38	117,062
2013/14	70	260,829
2012/13	39	106,848
2011/12	40	76,241
2010/11	19	24,514
2009/10	20	27,802

(iii) There are plans to purchase 16 specially modified buses in 2016/17.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health when she will outline her commitment to the future of acute mental health services in Omagh; and to outline her Department's vision for the future configuration of acute mental health services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

**(AQW 5467/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The business case for a second acute mental health facility in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area remains under consideration by my Department alongside other capital investment priorities, and timing will be dependent on future budget availability, value for money and affordability. As such I have made no decisions on the future configuration of acute mental health services, but I hope to give an indication as soon as possible.

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Health what plans she has to introduce the Group Strep B test.

**(AQW 5480/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The National Screening Committee (NSC) is an expert body which advises the four Health Departments on screening programmes. In November 2012 NSC re-reviewed the research evidence on antenatal screening for Group B Streptococcus (GBS) and recommended that screening for GBS should not be offered to all pregnant women.

The following were factors in the decision.

- 65% of deaths linked to GBS are in babies born prematurely i.e. before screening would take place.
- Most long term disability linked to GBS is caused when the baby is infected after the first week of life (Late Onset GBS) and antibiotics in labour do not reduce this type of GBS disease.
- The test only identifies women who are carrying GBS at the time when they are screened and some women will no longer be carrying GBS by the time they receive antibiotics in labour. It cannot identify the small number of women whose babies would be affected and therefore many thousands of women would receive antibiotics in labour when their babies would not be affected.
- Evidence suggests that a small number of pregnant women have been harmed as a result of receiving antibiotics in labour. This needs to be investigated further.

The NSC recommendations are reviewed regularly. A further review of antenatal screening for GBS is scheduled for 2016/17.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) also advise that screening for GBS should not be offered in pregnancy.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 4316/16-21, when the six Community Resuscitation Development Officers will be in post; and what is their intended geographic sphere of operation.

**(AQW 5716/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Ambulance Service anticipate that the recruitment of Community Resuscitation Development Officers will now commence in November, subject to the outcome of ongoing discussions with Trade Union representatives regarding job evaluation.

When the Community Resuscitation Development Officers are in place they will operate in all five Health and Social Care Trust areas.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health what assessment has been undertaken of in patient needs in Dungannon.  
(AQW 5726/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Decisions about the provision of inpatient services at South Tyrone Hospital are in the first instance a matter for the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

In June 2014, the Southern Trust undertook a full public consultation on proposals in respect of the modernisation of inpatient acute and rehabilitation stroke services; the future provision of inpatient non-acute hospital services for older people; and relocation of dementia assessment inpatient care for the Gillis Unit to a new fit for purpose unit on the Craigavon Hospital site. Details of the consultation, including who was consulted and the outcome of the consultation is available on the Trust's website at [http://www.southerntrust.hscni.net/pdf/tyc\\_outcome\\_nov2014.pdf](http://www.southerntrust.hscni.net/pdf/tyc_outcome_nov2014.pdf).

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health who has been consulted on the closure of in patient beds in Dungannon.  
(AQW 5727/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Decisions about the provision of inpatient services at South Tyrone Hospital are in the first instance a matter for the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

In June 2014, the Southern Trust undertook a full public consultation on proposals in respect of the modernisation of inpatient acute and rehabilitation stroke services; the future provision of inpatient non-acute hospital services for older people; and relocation of dementia assessment inpatient care for the Gillis Unit to a new fit for purpose unit on the Craigavon Hospital site. Details of the consultation, including who was consulted and the outcome of the consultation is available on the Trust's website at [http://www.southerntrust.hscni.net/pdf/tyc\\_outcome\\_nov2014.pdf](http://www.southerntrust.hscni.net/pdf/tyc_outcome_nov2014.pdf).

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister of Health whether her Department plans to close all in patient beds in the South Tyrone Hospital, Dungannon.  
(AQW 5728/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Decisions about the provision of inpatient services at South Tyrone Hospital are in the first instance a matter for the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

In June 2014, the Southern Trust undertook a full public consultation on proposals in respect of the modernisation of inpatient acute and rehabilitation stroke services; the future provision of inpatient non-acute hospital services for older people; and relocation of dementia assessment inpatient care for the Gillis Unit to a new fit for purpose unit on the Craigavon Hospital site. Details of the consultation, including who was consulted and the outcome of the consultation is available on the Trust's website at [http://www.southerntrust.hscni.net/pdf/tyc\\_outcome\\_nov2014.pdf](http://www.southerntrust.hscni.net/pdf/tyc_outcome_nov2014.pdf).

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health, other than her Department, to outline the other streams of funding for the Public Health Agency.  
(AQW 5735/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Aside from funding provided by the Department of Health, which includes funding transferred from other Departments that is allocated to the Public Health Agency to support joint programmes, the Agency's other income streams relate primarily to internal HSC recharges for recoupment of salary for employees on secondment, or rental costs for HSC bodies sharing accommodation.

The Agency also receives income from various organisations; including Medical Research Council, Cancer Research UK and Atlantic Philanthropies, for a range of research and development projects received.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health to outline her Department's relationship with the Public Health Agency.  
(AQW 5736/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Public Health Agency (PHA) is an Arms Length Body of the Department of Health. It provides information, advice and assistance as may reasonably be required in connection with the exercise of my Department's functions.

Its performance framework, key targets, standards and actions are defined by my Department in light of our overarching strategic aim and within the wider Programme for Government.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Health to detail the (i) total number; and (ii) proportion of (a) Assembly Written Questions; (b) Assembly Priority Written Questions; and (c) Freedom of Information requests directed at her Department that have been answered within the maximum permitted timescales since May 2016.  
(AQW 5742/16-21)

**Mrs O'Neill:**

- (a) Assembly Written Questions: 1079 asked, 739 (68%) answered on time, as of 20 October 2016
- (b) Assembly Priority Written Questions: 58 asked, 30 (51%) answered on time, as of 20 October 2016

- (c) Freedom of Information: 51 asked, 38 (75%) answered on time. In addition, there remain 3 requests still to be responded to that were, as of 20 October 2016, still within the 20 working day limit.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health other than her Department, to outline the alternate streams of funding for the Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service.

**(AQW 6186/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Departmental funding to the NI Blood Transfusion Service in each of the last two financial years is as follows:

	2014/15	2015/16
Revenue Resource Limit - Non cash	£435,000	£606,000
Capital Resource Limit	£132,000	£84,000
Funding Provided by Health and Social Care Bodies (HSCB and Trusts)	£22,160,367	£21,356,777

Alternate streams of funding for the NI Blood Transfusion Service in each of the last two financial years are as follows:

	2014/15	2015/16
Private Blood Group	£7,690	£5,545
British Bone Marrow Registry	£14,597	£9,113

The NI Blood Transfusion Service, established in 1946, is an independent Special Agency of the DoH and one of the Department's 17 Arm's Length Bodies.

An Arm's Length Body is defined as a body which has a role in the process of government but is not a Government Department, or part of one, and which accordingly operates to a greater or lesser extent at arm's length from Ministers; and a Body for which the Department has designated Accounting Officer status to an individual within the organisation – normally the Chief Executive.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health to outline her Department's relationship with the Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service.

**(AQW 6187/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Departmental funding to the NI Blood Transfusion Service in each of the last two financial years is as follows:

	2014/15	2015/16
Revenue Resource Limit - Non cash	£435,000	£606,000
Capital Resource Limit	£132,000	£84,000
Funding Provided by Health and Social Care Bodies (HSCB and Trusts)	£22,160,367	£21,356,777

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**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health what is the agreed health and social care spending tariff on agency staff; and on how many occasions has this been breached in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 6256/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** HSC Trusts have a number of options for securing sufficient cover;

- The internal Bank - for all categories of staff under which Bank staff are paid at their normal Agenda for Change rates. Trusts consider all internal options before then moving to engage Agency workers;

- Securing cover using the Regional Agency Framework. Under the Framework the pricing is set so that the hourly rate paid to the worker is the same as if they were directly employed by the Trust; and
- HSC Trusts can also secure cover through use of 'off-contract' agencies. HSC Trusts only use those agencies within the Framework unless exceptional circumstances exist and the shifts cannot be filled.

Information on the number of times HSC Trusts have secured off-contract cover over the last three years is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health (i) to list each occasion each Health and Social Care Trust has carried out, or sought to carry out, an international recruitment exercise for (a) doctors; and (b) nurses; and (ii) to detail for each exercise (a) a breakdown of the costs incurred; (b) the number of staff that were intended to be recruited; (c) the number of staff each Trust offered to recruit; (d) the number of staff who committed to come to Northern Ireland; and (e) the number of staff who did move to each Trust to take up employment.

**(AQW 6257/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Details of international nurse and doctor recruitment exercises, organised regionally, or by individual Trust, are provided in the table below:

<b>(i) International Recruitment Exercise</b>		<b>(ii) Detail of recruitment exercise</b>
<b>Regional</b> (carried out by Business Support Organisation)	<b>(a) Doctors</b> Commencing November 2016.	Underway, breakdown as requested not available at this stage.
	<b>(b) Nurses</b> Romania (May 2016); Italy (June 2016); Greece & Italy (October 2016); Philippines (May – September 2016).	(a) Full breakdown of costs not available as recruitment exercises are still underway and have not reached completion. (b) 622 sought – to fill current registered vacancies. (c) 766 offers made - to allow for 25% drop out. (d) 741 holding offers. (e) 25 have commenced employment across four Trusts as Band 3 Nursing Assistants until full registration completed.
<b>Belfast</b>	<b>(a) Doctors</b> Europe, New Zealand, Australia (May 2016)	(a) Advertising £2236.89 (b) 5 (c) 5 (d) 0 (e) 0
	Europe, New Zealand, Australia (December 2015)	(a) Advertising £ 11,824.52 (b) 11 (c) 11 (d) 0 (e) 0
	Europe, New Zealand, Australia (February 2015)	(a) Advertising £15,716.51 (b) 16 (c) 16 (d) 0 (e) 0
<b>Southern</b>	<b>(a) Doctors</b> (Europe, late 2015)	(a) £10,000.00 iro marketing; plus language training support (£150) and accommodation support (max £900) for those taking up appointment. (b) 10 to 15 (c) 10 to 15 (d) 10 (e) 2 to date

(i) International Recruitment Exercise		(ii) Detail of recruitment exercise
Western	(a) Doctors (Europe, 2016/17)	(a) Agency fees - £115,000.00 (b) 95 (c) 31 (d) 22 (to join before March 2017) (e) 12
	(a) Doctors (Europe, 2015/16)	Advertising £8,500.00; Agency fees £93,000.00 Total: (a) £101,500.00 (b) 70 (c) 46 (d) Initially almost all offers were accepted – however large drop off due to change in circumstances, securing alternative employment, failure to secure a visa, or to pass the relevant entry exams. (e) 14
	(a) Doctors (Europe 2014/15)	(a) Advertising £10,500.00 (b) 55 (c) 11 (d) Initially almost all offers were accepted, however large subsequent drop off. (e) 0

**Mrs Long** asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of red flag referrals from GPs for suspected ovarian cancer over the last six months; and the number that did not meet the target waiting time of two weeks, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

**(AQW 6325/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department's target for red flag GP referrals to be seen within 14 days refers to those for breast cancer only. However, the target waiting time for all cancer states that, "at least 95% of patients urgently referred with a suspected cancer, should begin their first definitive treatment within 62 days."

The number of red flag referrals for suspected ovarian cancer is not available. However, between January and June 2016, 22 patients commenced treatment for ovarian cancer following an urgent GP referral for suspected cancer, with five of those patients waiting longer than 62 days for their treatment. Due to the small numbers involved and to avoid personal disclosure, it is not possible to provide a breakdown by Health and Social Care Trust.

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health when she will answer (i) AQW 4918/16-21; and (ii) AQW 4919/16-21.

**(AQW 7307/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I answered both AQW 4918/16-21 and AQW 4919/16-21 on the 25 November 2016.

**Mrs Cameron** asked the Minister of Health how many people have held the post of Autism Spectrum Disorder Co-ordinator in each Health and Social Care Trust since 2010.

**(AQO 749/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Since 2010, there has been one Autism Spectrum Disorder Co-ordinator in the Western Health and Social Care Trust and there have been three Autism Spectrum Disorder Co-ordinators in each of the other four Trusts.

The role of the Autism Spectrum Co-ordinator is to support the implementation of the children and adult autism pathways and the cross-departmental Autism Strategy and Action Plan at a local level. This involves establishing links across directorates within each Trust and working in partnership with Departments and external agencies to ensure the effective delivery of services for autistic people.

It is planned to evaluate the role of the Autism Spectrum Disorder Co-ordinator as part of the current review into paediatric autism services being led by the Health and Social Care Board.

**Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Health to outline the current average waiting times for pre-operative assessments in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

**(AQO 756/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Before patients are admitted for treatment, they may be asked to attend a pre-operative assessment to determine their fitness for surgery and for the anaesthetic. Information is not available on the average waiting times for pre-operative assessments for patients on the waiting list for inpatient or day case admission.

**Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the development of the new Omagh hospital.

**(AQO 748/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I visited the new Omagh Hospital and Primary Care complex on the 17 November and saw for myself that this is a fabulous facility that is very nearly finished.

Completion of the construction works will be completed before the end of the year will be followed by a further period of post completion engineering services commissioning. This will result in the new Complex being handed over to the Trust on a phased basis from late January 2017 with Operational Commissioning and occupation between February and May 2017.

During my visit I heard from local people how much this facility will mean to them when it opens next year. The new hospital will provide inpatient beds for intermediate care, palliative care and cardiac assessment as well as renal dialysis, outpatient, day surgery and endoscopy services; an urgent care and treatment centre; imaging services including CT scanning; a children's centre; a woman's health unit; cardiac investigations; a rapid response service; chronic disease management; pharmacy; ophthalmology; and Allied Health Professional services including physiotherapy, podiatry and occupational therapy.

The new facility will also accommodate all services currently delivered from Omagh Health Centre including four GP practices, treatment room, community dental, community paediatrics, district nursing and health visiting. Community mental health teams will also move to the new facility.

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the commencement of services at the cancer centre in Altnagelvin Hospital.

**(AQO 750/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I was delighted to visit the new North West Cancer Centre last week and see round this impressive, state-of-the-art facility.

Construction is complete with phased occupation of the building and final commissioning of equipment underway. Clinical planning is well advanced; the first patients will commence treatment this week. A number of patients have already attended outpatient appointments in preparation for their treatment.

Full implementation of radiotherapy treatment will be phased.

The initial phase beginning this week will see a small number of new patients with Prostate cancer receive their treatment at the centre. Phase two, which due to start in the new year, will see a gradual increase in the number of patients and different types of cancers being treated at the centre. It is planned that the new centre will be fully operational by the end of May 2017.

I congratulate everyone involved in making this worthwhile project happen. Both Health Departments, the Belfast and Western trusts, health authorities and community and voluntary groups north and south have pulled out all the stops to make this a reality.

**Mr Kelly** asked the Minister of Health what engagement she has had with the Minister of Justice about addressing domestic and sexual violence.

**(AQO 751/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Justice Minister and I met, not long after we took office, to discuss how our respective Departments can continue to work together to deliver the Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy. This is a priority for us both. We are committed to working in partnership to send a clear message that domestic and sexual violence is not tolerated in any form in our society.

We have, where possible, coordinated our support for this year's '16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence' Campaign and will be participating in a number of events together over the coming days.

To mark this campaign, the Justice Minister and I will co-Chair the first meeting of the newly re-constituted Inter-Ministerial Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence (later this afternoon). I also look forward to our joint visit to a Women's Aid refuge to meet with staff and volunteers and indeed participating with the Justice Minister at the Women's Aid Charter event in the Long Gallery this Tuesday evening.

Our Departments will continue to work together to jointly fund key victim support and advice services such as the Government's 24 Hour Domestic and Sexual Violence Helpline; the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences for high risk victims of domestic violence; and The Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre.

I also fully support the work the Justice Minister is taking forward to introduce a new Domestic Abuse Offence in the North and my officials will continue to work with her Department to ensure any new measures and protections are integrated within Health and Social Care.

This is but one example of where departments can successfully apply a joined up approach in dealing with difficult societal issues.

**Ms Bailey** asked the Minister of Health whether she will make any further resource available to the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust for its work in prisons.

**(AQO 752/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Healthcare services in prisons are currently commissioned by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and delivered by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SET). My Department currently allocates a budget of up to £8.8m to the HSCB for the commissioning of healthcare services in prisons. I am therefore of the opinion that my Department already provides adequate financial resourcing to the HSCB for the commissioning of prison healthcare services and in the context of the current economic climate I have no plans to make further financial resources available.

However, the Justice Minister and I have agreed to commission an urgent review of vulnerable people in prison custody. Officials from both Departments are now working together to determine the structure, scope and timeframe of the Review. I would point out that this review will add to the collaborative work already in place between the two Departments in the development of a joint healthcare and criminal justice strategy and action plan which aims to identify the health and social care needs of all those in contact with the criminal justice system including those in prison.

**Mr McGuigan** asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of all-island solutions to mental health issues.

**(AQO 753/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department has submitted a paper to the North South Ministerial Council with a view to agreeing a health and social care work programme. Mental health is included as an area for consideration.

Specifically, I consider that perinatal mental health and eating disorders services are potential key areas for all-island collaboration.

There is no comprehensive regional perinatal mental health service in the North and, I understand, a similar position in the South. I am currently considering options to establish a service in the North, and I consider that this presents a good opportunity to look at options for all-island collaboration.

Eating disorders services in the North and the South are delivered using similar service models, primarily in community services with specialist in-reach to inpatient settings where necessary. My Department is leading a study on the feasibility of establishing a specialist unit in the North, and this will report to me in December.

I will be happy to share the findings with Ministers in the South in order to determine whether an all-island service might be an option. The work of organisations such as Cooperation and Working Together, which have progressed a number of mental health-related projects such as the cross-border eating disorders project under INTERREG IV, is also instructive for the future.

One issue to bear in mind in all-island mental health service development is that mental health legislation differs in the two jurisdictions, which could complicate issues such as compulsory admission for assessment or treatment, and patient transfer between jurisdictions. This would be an issue for discussion in the future.

There are also opportunities for all-island staff training and development opportunities across the range of mental health services.

Suicide prevention continues to be a key priority both North and South. Simon Harris and I launched the joint Concerned About Suicide leaflet at the November 2016 North South Ministerial Council meeting. There has also been recent collaborative working in relation to the Flourish! churches suicide prevention initiative; and roll out of the GAA Health and Wellbeing project which has a focus on the promotion of mental health awareness.

Senior officials from my Department and the Department of Health in the South are scheduled to meet in January 2017 to discuss areas of mutual interest.

**Mr M Bradley** asked the Minister of Health, in light of the recent BBC investigation into waiting time targets for people with mental health problems, how many additional staff are required in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust to meet the demand for treatment.

**(AQO 754/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** A recent review of the provision of psychological therapy services found that an additional 312 whole time equivalent staff are needed across the region in order to address the current levels of unmet need across Primary Care, Paediatrics, Adult Health, Learning Disability, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and Adult Mental Health Services.

This would indicatively mean around 70 whole time equivalent staff would be needed for the Northern Trust area.

The draft delivery plan for the Programme for Government Improving Mental Health indicator is out to consultation until 23 December. It recognises that psychological therapies is an area that needs further investment.

The Executive faces a very challenging budgetary situation and whilst I am actively making the case for more money for mental health, I am also looking at ways to get the very best out of current resources. For example, the Health and Social Care Board is working up proposals for a managed care network to better utilise existing expertise across Trusts and promote uniformity and better continuity of care across the region. This also demonstrates why fundamental reshaping of the health

and social care service is so vital to enable money to be released across the system so that it can be targeted to those areas that need it most.

I am fully aware of the significant challenges that face us with regard to mental health in the North of Ireland. I am committed to improving services. This will be a long-term effort and given the current budgetary position, there will be a need to prioritise. The time associated with recruiting and training large numbers of specialist staff is also not to be underestimated.

**Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Health, given that the Northern Ireland Association of Social Workers has reported that 88 per cent of social workers regularly work unpaid hours and that 50 per cent of social workers report staff vacancies in their team, how she plans to address this issue.

**(AQO 755/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I am aware of the Workload Survey report provided by the Northern Ireland Association of Social Workers (NIASW) in September.

Social work, like many other services in the HSC, has seen an increase in demand over the past number of years. More people are seeking social work help than ever before and social workers are responding positively to those people in need of support or protection.

In recognition of the growing demand over the past number of years, Trusts have employed 375 more social workers (an 11% increase) between 2011 and 2016. We know that there isn't a shortage in the supply of social workers to fill vacant posts. We also know that, while some areas have a higher turnover of staff than others, generally, the social work workforce is relatively stable. Recent reports to the Department provide evidence that Trusts are discharging their statutory functions in line with requirements.

The NIASW report highlights a number of issues regarding delays in recruitment to vacant posts and I would agree with the recommendation that employers should be seeking to fill vacancies in a timely way. The HSCB has been working with the Trusts and Business Services Organisation (BSO) in an effort to speed-up the process of recruitment to vacant posts, which has had some success. This should alleviate some of the pressures on social work teams.

I also agree with the report's recommendation for employers to undertake an audit to establish the number of unpaid hours worked by social work staff and the number of vacancies in social work teams in HSC. This will establish an accurate assessment of the scale of the problem and ensure employers comply with Human Resource policies in regard to staff working additional hours and vacancy management.

Many professionals in HSC often go above and beyond their duty; however it is unacceptable if staff are routinely working excessive hours. All social workers have a responsibility to ensure they practice safely and it is important that employers exercise a duty of care to their staff

**Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the diabetes strategy.

**(AQO 757/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Diabetes is one of the most challenging chronic conditions facing the people of the north of Ireland. There are currently approximately 88, 000 people living with diabetes and we are adding on average 3000 new cases annually.

The Diabetes Strategic Framework was published on 22nd November. It is part of a series of future initiatives to support 'Health and Well-being 2026, Delivering Together' which aims to drive radical and far-reaching transformation of Health and Social Care services across the north. The Diabetes Framework is centred around a number of key themes. These include a partnership approach to service transformation, supporting self management, preventing diabetes and encouraging innovation.

Central to the implementation of the Diabetes Framework is the formation of a 'Diabetes Network' where people living with the condition and frontline health professionals will work together to co-design services which will improve both patient experience and longer term health outcomes. The new Framework and associated Network for diabetes will provide an innovative and sustainable future for providing services for people living with the condition.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health whether the air ambulance will be doctor-led and staffed.

**(AQO 758/16-21)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I appreciate the Member's interest in this matter given his involvement with the late Dr Hinds and his work to generate support for the establishment of a Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS). As I am sure he will understand, introducing a major new service such as this requires careful planning, not only in putting a helicopter into the air but also making sure that the operational, financial and governance models are safe and robust, and that the wider health service is fully prepared for the change without any negative impact on existing hospital services.

That planning is drawing to a close and I intend to make a further announcement about the implementation of the service – including the initial staffing model - before the end of the year.

As I have previously stated, ultimately there will be a doctor and paramedic on board the aircraft, as this will bring the most benefit to critically ill patients by bringing together the complementary skills of both doctor and paramedic. This benefit derives

not just from the speed of transport, but also the advanced clinical interventions that such a model can provide, and indeed appears to be the model that most established HEMS services in other regions are moving towards.

I will make announcement about this in the near future taking on board the advice from my Chief Medical Officer, who I know has consulted with relevant experts to inform my decision about how that service will operate. My overriding priority will be to ensure that the service is robust and safe from the outset.

## Department for Infrastructure

**Mr McAleer** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he will review the Disabled Persons (Badges for Motor Vehicles) Regulations to prevent a future backlog in the processing of Blue Badge applications.  
(AQW 5997/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure):** I have asked officials to undertake a review of the Blue Badge application process through a consultative process that will begin early in 2017 for applicants with life-long mobility issues. The review will, I hope, produce a simpler, more accessible application process for those applicants with life-long mobility issues.

You will also be aware that my Department intends to align the Blue Badge production process to the Blue Badge Improvement Service (BBIS) system in Britain in April 2017. I expect this will improve the processing of Blue Badges and prevent backlogs in future.

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the planned start date for an hourly rail service between Derry and Belfast.  
(AQW 6432/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** The completion of Phase 2 of the Coleraine to Derry track relay will create the potential for the introduction of an hourly service between Belfast and Derry. The introduction of such a service is dependent upon my Department securing the necessary resource funding to subsidise Translink to operate the additional services required. This is currently estimated at £1.4m per annum. It also depends on Translink putting in place all the required operational and timetabling arrangements and I have asked for this to be progressed.

**Ms Bailey** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how many resident parking schemes are operational; and (ii) where these schemes are located.  
(AQW 6636/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** I can advise the Member that there are currently no residents parking schemes currently operational.

However, I have recently announced a residents' parking scheme in the College Park Avenue / Rugby Road area of south Belfast. The scheme, which will include a combination of parking spaces for residents and pay and display spaces, will move to the next stage of consultation in the coming weeks. If these further consultations are successful, a scheme could be in place by summer 2017.

I am continuing to look at this issue to see what other schemes can be brought forward, including proposed schemes in the Rossville Street area in Derry and Massereene Street and Clarke Court in Antrim, to address what is a very real concern for many people living in our towns and cities.

**Ms Bradshaw** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail all pilots for residential parking schemes which will be in operation by the end of (i) the 2016-17 financial year; and (ii) the 2017-18 financial year.  
(AQW 6744/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:**

- (i) I do not anticipate that there will be any residents parking schemes in operation by 2016/17
- (ii) Officials are proceeding with the design and implementation of the Rugby Road / College Park Avenue scheme, and if the 11 outstanding objections to the scheme can be dealt with, I anticipate the scheme to be in operation in 2017-18.

Informal consultation has also taken place for a proposed scheme in Rossville Street area in Derry and officials are liaising with the local community to seek to address issues which have been raised. It is hoped that this scheme will become operational in 2017-18.

A scheme was previously proposed for Massereene Street and Clarke Court in Antrim. However recent surveys have shown better parking availability and officials are currently reviewing the scheme to ensure that the criteria for residents' parking still exist. If the scheme proceeds it would be anticipated to be in operation in 2017-18.

**Ms Bradshaw** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the locations of all parking schemes in operation as of 7 November 2016.  
(AQW 6745/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** I can advise the Member that, as at 7 November 2016, there were no residents parking schemes in operation.

However, I have recently announced a residents' parking scheme in the College Park Avenue / Rugby Road area of south Belfast.

The scheme, which will include a combination of parking spaces for residents and pay and display spaces, will move to the next stage of consultation in the coming weeks. If these further consultations are successful, a scheme could be in place by summer 2017.

I am continuing to look at this issue to see what other schemes can be brought forward, including proposed schemes in the Rossville Street area in Derry and Massereene Street and Clarke Court in Antrim, to address what is a very real concern for many people living in our towns and cities.

**Ms Hanna** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) any current residential parking schemes; and (ii) any proposed residential parking schemes.

**(AQW 6896/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:**

- (i) There are currently no residents parking schemes in place in operation.
- (ii) Officials are proceeding with the design and implementation of the Rugby Road / College Park Avenue scheme, and if the 11 outstanding objections to the scheme can be dealt with, I anticipate the scheme to be in operation in 2017-18.

Informal consultation has also taken place for a proposed scheme in Rossville Street area in Derry and officials are liaising with the local community to seek to address issues which have been raised. It is hoped that this scheme will become operational in 2017-18.

A scheme was previously proposed for Massereene Street and Clarke Court in Antrim. However recent surveys have shown better parking availability and officials are currently reviewing the scheme to ensure that the criteria for residents' parking still exist. If the scheme proceeds it would be anticipated to be in operation in 2017-18.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the number of staff in the Rivers Agency that have not yet been found a head-for-head swap in advance of the relocation to Loughry.

**(AQW 6954/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Within DfI Rivers there are two groups of staff and I have provided the detail you request for each of these groups:

- 1 General Service Staff
  - 15 General Service posts are being relocated to Loughry.
  - All but two of these staff have successfully been found a head for head swap with other Civil Servants who are content to work in Loughry. Alternative posts have been identified for the final two staff and a moving date is being progressed.
- 2 Professional and Technical Staff
  - 41 Professional and Technical Staff posts are to relocate to Loughry. 23 of the staff in these posts are seeking a head for head swap.
  - Of these 23 staff, since my last update to you, three staff have been found an alternative post and a moving date is being sought. Accommodation has been reached in relation to a further two staff.
  - In summary, 18 Professional and Technical staff remain to be accommodated.
  - We are continuing to move this process forward over the next number of months.

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans has Northern Ireland Water to upgrade the sewage network treatment facilities in the East Londonderry constituency.

**(AQW 6973/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** NI Water has invested £9.7million on wastewater infrastructure and wastewater treatment sites in the East Londonderry Constituency during the PC13 (2013-2015) period and the first year of the PC15 period (2015-2021). This was predominantly invested in the recently completed Benone wastewater treatment works. The company plans to invest a further £8million on wastewater infrastructure in the remainder of the PC15 period on projects such as the Benone network upgrade, the Limavady Network/Catchment Upgrade and the completion of the Coleraine Combined Sewer Overflow work packages.

NI Water also intends to invest £8.5million on wastewater treatment in this area over the remainder of the PC15 period on projects such as Ballykelly Waste Water Treatment Works.

In addition, approximately 2,960 metres of sewer have been identified for replacement in the East Londonderry Constituency within the PC15 period at an estimated cost of £880,000. This work is a like-for-like replacement and is based on risk priorities, which can change annually, and is also subject to funding and approvals.

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of (i) high priority severity; and (ii) medium priority severity pollution incidents in the East Londonderry constituency that Northern Ireland Water has been involved in since 2013. (AQW 6985/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** The Table below, details (i) high severity; and (ii) medium severity pollution incidents in the East Londonderry constituency, attributed to NI Water by the NI Environment Agency (NIEA), for the period 1 January 2013 to 31 October 2016.

Table

Year	High Severity	Medium Severity
2013	0	0
2014	0	1
2015	0	0
2016*	0	1

\*1 January 2016 to 31 October 2016.

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether he proposes to extend the '20's Plenty' programme; (ii) to outline how the programme areas will be selected; (iii) whether he has had any consultations with local councils and other interested parties; (iv) has he any plans for a wider public consultation; and (v) has he any plans for '20's Plenty' to reach throughout Northern Ireland and to include (a) rural areas; (b) schools; (c) play areas; and (d) housing estates/developments. (AQW 6999/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department has a statutory duty to promote road safety and within the context of the Road Safety Strategy does this by supporting road safety schemes and providing road safety teaching resources free to schools.

Regrettably over 95% of road traffic collisions where someone dies or is seriously injured are due to human error. As young children are amongst the most vulnerable people using our roads, we need to give them extra time, be patient but mostly we need to expect the unexpected from them as they continue to develop their road safety awareness and skills. Therefore, in addition to my Department's portfolio of educational activities, we also help improve safety by encouraging drivers to reduce their speed and reminding them of school children in the area through engineering initiatives.

My Department encourages and supports 20 mph limits and zones in situations where there is a particular risk to vulnerable road users especially in residential areas. Successful 20 mph zones employ 'self enforcing' engineering measures such as road humps, central islands and other traffic calming measures to reduce traffic speeds resulting in substantial reductions in injury collisions. Almost 500 of this type of traffic calming scheme have been installed to date.

'20's Plenty' is the name of an organisation that campaigns for the introduction of default, area wide signed-only 20 mph speed limits on all residential and urban roads. Several local authorities in Britain have introduced such schemes however results are mixed. The Department for Transport in England has initiated a research project to determine what impact these reduced speed limits are having.

Evidence shows that signed-only 20 mph speed limits generally lead to only small reductions in traffic speeds and are therefore most appropriate for areas where vehicle speeds are already low. If average speeds are already around 24 mph on a road, introducing a 20 mph speed limit through signing alone, is more likely to lead to general compliance with the new speed limit. My Department is currently piloting the effectiveness of this type of signed-only scheme at five sites, including one in Belfast City Centre. These will be monitored to determine their effectiveness at reducing vehicle speeds and in reducing the number and severity of collisions. On completion of the pilots a decision will be taken as to whether there would be merit in rolling out further signed-only 20 mph speed limits.

All speed limits, other than those on Restricted Roads, are made by order under Article 38 of the Road Traffic Regulation (NI) Order 1997. These are advertised in the local press and members of the public can make representations about them during the consultation process. The PSNI, local councils, the emergency services and other interested parties are also consulted whenever a change of speed limit is being proposed or traffic calming measures are to be introduced.

I can confirm that my Department will introduce 20 mph limits and zones in situations where there is a particular risk to vulnerable road users especially in residential and commercial areas. I am particularly keen to see more part-time 20mph speed limits outside schools, especially where the school is on a road where the national speed limit applies. I have asked my officials to consider further refinements to the policy for this measure that would facilitate an increased provision, subject to available funding. There are no proposals to introduce 20 mph speed limits on other sections of the rural road network.

I am committed to continuing to work towards reducing deaths and serious injuries on our roads. I recognise the continuing challenges of preventing road deaths and serious injuries and will continue to ensure that my Department uses the tools at its disposal to address the issues.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) when the decision was taken to deploy Traffic Attendants in Coalisland; (ii) when the deployment commenced; and (iii) how many parking tickets have been issued to date. (AQW 7002/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:**

- (i) In June 2016 my Department's Parking Enforcement Unit commenced preparations to deploy Traffic Attendants in Coalisland.
- (ii) Traffic Attendants patrolled Coalisland on the 22 August and on the 10 November 2016.
- (iii) No parking tickets (Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs)) were issued in Coalisland on those dates.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the progress made in implementing paragraph 5.51 of the Mills Review 2103 into Mobuoy Road, which recommended that the Department no longer allows the granting of retrospective planning permissions for sand and gravel workings.

**(AQW 7036/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department published an Overview of Planning Responsibilities on 31 October this year. This document provides an overview of planning enforcement responsibilities in the north. It seeks to inform users of the planning system that, following the transfer of most planning functions to councils on 1 April 2015, a council has the primary responsibility for planning enforcement in its given administrative area.

To assist councils with their enforcement functions, a number of practice notes have also been produced covering the legislative framework, investigative approaches and enforcement procedures. Within the enforcement overview and practice notes, councils are reminded of their obligations to ensure compliance with the requirements of EU Environmental Directives and the associated regulations including the Planning (Environmental Assessment) Regulations (NI) 2015 and the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Regulations (NI) 1995.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Infrastructure what advice was given to traffic attendants deployed to Coalisland in relation to safety.

**(AQW 7047/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** NSL Services Ltd, which is my Department's Parking Enforcement service provider, advises that no specific advice was given to Traffic Attendants deployed in Coalisland in relation to safety.

NSL further advises that "conflict avoidance" training is given to all Traffic Attendants during their induction. Also, before commencing daily enforcement patrols, Traffic Attendants are given pre-deployment briefing sessions on general operational and health and safety matters.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether traffic attendants deployed in Coalisland (i) have come under threat, either directly or indirectly; (ii) have been verbally or physically abused (iii) were required to withdraw, call for support or contact the PSNI at any time; and (iv) have recorded and/or reported any incidents to the PSNI.

**(AQW 7048/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Traffic Attendants patrolled Coalisland on the 22 August and on the 10 November 2016. No problems were recorded on 22 August but, during the patrol on the 10 November, the Traffic Attendant and his accompanying manager reported that they were subjected to some verbal abuse from members of the public.

The Traffic Attendants did not find it necessary at any time to call for support or contact the PSNI. However, during the patrol on the 10 November, the Traffic Attendant and his accompanying manager invoked their conflict avoidance training and withdrew from the town prior to the patrol being completed.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on including Spencer Street and Downshire Road, Holywood in any future residents' parking pilot scheme.

**(AQW 7055/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I am aware of the desire by the residents of Spencer Street and Downshire Road, Holywood for controlled parking in their areas to address all day parking.

My Department is currently focusing its efforts on the implementation of residents' parking schemes in parts of Belfast and in Derry and Antrim.

Unfortunately, I am unable to indicate a timescale when the implementation of future schemes, including Holywood, might be taken forward, as this is dependent on the successful implementation of these initial schemes.

My officials have added Spencer Street and Downshire Road, Holywood to the list of areas for future consideration.

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has plans to introduce an express bus service from Newry to (i) Dublin Airport; and (ii) Dublin.

**(AQW 7059/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Translink has indicated that, in light of existing demand, additional services introduced on the X1 service's summer timetable have been retained into the winter schedule. This equates to eight additional return services per day.

To further assist passengers, in May 2016, Translink introduced an online booking system for the X1 service. When utilised this guarantees a seat for all passengers travelling from Sprucefield, Banbridge and Newry for their chosen journey time.

Currently Translink assess that there is insufficient demand to justify an express service from Newry to Dublin Airport and City Centre.

Newry passengers currently make up approximately 20% of the overall passenger numbers on the X1 Belfast to Dublin express service. The resources required to introduce a dedicated Newry to Dublin Airport and Dublin city centre service could be significant and, in Translink's view, current passenger levels could not justify this. Particularly if removing 20% of the X1 service passengers, this would also have a serious impact on the existing Belfast service.

In instances of high demand and when a bus is full on departure from Belfast, Translink staff have agreed to phone the Newry Depot to advise of the need to provide an additional bus. Where possible, the Newry Depot will provide additional services. In the year to date, it has provided 72 additional buses at Newry.

If a private bus operator feels that there is sufficient demand to run an express service from Newry to Dublin Airport and Dublin city centre, they could apply for a route permit to the relevant authorities in the Department.

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how many passengers have not been able to board the Dublin Airport Express bus service in Newry due to no seats being available; broken down for each of the last three years.  
(AQW 7060/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** The information requested is not held by Translink although they have informed me that, in the year to date, they have run 72 additional buses from Newry to Dublin Airport and onto Dublin city centre.

**Mr M Bradley** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department will give consideration to introducing a residents' parking scheme in the Circular Road / Union Street area of Coleraine. (AQW 7077/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department is currently pursuing a number of resident's parking schemes which are at various stages of development. It is my Department's intention to develop further proposals when the initial batch of schemes have been implemented and evaluated.

I understand that a request for a resident's parking scheme in Circular Road was considered back in 2012. Surveys were carried out at that time to determine the extent of parking by residents and non-residents. However, the result indicated that Circular Road did not meet the criteria for consideration for a scheme at that time.

A new survey of the Circular Road and Union Street area will be carried out, following implementation and evaluation of the schemes currently being developed by my Department.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister for Infrastructure what steps he is taking to support the work of the Lagan Canal Navigation Trust.  
(AQW 7095/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** In the current financial year, my Department has allocated funding of over £17,000 to support the work of the Lagan Navigation Trust.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what support his Department is giving to bodies seeking to promote the recreational boating industry, particularly on (i) the River Lagan; (ii) between Belfast and Craigavon; and (iii) cross-border routes.  
(AQW 7099/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department provides support for recreational boating on specific waterways through its sponsorship of Waterways Ireland, a North South Implementation Body. These specific waterways include the Shannon-Erne System which is a cross-border navigation.

Maintenance and management of the river Lagan falls within the remit of my Department which carries out the necessary works for flood prevention / alleviation. My Department also carries out maintenance on two sections of the Lagan Towpath: one between Stranmillis, Belfast and Sprucefield, Lisburn; and the other between Moira railway station and Soldierstown Aghalee.

The river Lagan is not currently used for recreational purposes apart from canoeists. Under the Operational Service Agreement, my Department maintains five sets of canoe steps: one set each at Glenmore Activity Centre, Drumbridge and Millburn and two sets at Shaw's Bridge.

I have previously set out my commitment to the restoration of the Ulster Canal and welcome the fact that this is recognised as a key priority within the Fresh Start Agreement. In line with that Minister Humphreys and I have jointly established The Ulster Canal Advisory Forum which will explore options for the restoration of the Ulster Canal.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the average length of time in 2015-16 for planning applications for agricultural buildings to be either approved or refused, broken down by local council area.

**(AQW 7114/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The table below details the average processing times for agricultural applications, broken down into Local Authority, for 2015-16. This type of application includes agricultural buildings or structures for the storage of slurry and/or manure, agricultural glasshouses, stables and livery yards and infilling of land for agricultural purposes.

**Table 1: Agricultural<sup>1</sup> applications decided<sup>2</sup>, withdrawn and average processing times<sup>3</sup> by Authority, 2015/16**

	Applications approved <sup>4</sup>	Applications refused	Total applications decided	Applications withdrawn	Average processing time (wks)
Antrim and Newtownabbey	8	3	11	1	18.2
Ards and North Down	4	3	7	0	35.2
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	20	1	21	0	37.0
Causeway Coast and Glens	22	2	24	1	30.0
Derry City and Strabane	7	1	8	0	43.8
Fermanagh and Omagh	20	1	21	4	29.0
Lisburn and Castlereagh	5	1	6	0	35.2
Mid and East Antrim	21	3	24	0	29.7
Mid Ulster	29	1	30	1	28.6
Newry, Mourne and Down	11	2	13	0	53.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>30.6</b>

**Source:** NI Planning Portal

**Notes:**

- 1 Agricultural applications have been defined using the primary classification taxonomy code of PC0002 and all applications falling into this definition have been included in this table.
- 2 Applications decided do not include withdrawn applications.
- 3 The time taken to process a decision/withdrawal is calculated from the date on which an application is deemed valid to the date on which the decision is issued or the application is withdrawn. The median is used for the average processing time as any extreme values have the potential to inflate the mean, leading to a result that may not be considered as "typical".
- 4 The number of applications approved is based on the number of decisions issued in the same time period.
- 5 Belfast City Council does not appear on the table as no agricultural applications were processed in this area.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to list each of the (i) regionally significant; and (ii) called-in planning applications his Department has (a) determined; or (b) is currently in the process of determining.

**(AQW 7115/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Since my appointment as Minister for Infrastructure, I have determined one regionally significant planning application and details of this are listed at Annex A.

The regionally significant and called-in planning applications currently under consideration by my Department are listed in Annex B.

**Annex A**

**Regionally significant determined applications**

Reference	Proposal	Location
X/2005/0653/O	New retail development, car parking and landscaping	Lands to the South of Court Street, Newtownards

## Annex B

## Regionally significant &amp; called-in applications under consideration

Reference	Proposal	Location
A/2006/0180/O	Food Store	Lands off Buncrana Road, Derry
H/2009/0264/O	Heritage led regeneration	Former William Clark & Sons Ltd, Upperlands, Maghera, Co Derry
X/2009/0858/O	Mixed use development	Lands south east of the Comber by-pass
A/2010/0241/O	Mixed use development including hotel, offices, healthcare facility	Lands to the east of Crescent Link, north of Sevenoaks, Derry
A/2010/0240/O	Retail superstore	Lands to the east of Crescent Link, north of Sevenoaks, Derry
L/2011/0359/F	Tourist destination resort – hotel, marina & holiday apartments	Gublusk bay, Killadeas, Co Fermanagh
D/2014/0011/F	Extension to existing basalt quarry	West and south of Bridge Road, Dunloy
U/2014/0096/F	Quarry and inert landfill: further quarrying of hard rock quarry lands and progressive restoration by landfill with inert wastes only. With associated storage areas and proposed new storage building	Hard rock quarry located at lands immediately north-east of Hightown Landfill (Old cell) 59 Upper Hightown Road Newtownabbey BT14 8RR
S/2014/0686/F	Winning and working of minerals, and associated mobile primary crushing & screening, access, etc.	130 Saintfield Road, Boardmills, Lisburn
P/2015/0218/F	Gruggandoo wind farm	South west of 40 Mullaghgarriff Road, Newry
LA03/2015/0234/F	Solar Farm	Whappstown Road, Kells
LA10/2015/0292/F	36 turbine wind farm with sub-station & grid connection	Doraville, west of Draperstown, Co Tyrone
LA02/2016/0006/F	Compressed air energy underground storage	Islandmagee, Co Antrim
LA09/2016/0232/F	11 turbine wind farm	3Km west of Swatragh accessed off the Corlacky Road
LA04/2016/0421/F	Construction of new quay	Airport Road West, Belfast
LA08/2016/1328/F	Gas to the West – construction of an underground gas pipeline	Portadown to Enniskillen
H/2009/0270/F	Works to listed buildings to extend and convert of the former Art Deco Building into a new factory (extending to 4,030 sq metres); change of use and retention for car parking; communal space; change of use to create 18 apartments; alterations and extension of 2 existing dwellings; change of use, extension and refurbishment of buildings for museum/exhibition space and other associated site works.	Former Wm Clark & Sons Ltd, Upperlands, Maghera
H/2009/0271/LB	As above (Listed Building Consent)	As above
Z/2013/0930/F	Housing/social housing development	Glen Road Heights, Belfast
P/2011/0792/RM	Turbot Fish Farm	Newry Road, Kilkeel
R/2013/0544/RM	Erection of 86 dwellings	Lands at Saul Road, Downpatrick
R/2014/0091/RM	Erection of 42 dwellings	Lands at Saul Road, Downpatrick
LA04/2016/1528/LBC	Partial demolition of side/rear extension	Masonic Hall, 15 Rosemary Street, Belfast
LA04/2016/1529/LBC	Conversion & extension of the hall building	Central Hall, 37/39 Rosemary Street, Belfast

Reference	Proposal	Location
LA04/2016/1619/ LBC	Variation of existing condition	1/34 North Street, 26/30 Donegall Street & 33/37 North Street, Belfast
LA04/2016/1620/ DCA	Variation of existing condition	16/24 Donegall Street, Belfast
LA04/2016/1621/ DCA	Variation of existing condition	43A/43B Rosemary Street, Belfast
LA04/2016/1622/ DCA	Variation of existing condition	3/5, 9/13 & 27/31 Rosemary Street, Belfast
LA04/2016/1623/ DCA	Variation of existing condition	53/63 Royal Avenue, Belfast
LA04/2016/1624/ DCA	Variation of existing condition	32/40 Donegall Street, Belfast
LA04/2016/1625/ DCA	Variation of existing condition	Temple Court, St Anne's Cathedral precinct, Belfast
O/2009/0792/F	Proposed electricity Interconnector	From new substation at Trewmount Road, Moy to link to proposed network in the Republic of Ireland
O/2013/0214/F	Proposed Interconnector associated works	From new substation at Trewmount Road, Moy to link to proposed network in the Republic of Ireland
T/2014/0114/F	Waste treatment facility	Hightown Quarry, 40a Boghill Road, Ballyutoag
C/2011/0459/F	6 turbine wind farm	Cam Burn, Craigmore Road, Coleraine

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the ten local councils that have been awarded grants to help the development of the Greenways plans.

**(AQW 7133/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The following Councils have been awarded grants under the Small Grants Programme for Greenways competition.

- Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council
- Ards and North Down Borough Council
- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Council Borough Council
- Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
- Derry City and Strabane District Council
- Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
- Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
- Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
- Mid Ulster District Council
- Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much grant funding has been provided to each of the ten local councils for the development of the Greenways plans.

**(AQW 7134/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Under the Small Grants Programme for Greenways competition, the table below outlines the distribution of funding allocated to the ten Councils:

Council		Grant Funding
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council	For 1 Feasibility Study	£ 8,000.00
Ards and North Down Borough Council	For 3 Feasibility Studies	£ 24,000.00
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Council Borough Council	For 4 Feasibility Studies	£ 32,000.00
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council	For 1 Feasibility Study	£ 8,000.00
Derry City and Strabane District Council	For 1 Feasibility Study	£ 8,000.00
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	For 2 Feasibility Studies	£ 16,000.00
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council	For 1 Feasibility Study	£ 8,000.00
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council	For 1 Feasibility Study	£ 8,000.00

Council		Grant Funding
Mid Ulster District Council	For 2 Feasibility Studies	£ 16,000.00
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council	For 3 Feasibility Studies	£ 24,000.00
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (Ards and North Down Borough Council)	For 1 Feasibility Study	£ 8,000.00
	<b>Total</b>	<b>£ 160,000.00</b>

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how his Department plans to replace road signs that have been defaced.  
(AQW 7135/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** TransportNI carries out regular inspections of all public roads and footways to ensure that essential maintenance needs are identified and remedial work is completed as necessary. During these inspections all defects are noted, including defective or vandalised signs, as well as those signs that require cleaning to improve their visibility.

Given the limited resources that are available, TransportNI has to prioritise what it does and signs will only be replaced if defacing causes a safety problem and cleaning has not been possible. This work will be carried out as resources permit.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether a copy of the internal departmental report on the business case for York Street interchange will be made available.

(AQW 7137/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** The York Street Interchange project utilises an innovative Early Contractor Involvement delivery strategy. This strategy will allow construction to commence as quickly as possible should the necessary funds become available. Due to the nature of this strategy, the business case has not yet been finalised.

The most recent economic appraisal figures for the scheme are contained within the Traffic and Economic section of the Proposed Scheme Report. This report was published, along with the scheme's draft Statutory Orders and Environmental Statement, in January 2015. The Proposed Scheme Report can be accessed via the project's website ([www.yorkstreetinterchange.com](http://www.yorkstreetinterchange.com)).

**Ms Hanna** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the work his Department has undertaken into developing Dutch style roundabouts as part of improving and developing cycling infrastructure, particularly in Belfast.

(AQW 7138/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** I am very keen that my Department develops better and safer bicycle infrastructure to give more people the freedom and confidence to use the bicycle for everyday journeys. The most recent schemes in Belfast, have been informed by the London Cycling Design Standards. As a result we have introduced innovative features such as low level bicycle signals and hi-visibility wands to improve the segregation between those people who wish to cycle and those who drive.

The London Cycling Design Standards make reference to 'Dutch' roundabouts as trial measures. The Transport Research Laboratory has recently trialled these in an off-street environment. Following the outcome of those off-street trials I will consider whether such innovative approaches might be trialled here. Improving the Pedestrian Crossing on the A55 Junction at Connswater Community Greenway

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he will consider improving the pedestrian crossing at the A55 junction at Connswater Community Greenway and Braniel estate to a more suitable crossing, such as a puffin crossing.

(AQW 7139/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** I have asked my officials to investigate an upgrade of this crossing to facilitate better access to the Connswater Community Greenway and indeed to the cycle tracks which exist along both sides of the A55 Knock Road.

**Mr Ford** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he would consider a localised approach to gritting services, particularly in Carnmoney and Mallusk, where extreme conditions can leave many residential streets impassable, rendering the current policy of gritting main thoroughfares ineffective in these areas.

(AQW 7140/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** I should start by explaining that TransportNI, as the sole road authority for the north of Ireland, has no statutory obligation to salt roads or footways. However, to assist the safe movement of traffic in wintry conditions, my Department does set aside sufficient funding to salt the main traffic routes across the country.

I can confirm that DFI gritting policy has not changed since your previous correspondence with DRD in November 2015, and I hope you can appreciate that it is simply not possible for us to salt all of the roads in the north, given the many other demands placed on my Department's finite resources, much of them safety related. The most effective use of our limited resources is to salt the busiest roads and so this forms the basis of our current policy.

As you may be aware, following the severe wintry weather at the start of 2013 a comprehensive review of TransportNI's winter service policy was commissioned. The review was carried out by the National Winter Service Research Group and examined every aspect of the winter service programme. The outcome of the review was positive and concluded that, broadly, the Department's winter service policies were well-considered and consistent.

With specific regard to the increasing the extent of the salted network, the review concluded TransportNI has developed and implemented a robust, risk-based rationale for determining the appropriate extent of the carriageway network across the north that is subject to routine precautionary salting during the winter months. The review also confirmed this rationale not only ensures efficient deployment of resources when undertaking precautionary salting, but also provides a robust and logical basis for the consideration of any requests for inclusion of additional sections of carriageway into this network.

The present policy is to salt main through routes carrying more than 1500 vehicles per day and, in exceptional circumstances, roads with difficult topography which carry more than 1000 vehicles per day. In applying the criteria buses get a high weighting, for example, a 30seater bus is counted as 30 vehicles.

Efforts are also made to ensure that small settlements of more than 100 dwellings have a salted link via the shortest route to the salted network and consideration is given to placing salt boxes in urban areas, or grit piles in rural areas, at hills, bends or junctions on roads that are not salted. These are for the public to use on a self-help basis. The application of this policy ensures that 28% of the total road network, which carries around 80% of traffic, is salted, at an annual cost of approximately £5m. An extension of the salting schedule to cover 90% or 100% of traffic volumes would increase the cost to approximately £10million or £20million per annum respectively.

Given the above, I therefore cannot offer further salting within the Carnmoney and Mallusk areas beyond our current approach. Salt boxes have been supplied in these areas for use on a self-help basis and are replenished after inclement weather throughout the winter season.

I hope that this response and detailed comments have been helpful in explaining my Department's policy in relation to our winter service activities.

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the roads that have been upgraded and resurfaced to date within the former Strabane District Council area as part £10m Rural Roads Initiative.

**(AQW 7145/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** As at 16 November 2016 the following roads have been treated as part of the Rural Roads Initiative in what was the former Strabane District Council area.

■ Drumnabey Road	3 locations	■ Greenlaw Road	2 locations
■ Garvaghblane Road	1 location	■ Sallowilly Road	3 locations
■ Park Road	1 location	■ Elagh Road	2 locations

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the road that remain to be upgraded and resurfaced within the former Strabane District Council area as part of the £10m Rural Roads Initiative.

**(AQW 7146/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** There are 82 locations identified for treatment under the Rural Roads Initiative within what was the old Strabane District Council area and 12 of these have been completed (these were identified by separate correspondence). Details of all roads to be treated can be found on the Department's website using the following link.

<http://riversagency.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=0783fd3dbf9046acbb0ea03bc3ff7f36>

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the road that remain to be upgraded and resurfaced within the former Omagh District Council area as part of the £10m Rural Roads Initiative.

**(AQW 7147/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** There are 78 locations identified for treatment under the Rural Roads Initiative within what was the old Omagh District Council area and 55 of these have been completed (these were identified by separate correspondence). Details of all roads to be treated can be found on the Department's website using the following link.

<http://riversagency.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=0783fd3dbf9046acbb0ea03bc3ff7f36>

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the roads that have been upgraded and resurfaced to date within the former Omagh District Council area as part £10m Rural Roads Initiative.

**(AQW 7148/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** As at 16 November 2016 the following roads have been treated as part of the rural roads initiative in what was the former Omagh District Council area.

■ Dullaghan Road	7 locations	■ Mullydoo Road	3 locations
■ Lettergash Road	3 locations	■ Backglen Road	1 location
■ Longhill Road	5 locations	■ Craighill Road	3 locations

■ Tattynagole Road	4 locations	■ Cranogue Road	1 location
■ Glenderg Road	1 location	■ Bernisk Road	2 locations
■ Aghnagar Road	3 locations	■ Tullyrush Road	1 location
■ Kilcam Road	1 location	■ Legacurry Road	2 locations
■ Clogherney Road	1 location	■ Blackwater Road	5 locations
■ Laragh Rd	1 location	■ Longhill Road	2 locations
■ Cranmore Road	1 location	■ Owenreagh Road	3 locations
■ Rock Road	3 locations	■ Oughterard Road	1 location
■ Radergan Road	1 location		

**Mr Smith** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) the policies; and (ii) procedures used by Transport NI to respond to enquiries and reports of faults via (a) email; (b) its website; and (c) telephone; and (iii) whether there is a document outlining such policies and procedures which is available publically.

**(AQW 7168/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I can advise that my Department is committed to providing our customers with high quality standards of service and we welcome feedback on the quality of the services we deliver and suggestions on how we can continue to improve. As well as fulfilling our statutory responsibilities, we also aim to continually improve our customer service.

Transport NI endeavors to issue substantive replies to 95% of complaints or expression of dissatisfaction of the service within 15 working days of receipt and if this is not possible, we will let the customer know why and tell them when they can expect a full response.

Some enquiries, such as customer questions, request for service or suggestion that do not satisfy the definition of a complaint, are not targeted for an immediate response, although we normally aim to respond to these within 15 working days. Enquiries that do not require a response or reports of a fault, such as a defective street light, pothole or incidence of flooding. These are logged onto our system either directly by the public on-line via the NI Direct web site, or indirectly by our call-centre handlers or officials in our local Transport NI maintenance offices.

My officials are currently producing a Customer Charter which will set out the Department's policy for responding to enquiries addressing all of these issues and when finalised will be placed on our website.

**Mr Smith** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether customers that report to Transport NI via (i) email; (ii) its website; and (iii) telephone are given a timeframe for response to their enquiry.

**(AQW 7169/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My officials aim to acknowledge all written complaints within three working days, which should also inform the customer as to how long they should expect to wait for a substantive response and, where possible, who is dealing with their response. My officials aim to issue substantive replies to all written complaints from customers within 15 working days.

We endeavour to resolve all verbal enquiries/complaints by the end of the next working day, unless it is not reasonably practical or is overly complicated, in which case the customer should be kept informed on the progress. In some instances we may need to ask the enquirer to provide clarification on the specifics of their enquiry in writing.

Not all enquiries require a written response, which includes report a fault issues, such as a defective street light, or a pothole. In these cases the enquiry details are logged onto our system and the customer is advised how to track the progress of the enquiry on-line. I should advise that my Department must prioritise repair work to initially target those areas posing the greatest risk to the public.

**Mr Smith** asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) how often the Transport NI website is updated in relation to reported faults; and (ii) what measures are in place to inform customers of the outcome of reported faults.

**(AQW 7170/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The Transport NI 'report a fault on-line' system updates automatically when an action is recorded on the road maintenance back-office system.

When a fault is reported on-line, the system allocates the fault to the relevant local maintenance section for investigation and follow-up action as necessary. The status of an enquiry is updated on the website when officials enter the investigation findings in the back-office system. Should the investigation determine the fault to be the responsibility of a third party, such as a utility company or private land owner, then the investigation findings will be updated to show the relevant party has been informed of the issue. Should an investigation result in a repair order being created by Transport NI, then the enquiry status is updated to show that it is in progress. When the work order is completed and the back-office system is updated the enquiry status is updated automatically to show that it is complete, and the fault will be removed from view on the interactive map.

A customer who reports a fault on-line is provided through the 'Track a Fault' feature on the on-line fault reporting system. Enquiry Response Time of Transport NI

**Mr Smith** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the percentage of enquires that were responded to by Transport NI within fifteen working days during the last five years; and (ii) the average timeframe for queries to be fully resolved.

**(AQW 7171/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The table below shows the total number of enquiries received by TransportNI during the past five years, the total number of enquiries responded to within fifteen working days and the percentage answered within fifteen days.

Year	Total Number of Enquiries received	Total Number of Enquiries responded to within 15 working days	% of Enquiries responded to within 15 working days
2015/16	15,020	14,462	96.3
2014/15	15,398	14,742	95.7
2013/14	15,255	14,063	92.2
2012/13	17,416	16,048	92.1
2011/12	16,873	15,270	90.5

You also asked for the average timeframe for queries to be fully resolved; my Department does not hold this information, and therefore I am sorry I cannot provide this data.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many parking tickets have been issued in (i) Aughnacloy; (ii) Coalisland; (iii) Donaghmore and (iv) Fivemiletown, broken down per calendar year since 2013.

**(AQW 7175/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Please see the table below for the numbers of parking tickets, known as Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs), issued in each the above locations broken down per calendar year since 2013.

		2013	2014	2015	2016 (Jan to Oct)
(i)	Aughnacloy	4	9	3	1
(ii)	Coalisland	0	0	0	0
(iii)	Donaghmore	7	27	10	5
(iv)	Fivemiletown	61	76	39	40

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how many complaints have been made regarding new LED lighting in Upper Bann; and (ii) how many changes to the lighting infrastructure have been made as a result of complaints.

**(AQW 7176/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department has recorded 291 complaints in relation to the 15,000 LED street lights that were fitted as part of the retrofit project in the Banbridge and Craigavon area.

After assessing each complaint received it was found that remedial work was required at 72 locations, which involving 267 adjustments to the street lighting infrastructure.

**Mr Stalford** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many appeals against fines for (i) parking breaches; and (ii) entering bus lanes were successful in each of the last two years, broken down in (a) totals; and (b) percentages.

**(AQW 7182/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Please see the table below for the details of challenges and appeals against fines, known as Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs), issued for parking breaches and entering bus lanes in each of the last two complete financial years.

My Department's Parking Enforcement Computer System is unable to differentiate between PCNs issued for parking breaches and those issued for entering bus lanes for challenges and appeals.

Financial Year	PCNs challenged	Challenges accepted	Challenges rejected	PCNs Appealed	Appeals accepted	Appeals rejected
2014/15	21,091	12,483 (59.19%)	8,608 (40.81%)	304	98 (32.2%)	206 (67.8%)
2015/16	27,318	14,042 (51.4%)	13,276 (48.6%)	315	106 (33.7%)	209 (66.3%)

**Mr Robinson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline his plans to bring forward planning legislation equivalent to the rest of the United Kingdom to protect Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

**(AQW 7210/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are designated by the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985. Under the provisions of Article 14 of that Order DAERA may, in relation to an AONB it has designated, formulate proposals for conserving or enhancing the natural beauty or amenities of that area; conserving wildlife, historic objects or natural phenomena within it; promoting its enjoyment by the public; and providing or maintaining public access to it.

My Department's Strategic Planning Policy Statement stipulates that development proposals in AONBs must be sensitive to the distinctive special character of the area and the quality of their landscape, heritage and wildlife, and be in accordance with relevant plan policies. In assessing proposals, including cumulative impacts in such areas, councils and the Department will take account of Landscape Character Assessments and any other relevant guidance including AONB Management Plans and local design guides.

I consider the current planning policy framework is satisfactory and I have no plans to bring forward any further planning policy or legislation.

**Mr McAleer** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) what steps have been taken to implement the Rural Needs Act at all levels within his Department; and (ii) what training and guidance has been provided to managers and officials within his Department on how to apply it.

**(AQW 7232/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Officials have been engaged in rural proofing since the Executive's commitment in 2002 and will continue to apply the current guidance. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, who lead on the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016, are currently reviewing the existing guidance and training on rural proofing. The responsibility for disseminating the guidance will rest with my Department's Equality Unit.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure pursuant to AQW 5313/16-21, to detail (i) the number of High Speed Friction sites in the Dungannon area; and (ii) the number of sites created to address road safety measures.

**(AQW 7233/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** TransportNI do not hold an inventory of High Friction Surfacing sites or sites created to address road safety measures and unfortunately I am therefore unable to provide the information requested.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the proposed (i) start date; and (ii) end date for the construction of the new Strathroy Link road.

**(AQW 7235/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I can confirm that development work on the Strathroy Link Road project is progressing well and it is anticipated that the tender documents will issue to contractors next month.

Subject to no challenges being received during the procurement process, it is hoped that work can commence in spring 2017 and be programmed across a 15 month period to facilitate the opening of the new road in the summer of 2018.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the number of road openings carried out by utilities in the Fermanagh area in the last three financial years; (ii) the number of failed openings identified in the same period; and (iii) the actions required to repair the defects.

**(AQW 7236/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The following table provides information in response to questions (i) & (ii).

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17 to date
Number of openings	1769	2173	2239	1408
Failed reinstatements	16	8	9	27

Each failed reinstatement is reported to the relevant utility company and TransportNI carries out follow-up inspections at the expense of the utility company until the necessary remedial action has been completed. It isn't considered appropriate to outline the actions required to repair the defects as each action was site specific and would be different for each individual failure.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure what areas of the old Donaghadee to Newtownards railway track are being considered as part of the Greenways proposals.

**(AQW 7240/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Under the Small Grants Programme for Greenways, Ards and North Down Borough Council was awarded a grant of £8,000 for the development of a feasibility study for a greenway from Orlock to Donaghadee, Newtownards and

Helen's Bay. While the feasibility study will consider the dismantled railway route between Newtownards and Donaghadee, the details of options considered are the responsibility of Ards and North Down Borough Council.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much funding is there for feasibility studies on proposals on Greenways. (AQW 7241/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** I launched 'Exercise – Explore – Enjoy': my Strategic Plan for Greenways on 9 November 2016. On the same day I also announced the award of £160,000 funding to enable ten Councils to take forward twenty feasibility studies for various proposed greenways within their respective council areas.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on any planned resurfacing of rural roads in the Ards and North Down Borough Council area. (AQW 7242/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** The Member will be aware of the rural roads resurfacing initiative which I announced earlier this year. I am pleased to confirm that a programme of resurfacing works at approximately 69 locations under this initiative is almost complete across Ards and North Down Borough Council area.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether penalties are applied if vehicles move into a bus lane to allow emergency vehicles with activated blue lights to pass during restricted times. (AQW 7251/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department's enforcement provider NSL reviews all bus lane video clips to determine if a contravention has occurred. If the reviewer observes that a vehicle has entered a bus lane temporarily to make way for an emergency vehicle to pass then a penalty (Penalty Charge Notice (PCN)) should not be issued.

If a driver believes that a PCN has been issued incorrectly there is a process available which allows them to challenge and/or appeal the PCN.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the specific effect on the development of policy within his Department arising from the implementation of the Rural Needs Act NI 2016; and (ii) what mechanisms are in place to achieve this. (AQW 7264/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** Rural proofing has been an aspect of policy development since 2002, and has now been placed on a statutory footing by the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs is currently reviewing the existing guidance and training on rural proofing in light of the legislation. The responsibility for disseminating the updated guidance will rest with my Department's Equality Unit. Until this guidance is available, my officials will continue to apply the current guidance.

**Mr Mullan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline whether his Department plans to repair road damage caused by the upgrading of the Bellarena rail halt. (AQW 7271/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** The damage to the roads was confined to grass verges which were driven over; some road gulleys which had been blocked; and some drainage channels which need to be cleaned out. The roads continue to be in operation and were never out of use.

Translink and TransportNI met on site on Monday 28 November along with Translink's contractor for the works in order to agree on what work was needed. Translink's contractor has commenced the works with the aim of completing them by early December. I will ensure this work is completed.

**Mr Robinson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the legislative requirement for farm trailers being towed on public roads to be properly lit. (AQW 7272/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** Article 27 of the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations (NI) 2000 [S.R. 2000 No. 169] requires that any person using any vehicle, including towed farm trailers, on a road must ensure that every lamp or light, with which the vehicle is prescribed by legislation to be fitted, is kept lit and unobscured at certain times. These times are between sunset and sunrise; or in seriously reduced visibility, or when any vehicle is allowed to remain at rest on a road between sunset and sunrise.

This legislative requirement includes farm trailers being towed on public roads.

All lamps, reflectors and other relevant lighting apparatus which are fitted to a farm trailer when used on a road must be maintained in good working order and be kept clean at all times.

**Mr Dunne** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for his assessment of the current bus lanes in Belfast city centre. (AQW 7273/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** Analysis of before and after surveys of the “Belfast on the Move” project, which provided 2.6km of new bus lanes in the city centre, show that it met its main aim of making Belfast a more accessible city, reducing general traffic levels in the city centre and encouraging increased level of walking, cycling and public transport usage.

In addition bus speeds for 2015 show a significant increase on 2013 and 2014 speeds across all corridors and in the last 12 months, following the introduction of BRT bus lanes, patronage has increased on the Metro 4 corridor in East Belfast by 4.6% and on the Metro 10 corridor in West Belfast by 6.6%.

**Mr Dunne** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether a contract arrangement is in place with all eleven local councils to grit footpaths during winter.

**(AQW 7276/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department currently has arrangements with all eleven District Councils for the removal of ice and snow from town centre footways during prolonged severe winter weather. These arrangements range from formal agreements in the structure of Memoranda of Understanding to more informal arrangements, contained in an exchange of letters between the respective parties. However, all are based on the same fundamental principles and each contains the basic requirement of an agreed schedule of footways to be treated by the Council, the amount of salt to be provided by TransportNI and salt delivery arrangements.

**Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the winter gritting schedule for Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

**(AQW 7277/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** In general TransportNI carries out preventative salting on a scheduled basis. This schedule of roads is determined using established criteria which is applied consistently across all areas.

In order for a road to be included in the gritting schedule it shall be:

- 1 a motorway or trunk road,
- 2 a main route – i.e. a through route carrying more than 1,500 vehicles per day,
- 3 another busy route with special difficulties – i.e. a through routes carrying between 1,000 and 1,500 vehicles per day where there are special difficulties for example railway crossings, height above sea level, extent and severity of gradients etc.
- 4 a link to a small settlement containing 100 dwellings or more (via the shortest route to the salting schedule).

Account shall also be taken of the availability of alternative or parallel routes and where parallel routes are available, the routes qualifying under points 2 and 3 above need not be salted.

Other routes are not normally included in the gritting schedule, however, ad hoc secondary gritting may be carried out in some areas in situations of prolonged ice or snow.

It isn't possible to provide information on a constituency basis however there are over 700kms of road on the gritting schedule within the areas maintained by Mid Ulster South (Dungannon) and Fermanagh & Omagh West (Enniskillen) Section Offices. You will appreciate however that some of this area falls within the Mid Ulster constituency.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Infrastructure what has been done to ensure drivers from the Republic of Ireland that receive bus lane fines in Northern Ireland pay the fine once they are back in the Republic of Ireland.

**(AQW 7282/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department's Parking Enforcement Processing Unit seeks vehicle keeper details from the relevant licensing authority in the South which is the Driver and Vehicle Computer Services Division of the Department of Transport Tourism and Sport. When keeper details are provided, the bus lane fines (Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs)) are issued in the same manner as for fines issued for vehicles registered with Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in the North.

No further action is possible once all enforcement correspondence has been issued to the recipient of a bus lane PCN in the South as my Department has no jurisdiction to recover PCN debt from residents in the South

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to list each Ministerial Direction he has issued since May 2016. including (i) the date; (ii) its purpose (iii) whether he was overruling any concerns of officials either before or after the Direction; and (iv) whether each Direction was accompanied by a full business case.

**(AQW 7299/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Since May 2016 I have not issued any Ministerial Directions which would permit expenditure outside of the departmental delegated expenditure.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on all road maintenance planned for the A5.

**(AQW 7317/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** TransportNI has recently completed two resurfacing schemes on the A5 between Omagh and Ballygawley at cost of some £125k. A further resurfacing scheme is currently underway between Newtown Stewart and Sion Mills at a cost of some £300k.

Within the last week tree maintenance works were also carried out on the A5 between Omagh and Ballygawley at Ballymackilroy.

While no further resurfacing work is planned along the A5 at present other routine maintenance works are planned for delivery before the end of the current financial including asphalt patching, road studs (cats eye) renewal, gully emptying and tree maintenance.

Reactive patching, winter gritting and response to other unforeseen circumstances will be undertaken as required.

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister for Infrastructure what provisions are being made for the Creagh Park and Share, Toomebridge.

**(AQW 7330/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The land ownership at Creagh Park and Share has recently been the subject of a legal challenge. The court ruled that the Department is no longer in control of the land that was previously used as a Park and Share and as a result, the car park has been closed.

It is appreciated that this may cause an inconvenience to people who previously used this facility, however, there are other options available including similar facilities located at Toome, Castledawson and Hillhead. In relation to the Castledawson Park and Ride facility, construction work has recently commenced to extend this car park and this will provide an additional 192 spaces which will be available early next year.

As part of the proposed A6 Dual carriageway between Randalstown and Castledawson, there is a new larger Park and Ride facility planned to replace the existing facility at Toome although the actual timescale for this work is unknown at present.

**Ms Ní Chuilín** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the residents' parking scheme at Carrickhill, North Belfast.

**(AQW 7336/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The Member will be aware there are currently no residents parking schemes in place in operation in the north. My officials are proceeding with the design and implementation of the Rugby Road / College Park Avenue scheme, and if the 11 outstanding objections to the scheme can be dealt with, I anticipate the scheme to be in operation in 2017-18.

The future development of schemes in other areas, such as Carrick Hill, will depend, to some extent, upon the successful implementation of the initial scheme in the College Park Avenue / Rugby Road area. Officials have added the Carrick Hill area to their list of areas for future consideration.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail what action his Department is taking to reduce flooding on key stretches of the A5.

**(AQW 7350/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Flooding on the A5 is comparatively rare with occurrences usually as a result of gullies or outlets becoming blocked by leaves and/or debris.

Flooding can also be caused by a more serious fault such as a collapsed culvert or manhole and this is what happened with the recent flooding incident on the A5 close to Newtown Stewart.

Following this incident, repair works to the manhole were programmed immediately and this work is now substantially complete.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline how the redevelopment of the A5 will impact on flooding currently being experienced along the current A5 route.

**(AQW 7351/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** As the proposed route for the A5 dualling project is for the most part offline from the existing road, it will have little impact on any flooding issues along the route of the existing A5.

The recent flooding that resulted in the A5 being closed near Newtown Stewart was due to a collapsed manhole and the construction of a new offline route would have no bearing on this event.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the amount spent by his Department on flood prevention along the current route of the A5.

**(AQW 7353/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Road drainage systems are designed and constructed to deal with rainwater that falls directly onto the carriageway and the capacity of such systems is determined accordingly. As such TransportNI generally does not undertake flood prevention works but rather directs resources towards maintaining existing road drainage systems.

Flooding on the A5 is comparatively rare and usually as a result of gullies or outlets being blocked by leaves and debris. In order to try and prevent these occurrences, TransportNI aims to clean all urban gullies twice annually and rural gullies once annually although this is subject to availability of funding. Additional cleaning is carried out at known problem locations as and when required.

In the current financial year TransportNI Western Division has to date spent over £1million on maintaining drainage systems including gully emptying, however, this amount is the total expenditure across the three District Council areas that include the A5 and it is not possible to isolate costs associated exclusively with the A5.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure who will have the ultimate responsibility for maintaining Greenways.  
(AQW 7354/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** Arrangements for the maintenance of greenways will be the responsibility of the body which owns them. It is expected that those bodies that design and build greenways will put in place appropriate maintenance and management regimes.

Where capital grant funding might be provided in future in support of greenways one of the conditions of offer will be the assurance that the greenways will be maintained. Repairs to Street Lighting

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) for an update on the repairs to street lighting across the North; to detail (ii) how many street lights are currently not lit; and (iii) the average time it takes to repair a faulty light, broken down by Division.  
(AQW 7378/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:**

- (i) My Department is currently providing a street lighting repair service in all areas across the North. In the period from 1 April 2016 until 25 November 2016, a total of 21,001 street lighting defects have been repaired.
- (ii) As of 25 November 2016, the number of street lights which have been reported as not lit and which have not yet been repaired is 7,909.
- (iii) The average time taken to repair a faulty street light, over the period from 1 April 2016 until 25 November 2016, broken down by Division is estimated as follows:

TransportNI Division	Average time to Repair
Northern	8 days
Eastern	14 days
Southern	17 days
Western	14 days
Overall	13 days

Additional contractor resources have recently been employed in Southern Division to help improve the average street lighting repair times in that Division.

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans he has to ease the traffic congestion in Armagh City.  
(AQW 7379/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** I can advise that my TransportNI has improved the layout of the junctions at Friary Road/Dobbin Street Lane and Friary Road /Newry Road in recent years.

The outcome has resulted in significant improvements to traffic flow in the city at these junctions and also at the Victoria Street, Gaol Square, Mall West junctions as the layout provides for two lanes from Victoria Street through to Friary Road.

TransportNI will continue to monitor and assess traffic patterns in the city with a view to improving safety and traffic progression as appropriate.

Regarding the proposed Link Roads in the city, it would not be appropriate to make a decision on the Preferred Option for the North and West link at this time, pending development of proposals for the Mullinure area highlighted in the Armagh City Centre Masterplan 2030.

A review of the Preferred Option for the Armagh East Link Road is anticipated to be complete in the coming months, however, it is important to note that the preferred option may, or may not, change as a result of this review.

Progression to construction for these proposals remains subject to clearing the statutory procedures, having satisfactory economic appraisals and the availability of funding in future budget settlements.

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department has any plans to upgrade the storm drainage network on Cathedral Road, Armagh city.

**(AQW 7380/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department currently has no plans to upgrade the storm drainage network on Cathedral Road, Armagh City.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the programme of monitoring that his Department has conducted on the unauthorised sand extraction from Lough Neagh Special Protection Area since the enforcement notices were served in 2015.

**(AQW 7391/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The unauthorised extraction of sand from Lough Neagh is the subject of an ongoing live enforcement case including an independent appeal and it would be inappropriate to comment on the Department's investigations.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many briefings on the unauthorised sand extraction from Lough Neagh Special Protection Area has he (i) requested; and (ii) received from officials since May 2016.

**(AQW 7392/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The unauthorised extraction of sand from Lough Neagh is the subject of an ongoing live enforcement case including an independent appeal and it would be inappropriate to comment on the Department's investigations.

**Mrs Hale** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) the statutory response time from TransportNI to queries from elected representatives and (ii) how he will ensure that this response time is not excessively exceeded.

**(AQW 7400/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** There are no statutory response times for queries from elected representatives other than those set out in the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

My Department always seeks to ensure that any queries are answered as quickly as possible whether they emanate from elected representatives or members of the public.

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the residents' parking scheme in the university area in Derry.

**(AQW 7401/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** In July of this year I announced a residents' parking scheme for the Rossville Street area in Derry. The development of this scheme is ongoing.

It is my intention to take forward the Rossville Street residents' parking scheme prior to consideration of any further schemes in the city. This will allow an evaluation of the performance of the Rossville Street scheme and an assessment of any issues arising from the scheme.

A residents' parking scheme in the university area in Derry is not therefore being taken forward at this time and will be considered after the Rossville Street scheme has concluded.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Infrastructure why the incidents of abuse against Traffic Attendants in Coalisland were not reported to the PSNI.

**(AQW 7402/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Traffic Attendants patrolled Coalisland on the 22 August and on the 10 November 2016. No problems were recorded on 22 August. However, during the patrol on the 10 November, the Traffic Attendant and his accompanying manager reported that they were subjected to some verbal abuse from members of the public. On this occasion the Traffic Attendant and his accompanying manager invoked their conflict avoidance training and withdrew from the town prior to the patrol being completed. They did not find it necessary to report the matter to the PSNI.

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) any additional train services planned on the network in the run up to Christmas 2016; and (ii) any promotions or passenger incentives being introduced to encourage the use of railways in the run up to Christmas.

**(AQW 7421/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:**

- (i) NI Railways commenced their pre-Christmas service enhancement programme with additional and strengthened services operating from Friday to Sunday each weekend from 18 November 2016.

Further capacity has been added to late night services on Friday and Saturday evenings on both the Portadown and Derry lines, whilst increased capacity has also been added to mid-morning, afternoon and early evening trains across the network on Saturdays and Sundays to meet demand.

- (ii) NI Railways have a number of promotions on offer over the Christmas period to attract customers which are as follows:
- Sunday day tracker (travel anywhere on the NI Railways network) reduced from £9 to £7

- 25% off monthly local rail tickets bought between 21 November and 9 December 2016
- 1/3 off all day return tickets purchased after 0930 hours
- Enterprise friends & family fare £50 after 0930 hours for 2 adults and 3 children
- Plus bus fare: purchase an Ulsterbus town service ticket for £1.00 or Metro ticket for £2.00 when you purchase any NI Railways day return fare.

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there has been any increase in rail passenger numbers (i) travelling to; and (ii) travelling from Portadown following the implementation of the revised timetable.

**(AQW 7422/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The current railway timetable was introduced on 30 August 2015.

In the 12 months since, the number of passenger journeys to and from Portadown station has slightly reduced. Journeys recorded for the 12 months prior to and after the introduction of the new timetable are detailed below.

	<b>Passenger Journeys 31/08/14 – 30/08/15</b>	<b>Passenger Journeys 31/08/15 – 30/08/16</b>	<b>Percentage Difference</b>
Boarding	710,097	702,233	-0.9%
Alighting	209,975	208,072	-1.0%

Despite the reduction in journeys to and from the town, the Portadown line remains the busiest on the NI Railways network accounting for 32% of local passenger journeys.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for his assessment of the (i) community; and (ii) social impact of NI Water backdating charges, to the maximum six years, for sewage to (a) voluntary organisations; (b) charities; and (c) places of worship under the the Limitation (Northern Ireland) Order 1989.

**(AQW 7424/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** In circumstances where a customer has been charged incorrectly, NI Water may choose to make retrospective adjustments to the bill and will always do so where the adjustment is in the customer's favour. This may result in a refund if NI Water has overcharged the customer or it could result in a bill for charges not previously applied.

The impact of backdating charges on voluntary organisations, charities and places of worship will differ depending on the volume of water they consume or the rateable value of their premises. NI Water fully appreciate that retrospective charges are unwelcome; however it has a duty to levy and recover costs for services provided and to ensure that all non-domestic customers are billed fairly and accurately.

NI Water is aware that such backdated bills may present customers with difficulties and for this reason a range of payment plans are available to help mitigate the effect these bills may have on the organisation. Anyone who is having difficulty paying their bill is encouraged to contact NI Water directly to discuss payment options. NI Water: Outstanding Sewage Charges

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail on how many occasions NI Water have (i) identified; and (ii) pursued non-domestic customers for outstanding sewage charges under the The Limitation (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 7425/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** In the last five years NI Water has conducted three planned/coordinated retrospective sewerage billing projects to ensure accuracy in all accounts. It is within these projects that non-domestic customers, who were billed incorrectly for sewerage charges, were identified and pursued under The Limitation (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 to recover the outstanding balance. The three projects are detailed in the table below.

<b>Date of Review</b>	<b>Name of Review</b>	<b>Accounts Identified</b>	<b>Money Recouped</b>
May 2014	Sewerage Standing Charge	60	£25k
September 2014	Non-Payment Disconnection	40	£55k
May 2016	Sewerage Account	330	£810k

There may have been individual accounts identified and corrected on an ad-hoc basis; however NI Water is unable to retrospectively identify these or quantify the financial impact.

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline when mutual recognition of road traffic penalty points and disqualification of driving licences will apply between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

**(AQW 7439/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** With reference to the mutual recognition of driving disqualifications, a bilateral treaty has been drawn up between Britain and Ireland, to reinstate the arrangements for mutual recognition. The treaty was signed on 30 October 2015 and will be ratified once both parties have implemented the respective primary and secondary legislative amendments.

Primary legislation is in place and the relevant secondary legislation is expected in early 2017. The progress of the equivalent primary legislation in the south has been slowed by a number of amendments and I understand it is unlikely that the necessary legislation will be in place before spring 2017.

I fully support the mutual recognition of driving disqualifications and will continue to advocate the policy position via the North South Ministerial Council.

The mutual recognition of penalty points is a separate matter and the timeframe for implementation is more difficult to define. Whilst my officials and their southern counterparts continue to work closely towards the implementation of mutual recognition of penalty points for speeding, drink driving, not wearing seatbelts, and use of mobile phones on the island of Ireland, it is a particularly complex project, complicated by the differing legislation and operational processes between jurisdictions.

Implementation is likely to require primary legislation in both jurisdictions and it would be wrong to move to legislation until there is certainty that it will be workable and effective. This can only be achieved by working with southern counterparts to ensure that all issues are identified and resolved.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the non-adopted residential developments which are bonded and completed in Enniskillen; and (ii) the methods used to progress each development to full adoption, with proposed completion dates. **(AQW 7462/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Please see below a list of housing developments in Enniskillen which are bonded but not yet adopted by my Department. Officials have also provided an update on each development in terms of its progress towards adoption.

Please note that the development addresses provided are those used in the bond and agreement documentation and that these are based on the address submitted at the time as part of the planning process. In some cases these now differ from the development name adopted by the developer.

- 1 Tempo Road (PS801/15) – This is a relatively new development and the developer is finalising completion towards adoption of infrastructure.
- 2 Meadowvale, Garvary (PS802/97) – Officials are continuing to liaise with the developer regarding the completion of this development and consider this to be the appropriate action at this time.
- 3 Drumclay Court, Lower Chanterhill Road (PS803/02) – A new developer has recently purchased this development and officials are in discussion with him in relation to the outstanding road infrastructure works. The Department will continue to afford the developer the opportunity to complete this development and it is not considered appropriate for enforcement action to be taken at this time.
- 4 Castle View, Sligo Road (PS803/03) – The Department has served an enforcement notice on the developer and subject to availability of contracting resource, intends to commence the remedial works within this development during the 2017/18 financial year.
- 5 Raceview, Factory Road (PS806/04) – The Department has taken enforcement action on this development and the remedial works are complete. Pre adoption paper work is underway.
- 6 Watersedge Apartments, Sligo Road (PS808/07) – This development has been completed by the developer and is currently within the one year defect liability period.
- 7 Gallagh Shore Phase 2, Rossory Church Road (PS809/97) – There are significant issues associated with the poor ground conditions within this development. As a result the road has not been constructed to the required standard and the sewerage infrastructure requires substantial remedial works. The Department is currently considering what options are available.
- 8 Old Rossory Road (PS811/04) – The adoption of the development road is affected by issues involving third party lands. Unfortunately this is outside of the Department's control and is the responsibility of the developer to address the problem. Officials are continuing to liaise with the developer to advise him of his responsibilities.
- 9 Castle Coole Manor, Killyhevlín (PS822/12) – The developer is currently on site and is continuing to progress this development towards adoption.
- 10 Ballaghmore Heights, Coleshill Road (PS826/12) – Officials are continuing to liaise with the developer regarding completion of this development and consider this to be the appropriate action at this time.
- 11 Scaffog, Derrylin Road (PS831/09) – Officials are continuing to liaise with the developer regarding completion of this development and consider this to be the appropriate action at this time.
- 12 Drumawill Gardens, Sligo Road (PS831/09) – The developer is currently on site and the Department is working closely with him to resolve outstanding issues.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure pursuant to AQW 5941/16-21, to detail (i) the contingency plans for snowfalls for gritters operating on the A4 Ballygawley to Fivemiletown for this winter; and (ii) what percentage add-on for snowfalls has been included in the estimated route time.

**(AQW 7463/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The recent route optimisation project dealt with precautionary salting arrangements only and not snowfall. As such no allowance has been made within the route optimisation project for dealing with snow.

The Department for Infrastructure's winter service programme is provided to help mitigate against the effects of adverse winter weather; however, it does not eliminate them.

Throughout the winter season, some 300 staff and a fleet of approximately 130 gritters are available every day to salt the gritted road network, which covers 80% of traffic journeys, and help drivers and road users cope with wintry conditions.

Salt barns and stockpiles were filled to maximum capacity before the start of the season and this, together with a further reserve stock of around 20,000 tonnes, takes the overall salt stock level to over 90,000 tonnes. There is also provision for further supplies of salt, if required, at the rate of around 15,000 tonnes per month.

During periods of prolonged snow, all gritters will be fitted with snow ploughs and efforts directed to clearing snow from motorways and the trunk roads such as the A4, before moving to other main roads and the busiest urban link roads. To further improve resilience snow clearance contracts are also in place to enable contractors and farmers to help clear roads of snow.

Unlike precautionary planned gritting the response to snowfall needs to be flexible in order to deal with the circumstances in a particular area. The response on any individual route depends not only on the amount of snow that falls, but also on the amount of warning that is available and the extent to which problems arise.

In addition to the 'normal' gritting fleet which is available for the A4, each Depot has a spare grittier which can be used as required or in the event of breakdown. Furthermore two lorries which have the capability of being used as gritters are retained at Ballyvadden Depot along with a stockpile of salt and this can be used on the A4 as required. The opportunity also exists to divert gritters and other resources from areas / depots not affected by snow to give assistance to areas facing difficulties.

I trust this outlines my Department's plans for dealing with ice and snow during the winter period.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure pursuant to AQW 5941/16-21, to detail (i) the contingency plans for breakdowns of gritters operating on the A4 Ballygawley to Fivemiletown for this winter; and (ii) what percentage add-on for breakdowns has been included in the estimated route time.

**(AQW 7464/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** There is no percentage add on for breakdowns included in the estimated gritting route times and contingency plans for breakdowns of gritters operating on the A4 Ballygawley to Fivemiletown are similar to those plans elsewhere and are outlined below.

In addition to the 'normal' gritting fleet which is available, each Depot has a spare gritter which can be used in the event of breakdown. Each TransportNI Division also has additional spare gritters which are available as required. In the event of multiple breakdowns and where additional spare gritters are not available immediately, other gritters may be used to treat roads when their normal routes have been completed. Gritters may also be diverted during gritting operations to ensure that priority routes are completed as soon as possible should breakdowns occur.

**Mrs Barton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the non-adopted residential developments which are bonded and completed in Dungannon; and (ii) the methods used to progress each development to full adoption, with proposed completion dates.

**(AQW 7465/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Please see below a list of housing developments in Dungannon which are bonded but not yet adopted by my Department. Officials have provided an update on each development in terms of its progress towards adoption.

Please note that the development addresses provided are those used in the bond and agreement documentation and that these are based on the address submitted at the time as part of the planning process. In some cases these now differ from the development name adopted by the developer.

- 1 Gortmerron Heights (PS404/09) – The developer is currently on site and is continuing to progress this development towards adoption.
- 2 Killymeal Road (PS404/12) – This development has been completed by the developer and is currently within the one year defects liability period.
- 3 Glebe Crescent (PS406/90) – The required visibility splays are not in place for this development and their provision requires use of third party lands. Unfortunately this issue is outside of the Department's control and is the responsibility of the developer to remedy.
- 4 Carland Road (PS407/06) – The developer is currently on site and is continuing to complete this development towards adoption.

- 5 Coalisland Road (PS407/10) – The developer is currently on site and is continuing to progress this development towards adoption.
- 6 Ardglena (408/97) – Officials are continuing to liaise with the developer regarding completion of this development and consider this to be the appropriate action at this time.
- 7 Hollow Mills Meadows (PS409/06) – This development has been completed by the developer and is currently within the one year defects liability period.
- 8 Woodlawn Park (PS410/12) – The developer is currently on site and is continuing to progress this development towards adoption.
- 9 Pinebank Park, Regents Court (PS411/05) – The developer is currently on site and is continuing to progress this development towards adoption.
10. Columba Villas (PS411/86) – There are defects related to the sewerage infrastructure which are preventing adoption. TransportNI officials are in discussion with NI Water to consider what options are available to progress this development.
11. Coolhill Mews (PS412/06) – A new developer has purchased this development and is continuing to complete the outstanding infrastructure works. The Department will continue to afford him the opportunity to complete this development and it is not considered appropriate for enforcement action to be taken at this time.
12. St Andrew's View (PS418/06) – There are defects related to the sewerage infrastructure which are preventing adoption. TransportNI officials are in discussion with NI Water to consider what options are available to progress this development.
13. Circular Road (PS420/09) – This development has been completed by the developer and is currently within the one year defects liability period.
14. Brookfield, Gortmerron Link Road (PS421/04) – The developer is currently on site and is continuing to progress the unadopted phases within this development towards adoption.
15. Ballygawley Road (PS422/07) - There is a new developer on site and they are finalising completion of any outstanding work.
16. Coalisland Road (PS428/02) – There is a new developer on site and outstanding work is being progressed. The Department will continue to afford this developer the opportunity to complete this development and it is not considered appropriate for enforcement action to be taken at this time.
17. Milltown (PS434/07) – This development is complete and the Department is awaiting 'as built drawings' from the developer to initiate the adoption process.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in relation to the deployment of traffic attendants in Coalisland; whether (i) the PSNI were notified of the planned deployment in advance; (ii) the PSNI were alerted on the days of deployment in question; and (iii) was the notification by his Department or the traffic attendant contractor.

**(AQW 7479/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Traffic Attendants were deployed to Coalisland on the 22 August and on the 10 November 2016. The PSNI were not notified in advance of the planned deployment and also were not alerted on the days of deployment.

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister for Infrastructure why there are no On Board Toilet Facilities on the Ulsterbus Belfast Dublin/ Dublin Airport Return Bus Service.

**(AQW 7494/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Under the European Bus and Coach Directive 2001/85/EC, there is no legal requirement to provide toilet facilities on any bus service.

Translink's policy is to provide toilets on journeys that are expected to last more than three hours and where there is no access to toilet facilities on the route i.e. at a bus station or other planned stop on the route.

As the scheduled journey time for the Belfast to Dublin airport services is 1 hour and 45 minutes, no toilet facilities are currently provided.

In the event of an emergency where an individual requires toilet facilities during the bus journey, passengers can make the bus driver aware of the situation and an appropriate stop can be made on the route where toilet facilities would be available. Accidents Recorded Since the Introduction of Traffic Lights at Gransha Roundabout, Bangor

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many accidents have been recorded since the introduction of the traffic light system at the Gransha Roundabout, Bangor.

**(AQW 7499/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The recording and compilation of collision statistics in the north is carried out by the PSNI. My Department receives details of any collision that results in personal injury to assist with the identification and prioritisation of engineering measures on the road network.

The contact within the PSNI for collision statistics is:

The Force Statistician PSNI, Lisnasharragh, 42 Montgomery Road, BELFAST BT6 9LD.

With regard to the data currently held by my Department for Gransha Road roundabout, I can confirm that, since the introduction of traffic signals in August 2015, our records show one collision during the period up to March 2016.

**Mr Chambers** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the on-street parking bays within the public realm work area in Bangor; (i) prior to; and (ii) on completion of the scheme.

**(AQW 7504/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The number of on-street parking bays (i) prior to; and (ii) on completion of the scheme within the public realm work area in Bangor are as follows;

- (i) 162 parking bays prior to the implementation of the local Councils scheme; and
- (ii) 134 parking bays on completion of the scheme.

The Public Realm scheme in Bangor was provided by North Down Borough Council in conjunction with the then Department for Social Development.

My Department, as custodian of the public highway, provided the necessary legislation to allow enforcement of the parking restrictions on the new streetscape in Abbey Street, Main Street, Bridge Street and High Street.

**Mr Chambers** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there are any (i) regulations; or (ii) legislation covering the long-term parking of touring caravans on public roads.

**(AQW 7505/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** There are no regulations or legislation which specifically addresses the long-term parking of touring caravans on public roads. However, the following legislation applies:

Article 91 of The Roads (NI) Order 1993 (1993 No. 3160 (N.I. 15)) provides that any person who without reasonable excuse encamps or maintains an encampment including with a caravan shall be guilty of an offence.

Regulation 27 of the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations (NI) 2000 (SR 200 No.169), sets out requirements about the use of front and rear position lamps, rear registration plate lamps, side marker lamps and end-outline marker lamps which apply to vehicles parking on roads during the hours between sunset and sunrise. This would apply to caravans.

Regulation 119 of the Motor Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations (NI) 1999 (SR 1999 No.454), concerns the unnecessary obstruction of a road by a motor vehicle or a trailer. It would be the role of the PSNI to investigate any breach of this Regulation

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in light of the European Union referendum result, what efforts have been made to ensure a regular, unhindered and secure rail link to Dublin.

**(AQW 7551/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The Belfast/Dublin Enterprise service is operated jointly by NI Railways and Iarnród Éireann.

The companies meet regularly to review operational performance, growth opportunities and develop strategic business cases to enhance the overall service provision.

The potential for additional border controls between the North and the South under Brexit could have a significant operational impact on the Enterprise rail service, however, I want to ensure that NI Railways and Iarnród Éireann continue to work closely for the enhancement of cross-border travel.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans his Department has to mitigate against any future loss of European funding.

**(AQW 7553/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The letter from the British Government dated 4 October states that all projects which are agreed before it leaves the European Union will be guaranteed (provided it meets certain criteria) but no guarantee has yet been offered for funding allocated after that date.

It is important to note the securing of EU funding through both competitive and non-competitive channels has never been the sole determinant of project delivery; rather, the funding has been treated as additional and has the benefit of allowing other projects, across departments, to be progressed sooner than may have been originally scheduled. I continue to work closely with my Executive colleagues in determining the full political and financial implications of a withdrawal from the EU, so that my Department can identify opportunities and solutions to deliver our key projects.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in light of a proposed Brexit, what work has been commissioned to ensure (i) a long term; and (ii) financially sustainable approach to international connectivity.

**(AQW 7554/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department is continuing to analyse and consider the potential impacts of Brexit and how these will affect us locally. It would not be appropriate to share the results of this work as it will ultimately inform the Executive's input to the UK Government's negotiation position.

**Mr K Buchanan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the number of reported cases of anti-social behaviour, abuse and vandalism involving bus shelters in each of the last three years; and (ii) the number of successful prosecutions taken against offenders.

**(AQW 7596/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The maintenance of bus shelters is subject to a third party contract with Clear Channel Northern Ireland which is managed by Translink on behalf of TransportNI who own the bus shelters.

The Department does not retain any information regarding anti-social behaviour, abuse or vandalism at bus shelters. This also includes any prosecutions that may have been taken against offenders.

**Mr K Buchanan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how his Department is ensuring that train and bus routes are free from graffiti, and in particular, sectarian graffiti.

**(AQW 7597/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Translink aim to respond within 24 hours to any reports of any graffiti at train and bus stations.

Bus shelters are maintained by the Clear Channel Northern Ireland which works to a 48 hour target for the removal of graffiti. If any graffiti is deemed to be of a nature to cause serious offence, which includes that which is sectarian in nature, then it responds as follows:

- within four hours for faults reported between 07.30 and 15.00 Monday to Friday
- by 12 noon on the next working day for faults reported between 15.00 and 07.30 and on Saturdays & Sunday.

**Mr K Buchanan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of times Translink buses have been vandalised in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 7598/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The table below details the number of times Translink's buses have been vandalised in the last three years:

2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
390	289	238

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in relation to the decision to suspend 24 hour bus lanes, whether drivers that have received a penalty for using the specific lanes outside bus operational hours will receive a refund.

**(AQW 7652/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department is currently in the process of amending legislation relating to the hours of operation of the bus lanes in East Bridge Street, Saintfield Road at Forestside and Upper Newtownards Road. This process is aimed at changing the hours of operation for these bus lanes from 24 hours to 12 hours per day, making them operational from 7am to 7pm.

However, until the changes are implemented, non-permitted vehicles travelling along these bus lanes during the current hours of operation will be in contravention as the current legislation remains in place. Any change to the legislation will not be retrospective. This means that voiding penalties (Penalty Charge Notices) and refunding fine payments is not justified.

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister for Infrastructure what reviews regarding the impact of a Brexit are currently underway in his Department.

**(AQW 7661/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department is continuing to analyse and consider the potential impacts of Brexit and how these will affect us locally. It would not be appropriate to share the results of this work as it will ultimately inform the Executive's input to the UK Government's negotiation position.

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister for Infrastructure what discussions he has held with the Foyle Port Commissioners regarding the impacts of a proposed Brexit on the port.

**(AQW 7663/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** In August of this year I took the decision to establish a dedicated Brexit Planning Team within my department. Since its formation, the team has actively engaged with numerous key stakeholders, including the Belfast Harbour

Commissioners and the British Ports Association, of which Belfast, Foyle, Warrenpoint and Larne Ports are members. Ongoing engagement with all of our ports, both individually and collectively, will continue as the EU withdrawal process moves forward.

**Mr McNulty** asked the Minister for Infrastructure what discussions he has held with the Belfast Harbour Commissioners regarding the impacts of a proposed Brexit on the port.  
**(AQW 7664/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** In August of this year I took the decision to establish a dedicated Brexit Planning Team within my department. Since its formation, the team has actively engaged with numerous key stakeholders, including the Belfast Harbour Commissioners and the British Ports Association, of which Belfast, Foyle, Warrenpoint and Larne Ports are members. Ongoing engagement with all of our ports, both individually and collectively, will continue as the EU withdrawal process moves forward.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether (i) he will publish the full sectoral audit conducted by his Department identifying possible impacts, risks, opportunities and contingencies which may arise from Brexit; and (ii) he has approved the same.  
**(AQW 7684/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** This information will be used to inform the Executive's input to the UK Government's negotiations. It would not be appropriate to publish it at this time.

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure pursuant to AQW 6736/16-21, when could real-time email updates to the public become available.  
**(AQW 7690/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The provision of real-time email updates to the public would require my Department to move from its current paper-based work instruction process to an all-electronic method.

It is anticipated that real-time email updates to the public could be available in 2018.

**Mr Robinson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has plans to extend residents' parking schemes to towns such as Limavady.  
**(AQW 7702/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department is currently pursuing a number of resident's parking schemes which are at various stages of development. It is my Department's intention to develop further proposals in appropriate locations when the initial batch of schemes have been implemented and evaluated.

**Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister for Infrastructure pursuant to AQW 6693/16-21, whether an investigation of the Shore Road, Portaferry will be carried out by his Department.  
**(AQW 7731/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I can advise the Member that my Department is currently assessing Shore Road, Portaferry for inclusion on the resurfacing programme later this financial year.

As with all such similar schemes, it will be subject to there being no conflict with proposed works by utilities.

**Mr Anderson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure when the review into the multi-agency response to flooding conducted by Alan Strong will be published.  
**(AQW 7743/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department has received a final version of the report.

I am to receive a briefing from officials on the findings at the end of November and I plan to release the report to the Assembly in early December.

**Mr Chambers** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update regarding traffic restrictions around the collapsed property in Stewart's Place, Holywood.  
**(AQW 7780/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I would firstly advise the Member that this situation is currently a matter between the developer/owner of the property and the Ards and North Down Borough Council's Planning Department as the building is listed.

My understanding is that following the collapse of a section of the building resulting in the road being closed, the developer has taken steps to make the building safe in response to representations from the Council's Building Control department. While this has allowed the road to be opened to traffic again, in the interests of public safety it has been necessary to close one traffic lane and operate temporary signals to control traffic flows in both directions.

This situation is not ideal and I can confirm that officials from my Department's TransportNI wrote to the Chief Executive of the Council when the road was closed initially and more recently consulted a senior official from the Council for an update on progress to resolve this matter.

I would reiterate that this is a situation not of my Department's making but one which we have been drawn into because of the potential impact on the safety of road users. TransportNI would like to see this matter resolved and the road fully open to traffic and will continue to engage with the Council and the developer/owner, however any support from Members representing the area in lobbying the Council would be welcome.

**Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on planned works to Lurgan railway station.  
(AQW 7808/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** Translink is progressing with a feasibility study and options development for the redevelopment of Lurgan Station.

It is currently planned to complete the Economic Appraisal in 2017/18.

Subsequent detailed design and construction phases for the project will be dependent on planning consent and funding allocation within the next capital plan.

**Mr Anderson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline how his Department is ensuring that road signs obscured by overgrown hedges and trees are visible for road users and pedestrians.  
(AQW 7858/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** Most roadside trees and hedges are on lands adjacent to public roads and it is the responsibility of property owners, or occupiers of these lands, to ensure that such trees and hedges do not endanger or obstruct road users. From time to time the Department places notices in the local press and in farming journals reminding owners/occupiers of this responsibility.

Generally, overgrown trees and hedges that endanger or obstruct road users are usually identified by Departmental staff during routine maintenance inspections and the appropriate remedial action initiated.

As a first step, owners/occupiers are identified and are requested to co-operate in removing or cutting the trees or hedges. If that fails, the Department has powers under Article 50 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993 to serve a notice on the owner/occupier requiring him to remove or cut back the tree or hedge so as to remove the danger or obstruction.

Where an owner/occupier does not comply with the requirements of the notice, the Department may carry out the necessary works and recover the costs.

**Ms Bradshaw** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on when further funding may become available for a grant to the Carryduff Greenway, in addition to that already announced under Stage 1 of the Small Grants competition as allocated on 9 November 2016.  
(AQW 7871/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** The ten Councils which have received funding to develop feasibility studies under Stage 2 of the Small Grants Programme for Greenways competition are required to submit their studies by 10 March 2017. These studies will be assessed and it is currently anticipated that up to four studies will be selected to proceed to Stage 3 where they will receive a further grant of £25,000 to fund the development of a detailed design during the 2017/18 financial year.

My Department is also considering the development of a capital grant scheme for the construction of greenways schemes which, subject to the availability of funding, could be available from the 2018/19 financial year.

**Mr Dickson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, following the Chancellor's Autumn Statement, for an update on the York Street Interchange project.  
(AQW 7872/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** I welcome the additional funding for infrastructure available to the Block following the Chancellors Autumn Statement. The Executive will now determine its capital allocations for the four years ahead and I will be striving to maximise the amount available to my Department to progress the ambitious agenda I have laid out.

With regard to the progression of the York Street Interchange scheme, I'm sure you are aware that I announced the publication of the outcome of the Public Inquiry along with a Departmental Statement and Notice to Proceed on Tuesday 15 November. This was an important step, which allows my officials to progress the development of the scheme, in particular the recommendations in the Inspector's Report from the Public Inquiry regarding consultation with the local community and other key stakeholders.

Progression of this scheme to construction is dependent on funding and I will need to consider this project, together with other priorities as part of my Budget 2017-21. The York Street Interchange, however, remains a priority and I am committed to do all that I can to deliver the scheme within the current financial context, working with the Finance Minister and other Executive colleagues.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much funding his Department, and its legacy department, has awarded to Road Safe NI over the last four years.

**(AQW 7900/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** Road Safe NI (formerly known as The Road Safety Council of Northern Ireland) has received a total of £6,328.93 through the Road Safety Grant Scheme during the period April 2012 - March 2016.

Following successful applications to the 2016/17 Road Safety Grant Scheme, Road Safe NI has been approved for funding of £15,078 for two separate road safety projects. This funding will be distributed during the 2016/17 financial year.

The funding breakdown is as follows:

■	2012/13	Nil
■	2013/14	£2,309.80
■	2014/15	Nil
■	2015/16	£4,019.13
■	2016/17	£15,078

**Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) for his assessment of the safety of the A2 between Warrenpoint and Newcastle; and (ii) to outline what plans he has to meet the safety requirements of people that use the route.

**(AQW 7904/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** I can advise that there is in place a comprehensive inspection and maintenance regime to ensure the quality and safety of the road surface. I can assure you that TransportNI is proactive in identifying and addressing any road surface defects that might compromise the safety on the A2.

I can also advise that the A2 is a designated protected route and is subject to planning constraints with the intention of restricting the number of new access and control the use of existing accesses onto protected routes.

In addition, TransportNI's Network Development engineers are proactive in their identification of improvement works to further enhance the safety of the A2. In this regard I can confirm that technical assessments have been carried out at a number of locations along this route to allow schemes to be prioritised and considered for inclusion on works programmes.

I can also confirm that engineering staff are proactive in their review of collisions with the PSNI, with a view to identifying if there are any common causation factors which could be addressed by engineering measures.

In addition to engineering measures, you will be aware of the initiatives to promote education of road users with the intention of reducing collisions and injuries on our roads. The statistics serve to reinforce the messages from the "Share the road to zero" initiative and the importance of the responsibility that drivers have to take care for themselves and other road users.

My Department will continue to undertake comprehensive inspection and maintenance activities and will continue to monitor collisions and be proactive in our identification of viable engineering works to sustain and further improve road safety and traffic progression - for the benefit of all road users travelling along this arterial route.

Whilst there are no works planned for this section of the A2 at this time, if there are specific locations which are of particular concern I will be happy to instruct my officials in Southern Division to discuss directly with you if you can provide the relevant details.

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister for Infrastructure what redress is available for businesses whose operation is affected detrimentally by extensive road works that limit access to their premises.

**(AQW 7988/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** The Roads (NI) Order 1993 places a statutory duty on my Department to maintain the road network. To facilitate works required to meet this statutory duty my Department exercises powers under the Road Traffic Regulations (NI) Order 1997, to temporarily close roads for construction or maintenance purposes. In planning road works, my Department aims to minimise disruption to commuters, residents and businesses and consults with those directly affected. There is no statutory provision for the payment of compensation to businesses adversely affected by road works.

I would refer the Member to the information leaflet produced by my Department "Disruption caused by Road Works – Information for Residents, Businesses and Road Users" which can be viewed on the following link:

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/disruption-caused-by-road-works-information-residents-businesses-and-road-users>

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister for Infrastructure pursuant to AQW 7329/16/21, whether it would be unusual, following direct contact by an elected representative to a specific business area or local office in his Department, for them to complete works and not inform the elected representative that had made the initial inquiry or to pass that information or response on to another elected representative.

**(AQW 8017/16-21)**

**Mr Hazzard:** It would be unusual for my officials not to fulfil any undertaking given to advise on the completion of works. With regards to passing information to other elected representatives, it should be noted that often several elected representatives will make enquiries about the same subject matter.

If the member has a specific case in point I should be happy to look into it.

**Mr K Buchanan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail any new road resurfacing plans for Mid Ulster over the next four years. (AQW 8096/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** You recently asked a question (Ref: AQW 6061/16-21) and I responded to you on 9 November advising that TransportNI carries out an annual programme of resurfacing in all council areas commensurate with the available budget. I also advised that TransportNI does not know what budget it will have for resurfacing, or indeed any other activity, in future financial years and therefore a definitive programme cannot be provided at this time.

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister for Infrastructure when he will publish the Belfast Bicycle Network Plan for public consultation. (AQW 8120/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** I am planning to publish the draft Belfast Bicycle Network for public consultation early in the New Year. The draft Network has proposals which aim to deliver safe and attractive cycling routes around Belfast over the next ten years.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many parking tickets have been issued for parking in the loading area outside McCullough's Prams and Nursery shop on Bridge Street, Bangor in the last 12 months. (AQW 8141/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** 26 parking tickets (Penalty Charge Notices) have been issued for parking contraventions in the loading bay outside McCullough's Prams and Nursery shop on Bridge Street, Bangor in the last 12 months.

## Department of Justice

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to outline which agency is/was the Designated Risk Manager in the case of Frederick Samuel Pinkerton (Craigavon Magistrates' Court) after his previous conviction, and up to the current alleged offence. (AQW 6961/16-21)

**Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice):** The Designated Risk Manager was the Probation Board for Northern Ireland.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Justice to detail her legislative programme for this mandate. (AQW 7044/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** I am finalising my legislative priorities for the mandate and will be briefing the Justice Committee on my initial proposals in more detail at its meeting on 1 December. I will also be informing my Executive colleagues of how these plans reflect and support the priorities in the Programme for Government.

At this stage, I intend to bring forward three short, focused Bills in 2017-18 to give effect to Departmental commitments under the Fresh Start Action Plan; tackle domestic abuse; and combat stalking in Northern Ireland.

By the end of this year I hope to be able to advise the Assembly of my overall programme in some detail.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice pursuant to AQW 6438/16-21, to detail this figure as a percentage of the total number of prisoners on final or latter stage release, in 2016 to date. (AQW 7053/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** 12.9% of prisoners whilst on final or latter stage release have been returned to Maghaberry, in 2016 to date.

**Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Justice pursuant to AQW 6500/16-21, for her assessment on the number of successful prosecutions. (AQW 7097/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** The policy on public prosecutions in Northern Ireland is a matter for the Public Prosecution Service (PPS). I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Director of Public Prosecution. You may therefore wish to direct your question directly to the PPS.

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Justice pursuant to AQW2358/16-21, whether the Police Service of Northern Ireland's billing of Dalradian Gold for expenditure incurred when escorting the transport and delivery of explosives marks a policy change where private mining firms will, in future, be required to cover these significant financial costs to the public purse. (AQW 7104/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** Whilst PSNI falls under the remit of the Department of Justice they have complete operational autonomy. I understand that the PSNI has issued an invoice to Dalradian and that both sides are currently seeking legal advice on the matter. It would not be appropriate to speculate until the matter is concluded.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the review into maximum sentences.  
(AQW 7127/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** The comprehensive Review of Sentencing Policy includes consideration of the appropriateness of the legislative framework for a number of categories of crime including the appropriateness of the maximum penalty available for certain offences which may result in death.

The process of policy development, which, given the scope of the review, is being carried out on a staged basis, is underway.

**Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the potential for stalking legislation.  
(AQW 7156/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** As I announced on 12 September I have asked my Department to review the law of harassment and to identify the scope for introducing specific stalking offences.

The Justice Committee has also indicated that it intends to carry out a review to consider the potential benefits of specific stalking legislation. The Committee will produce a report by April 2017 to support legislative change.

My Department will work closely with the Committee on this issue so that legislation can follow on swiftly from the conclusion of this shared approach.

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment on the steps required to address the insufficiency of detail in the Paramilitary Action Plan to allow money to be drawn from the UK Government in the current and future financial years.  
(AQW 7172/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** The action plan sets out a high level direction of travel and we have always been clear that more work was required to develop detailed plans for implementation. This work is being led by the Tackling Paramilitarism Programme Board, which includes NIO, and is underway.

A key element of this work will be to engage communities and put in place focused interventions in the most vulnerable areas. This will also involve more detailed plans being developed by Departments and statutory bodies, linking to their Programme for Government and other initiatives, and the consideration of appropriate allocations. This work will inform discussions on the drawing down of UK Government funding at the appropriate time.

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Justice to outline how she reconciles her statement of 14 November that “it is not the case that the Northern Ireland Office or Secretary of State have refused any money”, in relation to the Paramilitary Action Plan with the Minister of Finance’s statement on 25th October that “the Secretary of State has advised that UK Government funding will not be released until the Executive agree a more detailed action plan”.  
(AQW 7173/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** I have been clear that no request has been made for the release of Treasury funds, and no request has been refused by the NIO or Secretary of State. The Secretary of State has also clarified in an interview with The View (27 October) that the NIO has ‘not been asked for money.’ We are working on a detailed implementation plan and are liaising with NIO to agree the arrangements for the release of funding in support of the action plan.

In addition, the Finance Minister issued a statement to the media on 26 October confirming that:

*“While the Executive has not yet accessed the funding provided by the British Government, this funding is secure and it will be drawn down at the appropriate times, over the 5 year period, once plans are agreed. The funding is not tied to specific yearly profiles.”<sup>3</sup>*

<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/news/funding-tackle-paramilitary-activity-not-risk>

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice pursuant to AQW 6304/16-21 and given the seriousness of the necessity to ensure a SPAR is appropriately adhered to and the challenges involved in specific and reliable safety checks, to outline (i) why is there no specific ratio; and (ii) whether she intends to introduce same.  
(AQW 7189/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** Most prisoners engaging in the SPAR process are located in their normal residential location which is dynamically staffed to ensure the SPAR process is adhered to. An audit system is in place which allows managers to carry out reviews of completed (and live) SPARs. I am content that specific ratios of staff are not required.

3 <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/news/funding-tackle-paramilitary-activity-not-risk>

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to outline how many committal warrants were issued for unpaid fines in courthouses of the former Armagh and South Down Court Division shown (i) per court house; and (ii) as magistrates' or crown courts; and of these, how many resulted in (a) a prison term; or (b) full payment on service of the committal warrant.

**(AQW 7190/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** As the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service is currently upgrading management information systems in preparation for the establishment of the new Fine Collection and Enforcement Service, it is not possible to provide the information requested at this time. The information will be provided as soon as it is possible to do so.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice pursuant to AQW3752/16-21, for her assessment on whether NIPS accept that all prisoners could be considered vulnerable as noted by the Minister for Health; and if so, what action will be taken to ensure additional safeguarding.

**(AQW 7191/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** My department is currently working with the Department of Health in the development of a joint healthcare and criminal justice strategy and action plan. Any prisoner may become vulnerable at any point during their time in custody. Prison staff are trained to detect signs of vulnerability and when they do they have a range of options to act on, such as activating the Supporting Prisoners At Risk (SPAR) process or by making referrals to Healthcare or other partner agencies.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether (i) there is correlation between substance abuse in prisons and high levels of prisoners with mental health issues; and (ii) she will instruct NIPS to conduct an investigation to establish potential links, and thereby assist in safeguarding.

**(AQW 7225/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** On the 21 November 2016, the overall prisoner population within NIPS stood at 1,522. Data held on the PRISM computer system showed that 406 prisoners were recorded as having a mental illness, with 728 recorded as having an addiction. 277 prisoners were recorded as having a mental illness and an addiction.

I announced on the 21 November 2016 that Minister O'Neill and I have agreed to conduct an immediate review of Vulnerable People in Custody. Officials from both Departments will now work together to define the structure, scope and timeframe of this review.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to outline how many prison officers are appointed safety officers, per prison facility.

**(AQW 7227/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The Northern Ireland Prison Services provides Supporting Prisoners At Risk (SPAR) training to all staff as all staff have a duty of care to those in custody and are expected to be ready and able to activate the SPAR process should they become aware of a prisoner in distress. NIPS does not appoint 'safety officers', however, there are several people who cover posts related to the management of safer custody in each establishment.

Prisons also has approximately 15 staff trained in Health and Safety through National Examination Board for Occupational Health and Safety or Chartered Institute of Environmental Health.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice in relation to her recent comments on 14 November in relation to taking initiatives on mental health issues in prisons, whether she plans to introduce STORM training for prison officers as one of the initiatives.

**(AQW 7228/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** I announced on the 21 November 2016 that Minister O'Neill and I have agreed to conduct an immediate review of Vulnerable People in Custody. Officials from both Departments will now work together to define the structure, scope and timeframe of this review. Staff training will be considered as part of the review and if an additional training requirement is identified, officials from both Departments will agree the most appropriate training product to meet that requirement.

**Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) what steps have been taken to implement the Rural Needs Act at all levels within her Department; and (ii) what training and guidance has been provided to managers and officials within her Department on how to apply it.

**(AQW 7230/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 (the Act) was passed by the NI Assembly on 8 March and received Royal Assent on 9 May 2016.

The provisions of the Act are not yet in operation and it is proposed that the Act will come into operation for Northern Ireland Departments and district councils on 1 June 2017.

In the interim, my Department is maintaining an existing commitment to undertake rural proofing of all new and revised policies and strategies.

DAERA guidance (formally DARD) has been circulated within my Department and was placed on the Departmental Intranet site for information. The aide memoire in the guidance "Thinking Rural: The Essential Guide to Rural Proofing," is used by departmental business areas when developing new or revised policies.

In addition the Centre of Applied Learning (CAL) provides a number of generic courses to assist policy makers across the NICS. DOJ staff have access to this training and several of these courses specifically look at the impact of legislation on policy development such as a Guide to Rural proofing, Equality Impact Assessment, Regulatory Impact Assessment and an Introduction to Section 75 (e-learning).

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister of Justice whether she will allocate funding to the Mental Health Street Triage Pilot in Belfast; and if so, when the funding will be allocated.

**(AQW 7252/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** Scoping of existing provision is now under way by a working group chaired by the Police Service, and a number of costed models will be developed and eventually considered for prioritisation. It is therefore too early to consider funding allocations.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the specific impact on the development of policy within her Department from the implementation of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016; and (ii) what mechanisms are in place to achieve this.

**(AQW 7265/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** As the member will be aware the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 (the Act) was passed by the NI Assembly on 8 March and received Royal Assent on 9 May 2016.

The provisions of the Act are not yet in operation and it is proposed that the Act will come into operation for Northern Ireland Departments and district councils on 1 June 2017.

In the interim, my Department is maintaining an existing commitment to undertake rural proofing of all new and revised policies and strategies.

DAERA guidance (formally DARD) has been circulated within my Department and was placed on the Departmental Intranet site for information. The aide memoire in the guidance "Thinking Rural: The Essential Guide to Rural Proofing," is used by my officials throughout the equality screening process.

**Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Justice to list each Ministerial Direction she has issued since May 2016, including (i) the date; (ii) its purpose (iii) whether she was overruling any concerns of officials either before or after the Direction; and (iv) whether each Direction was accompanied by a full business case.

**(AQW 7297/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** I have not issued any Ministerial Directions since taking up office in May of this year.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether a categorisation of dangerous, defined in the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, be applied at summary conviction or indictable only.

**(AQW 7346/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** Under Article 15 of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 the assessment of dangerousness applies where a person has been convicted on indictment of a specified violent or sexual offence.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether prison staff at HMP Magilligan enter and leave using the same access road/area as visitors.

**(AQW 7347/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** Magilligan Prison is located on the Point Road and this is the only arterial route to the prison.

All Staff and Official visitors enter the prison via the Main Gate and all visitors to see prisoners must enter the prison via a separate dedicated visitor's entrance.

I can confirm that both entrances are accessed via the Point Road and are within relatively close proximity to each other.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to outline (i) the assurances given to residents, householders and schools that raised concerns as to the placement of convicted sex offenders in the vicinity of Thompson House, Belfast; and (ii) the dates this assurance was given.

**(AQW 7349/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** Thompson House is managed by the Presbyterian Church Ireland (PCI). The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) uses accommodation, such as Thompson House, to assist in the supervision of offenders who have served their prison sentence and have been released back into the community.

PBNI fully understand the public concerns in relation to sex offenders being managed in the community and have always been keen to engage with local residents and community groups.

PBNI work closely with PCI and attend the annual stakeholder meetings held by PCI at Thompson House. The most recent such meeting was held on 28 September 2016. I understand that representatives from the local Cavehill and Antrim Road community groups have been invited to these meetings but have not attended to date.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Justice following the farm vehicle marking scheme, whether she will consider funding a trial to allow farmers to purchase tracking devices to be fitted to agricultural machinery.  
(AQW 7362/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** The issue of crime against the farming community is a priority area for me as Justice Minister.

The Executive's Community Safety Strategy 2012–2017 recognised that rural communities have specific issues and priorities, such as livestock and machinery theft. The Strategy underlines the Department of Justice's commitment to support the outcomes of the Executive's Rural White Paper and Action Plan, led by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), to support and sustain rural communities and to deliver initiatives across Northern Ireland that will contribute to safer rural communities.

A key vehicle for taking forward this work at a strategic level within the Department of Justice is the Rural Crime Partnership (RCP) – whose membership includes the DoJ, NFU Mutual, Ulster Farmers' Union, DAERA and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The primary focus of the RCP has been on developing a collaborative response to crime which is specific to rural areas and agricultural crime.

The RCP used information gleaned from data gathered by the PSNI to support and fund the development and delivery of a number of initiatives, including a regional project to fit TRACKER security devices to high value farm machinery, resulting in the protection of over £3 million worth of machinery.

Given the success of this initiative, but also taking into account the most up to date data on trends and patterns in agri-crime, the Partnership is considering similar measures of this nature and I have asked my officials to keep you advised of developments in this regard.

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Justice pursuant to AWQ 6034/16-21 and AWQ 6035/16-21, to detail the total spent on modern digital camera equipment, over the last three years.  
(AQW 7433/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** There has been no expenditure on modern digital camera equipment in the last three years. I am very much aware of the need to invest resources in road safety initiatives. My Department is working with the PSNI and the Department of Finance to that end.

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Justice pursuant to AWQ 6034/16-21 and AWQ 6035/16-21, (i) how much the NI Road Safety Partnership's fine income exceeded expenditure over the last three years; and (ii) the value of funds remaining on account unspent.  
(AQW 7434/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:**

£k	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Income from fines	1,087	1,014	1,342
Expenditure allocated against fine income	468	552	486
Net income	619	462	856

Value of fine income remaining unspent on account	£3,775k
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**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to outline why safety warnings to HMP Maghaberry prison staff are not issued via text; and whether could this be considered.  
(AQW 7435/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** Security messages in relation to staff security are received from the PSNI. The messages are confidential and the information remains the property of the PSNI; strict handling instructions are in place. The only approved method of dissemination is by secure internal email or by direct phone call when the message refers to an individual.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice pursuant to AQW 7188/16-21 and given the seriousness of the offence and the terms of release, to outline why the PSNI were not the Designated Risk Manager.  
(AQW 7436/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** The Probation Board for Northern Ireland is the lead agency for risk managing offenders who are subject to statutory post release supervision of their sentence. PSNI retain responsibility for any other statutory orders which are in force but would normally only act as lead agency in cases where there is no statutory licence period or it has subsequently expired.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to detail how many committal warrants were issued for unpaid fines in the former Ards Court Division (i) per court house; and (ii) shown as magistrates or crown courts; and of these how many resulted in (a) a prison term; or (b) full payment on service of the committal warrant.

**(AQW 7437/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** As the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service is currently upgrading management information systems in preparation for the establishment of the new Fine Collection and Enforcement Service, it is not possible to provide the information requested at this time. The information will be provided as soon as it is possible to do so.

**Ms Mallon** asked the Minister of Justice how many welfare appeals are expected to be lodged in (i) 2016-17; (ii) 2017-18; (iii) 2018-19; and (iv) 2019-20.

**(AQW 7467/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The projected number of welfare appeals in future years is currently a matter for the Department for Communities and is detailed in the Minister for Communities reply to AQW/7568/16-21. I can however confirm that in the context of 2016-17 the Appeals Service has received 6,613 appeals as at 30 October 2016.

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Justice whether her Department plans to work with her Executive Colleagues, and the PSNI, to raise awareness on the rights of young people regarding stop and search procedures.

**(AQW 7474/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** NI Direct provides information to the public on stop and search procedures in Northern Ireland.

Stop and search powers, by their very nature, are intrusive so it is important that people are aware of their rights when these powers are being exercised by police officers.

As these are operational policing powers, the primary responsibility for ensuring that individuals are aware of their rights rests with the Police Service of Northern Ireland in the first instance. Exercise of these powers by the PSNI is closely scrutinised and monitored by the Policing Board.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the circumstances of a security breach at Dungannon Courthouse on Friday 18 November 2016, including if the PSNI were notified; and whether any persons were arrested and/or charged.

**(AQW 7484/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service does not comment on security matters.

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Justice to outline what role her Department has in connection to the Belfast Harbour Police.

**(AQW 7496/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** Routine management of the Belfast Harbour Police is a matter for the Belfast Harbour Commissioners who are appointed by the Department for Infrastructure. My Department's role is to ensure that policing arrangements for the Belfast Harbour Police are compatible with those of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, which has primacy for policing in Northern Ireland, and to ensure that proper oversight and accountability arrangements are in place.

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any discussions with the PSNI regarding any current or planned cross-border cooperation with An Garda Síochána.

**(AQW 7516/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** Law enforcement in Northern Ireland has always co-operated with colleagues in the Republic of Ireland to tackle the threat posed by criminals. Addressing cross-border criminality is principally an operational matter for the two police forces and other key law enforcement agencies however, in my role as chair of the Organised Crime Task Force, I meet regularly with the PSNI.

In addition the establishment of the Joint Agency Task Force (JATF) under the Fresh Start Agreement is enhancing the operational response to cross-border criminality and has agreed priorities for law enforcement in both jurisdictions. The JATF provided a written progress report to me and to the Tánaiste at the November meeting of Justice Ministers under the Inter-Governmental Agreement on Criminal Justice Matters. I am encouraged by the JATF's successes to date which include a number of arrests and ongoing prosecutions, the seizure of illicit goods and the return of stolen items to their owners.

PSNI and An Garda Síochána also launched an updated Cross Border Policing Strategy earlier this year, which sets out the variety of ways in which the police services work together. The strategy aims to improve public safety throughout Ireland, by disrupting criminal activity and maximising the response of both police services to paramilitarism and organised crime in the border region.

My officials are also engaged in ongoing discussions with PSNI and other relevant organisations to explore the operational implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland. I am satisfied that we currently have effective links and strong partnership arrangements in place for cross-border co-operation with Ireland and I am committed to ensuring that this continues to be the case in the future.

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the consideration given to the impact of Brexit on the efforts to address human trafficking.

**(AQW 7517/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** My officials are engaged in ongoing discussions with PSNI and other organisations, including UK Border Force, to explore the operational implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland.

This includes consideration of the potential impact of Brexit on organised crime, including human trafficking and organised immigration crime.

It also includes consideration of the European Arrest Warrant which we will wish to see retained post the UK's departure from the EU.

I am satisfied that we currently have effective links and strong partnership arrangements in place for cross-border co-operation with Ireland and I am committed to ensuring that this continues to be the case in the future.

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the discussions with the PSNI regarding any work they have been tasked with relating to the European Arrest Warrant.

**(AQW 7518/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** My officials are engaged in ongoing discussions with PSNI and other organisations, including UK Border Force, to explore the operational implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland.

This includes consideration of the potential impact of Brexit on organised crime, including human trafficking and organised immigration crime.

It also includes consideration of the European Arrest Warrant which we will wish to see retained post the UK's departure from the EU.

I am satisfied that we currently have effective links and strong partnership arrangements in place for cross-border co-operation with Ireland and I am committed to ensuring that this continues to be the case in the future.

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the discussions with the UK Border Agency regarding any plans her Department has been tasked with relating to the Irish border.

**(AQW 7519/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** My officials are engaged in ongoing discussions with PSNI and other organisations, including UK Border Force, to explore the operational implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland.

This includes consideration of the potential impact of Brexit on organised crime, including human trafficking and organised immigration crime.

It also includes consideration of the European Arrest Warrant which we will wish to see retained post the UK's departure from the EU.

I am satisfied that we currently have effective links and strong partnership arrangements in place for cross-border co-operation with Ireland and I am committed to ensuring that this continues to be the case in the future.

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any reviews on the impact of Brexit currently underway in her Department.

**(AQW 7610/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** My Department continues to carry out a detailed analysis of the potential impact of Brexit and the issues that will affect us locally. It would not be appropriate to share the results of this analysis as it will be used to inform the NI Executive's input to the UK Government's negotiation position.

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any discussions with Forensic Science Northern Ireland regarding how a proposed Brexit will impact current or planned cross-border co-operation.

**(AQW 7611/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** My officials are liaising with criminal justice organisations to explore the operational implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland.

This includes consideration of the existing EU criminal justice co-operation instruments.

I am satisfied that we currently have effective links and strong partnership arrangements in place with Ireland for cross-border co-operation and I am committed to ensuring that this continues to be the case.

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any discussions with the Northern Ireland Prison Service regarding how inter jurisdictional prisoner transfers could be impacted by a proposed Brexit.

**(AQW 7612/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** My officials are liaising with criminal justice organisations to explore the operational implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland.

This includes consideration of the existing EU criminal justice co-operation instruments.

I am satisfied that we currently have effective links and strong partnership arrangements in place with Ireland for cross-border co-operation and I am committed to ensuring that this continues to be the case.

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any Departmental plans to mitigate against any future loss of European Funding.

**(AQW 7613/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** It is too early at this stage to make an assessment of any impact on EU funding arising from the UK's withdrawal from the EU. This will largely depend on the terms of the relationship between the UK and the EU which is ultimately agreed.

In light of recent statements from Treasury providing guarantees for EU funding, we do not anticipate any risk to current projects involving justice organisations.

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any work undertaken to establish the number of laws in her departmental remit that may need to be revisited in light of Brexit.

**(AQW 7614/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** This issue is being considered as part of a detailed assessment of the potential impact for us of a UK withdrawal from the EU.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any consideration given to the impact on policing if there is a loss of access to the Secure Information Exchange Network Application, in the event of Brexit.

**(AQW 7620/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** My officials are engaged in ongoing discussions with criminal justice organisations to explore the operational implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland.

This includes consideration of the existing EU criminal justice co-operation instruments.

I am committed to ensuring that we continue to have effective links and strong partnership arrangements in place for international criminal justice co-operation.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any consideration given to the impact on policing if there is a loss of access to the Europol Information System, in the event of Brexit.

**(AQW 7621/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** My officials are engaged in ongoing discussions with criminal justice organisations to explore the operational implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland.

This includes consideration of the existing EU criminal justice co-operation instruments.

I am committed to ensuring that we continue to have effective links and strong partnership arrangements in place for international criminal justice co-operation.

**Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any Departmental plans to ensure access to the broadest range of international criminal databases in the event of Brexit.

**(AQW 7622/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** My officials are engaged in ongoing discussions with criminal justice organisations to explore the operational implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland.

This includes consideration of the existing EU criminal justice co-operation instruments.

I am committed to ensuring that we continue to have effective links and strong partnership arrangements in place for international criminal justice co-operation.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to outline, in relation to the incident in HMP Maghaberry in which a female prison officer was bound to a chair (i) how many prison officers were on duty at the time in the house and/or landing in question; and of these (ii) what was the breakdown of male and female prison officers.

**(AQW 7674/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** It would not be appropriate to discuss the staffing levels in prisons, particularly for a high security prison.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the current scheme piloted by Probation Services NI in relation to the preparation of pre-sentence reports at magistrates' courts.

**(AQW 7675/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The Probation Board for Northern Ireland commenced a pilot of the new Magistrates' Court Report on 1 November 2016. The pilot is currently being run across Laganside, Dungannon, Enniskillen, Armagh and Magherafelt Courts and will last for a period of three months before being evaluated. The Reports will provide bespoke assessments for District Judges in these Court areas.

The Reports are designed to facilitate a speedy resolution to court sentencing and to encourage focus and brevity in report writing.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to order a Serious Case Review into (i) the monitoring; and (ii) suitability of placement of Leo Hoad whilst in the community.

**(AQW 7676/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** It is not the responsibility of the Minister of Justice to order a Serious Case Review. It is the Strategic Management Board, responsible for oversight of the Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI), who commissions such reviews where they meet the required criteria. A Serious Case Review has not been commissioned in this case as the matter does not meet the criteria set out in the PPANI Manual of Practice.

**Ms Hanna** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the discussions she has held with representatives of the legal profession within Northern Ireland regarding the impacts of a proposed Brexit on their profession.

**(AQW 7757/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** Both I and my officials meet regularly with the Bar Council and the Law Society to discuss matters of mutual interest including Brexit.

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the consideration given to the impact on policing in Northern Ireland if, in the event of Brexit, there is a loss of access to the Passenger Name Records system.

**(AQW 7765/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** My officials are engaged in ongoing discussions with criminal justice organisations to explore the operational implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland.

This includes consideration of existing EU criminal justice co-operation instruments.

I am committed to ensuring that we continue to have effective links and strong partnership arrangements in place for international criminal justice co-operation.

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the consideration given to the impact on policing in Northern Ireland if, in the event of Brexit, there is a loss of access to the Schengen Information System.

**(AQW 7766/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** My officials are engaged in ongoing discussions with criminal justice organisations to explore the operational implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland.

This includes consideration of existing EU criminal justice co-operation instruments.

I am committed to ensuring that we continue to have effective links and strong partnership arrangements in place for international criminal justice co-operation.

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the consideration given to the impact on policing in Northern Ireland if, in the event of Brexit, there is a loss of access to the European Criminal Records Information Service.

**(AQW 7767/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** My officials are engaged in ongoing discussions with criminal justice organisations to explore the operational implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland.

This includes consideration of existing EU criminal justice co-operation instruments.

I am committed to ensuring that we continue to have effective links and strong partnership arrangements in place for international criminal justice co-operation.

**Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the consideration given to the impact on policing in Northern Ireland if, in the event of Brexit, there is a loss of access to the Prüm database.

**(AQW 7768/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** My officials are engaged in ongoing discussions with criminal justice organisations to explore the operational implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland.

This includes consideration of existing EU criminal justice co-operation instruments.

I am committed to ensuring that we continue to have effective links and strong partnership arrangements in place for international criminal justice co-operation.

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Justice to publish the full sectoral audit conducted by her Department identifying possible impacts, risks, opportunities and contingencies which may arise from Brexit; and whether she approved same.

**(AQW 7799/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The work which my Department has undertaken to identify the key justice issues on Brexit will be used to inform the UK Government's negotiations. It would not be appropriate to publish it at this time.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to outline who or which agency is the Designated Risk Manager for Jason Leonard Shaw, up to and since the current alleged offences.

**(AQW 7801/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** PSNI are the Designated Risk Managers but, following sentencing in this case, this is currently the subject of reassessment.

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice following her statement on Monday 21 November 2016 in relation to addressing prisoner mental health, and equipping prison staff with skills to identify and assist prisoners that are suffering, whether she will reconsider having non-medical prison staff trained in STORM.

**(AQW 7803/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** I announced on the 21 November 2016 that Minister O'Neill and I have agreed to conduct an immediate review of Vulnerable People in Custody. Officials from both Departments will now work together to define the structure, scope and timeframe of this review. Staff training will be considered as part of the review if an additional training requirement is identified.

**Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the current waiting time for individuals to receive their Access NI certificates.

**(AQW 7821/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The average current waiting times for individuals to receive their Access NI certificates, as of 24th November 2016, were as follows:

Type of check	Average time to issue certificate
Basic (Direct application by member of the public)	1 day
Basic (Application made through Responsible Body)	1 day
Standard	1 day
Enhanced	On-line application - 3 days Paper application - 6 days  Where a case has been referred to a police force, it is taking an average of 21 days to issue the certificate.

Where an application for an enhanced criminal record certificate must, under the current legislation, be referred to a police force, the length of time to complete the case will vary on an individual basis. Currently there are no cases outstanding with police for more than 60 days. There are currently 57 cases with PSNI for 25 days or more and 1 with other UK police forces.

Access NI publish anticipated turnaround times for applications on a weekly basis through the NI Direct website: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/costs-and-turnaround-times>

**Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Justice to detail how many community service orders have been issued in each of the last five years, broken down by court division.

**(AQW 7822/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The number of community service orders made in Crown and Magistrates' Courts in each of the last five years, broken down by court division, is presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1 – Number of community service orders made<sup>1</sup> in Crown and Magistrates' Courts, by Court Division: 2011 to 2015**

Court Division	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Belfast	715	653	615	467	482
Londonderry	133	158	155	107	119
Antrim	94	79	89	77	106
Fermanagh and Tyrone	199	197	209	147	179
Armagh and South Down	52	82	59	53	77
Ards	170	139	120	85	106
Craigavon	169	155	152	118	152
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,532</b>	<b>1,463</b>	<b>1,399</b>	<b>1,054</b>	<b>1,221</b>

**Source:** Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

1 Excludes orders made on appeals.

The number of community service orders that were not completed during the period 2012 to 2015 is presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2 – Number of community service orders that were not completed: 2012 to 2015**

	Year			
	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number of community service orders not completed	399	371	326	298

**Source:** Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI)

The provision of data for the calendar year 2011 would require a manual trawl of records by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

**Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total number of community service orders that have failed to be completed, in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 7823/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The number of community service orders made in Crown and Magistrates' Courts in each of the last five years, broken down by court division, is presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1 – Number of community service orders made<sup>1</sup> in Crown and Magistrates' Courts, by Court Division: 2011 to 2015**

Court Division	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Belfast	715	653	615	467	482
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Ards	170	139	120	85	106
Craigavon	169	155	152	118	152
Total	1,532	1,463	1,399	1,054	1,221

**Source:** Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

1 Excludes orders made on appeals.

The number of community service orders that were not completed during the period 2012 to 2015 is presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2 – Number of community service orders that were not completed: 2012 to 2015**

	Year			
	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number of community service orders not completed	399	371	326	298

**Source:** Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI)

The provision of data for the calendar year 2011 would require a manual trawl of records by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister of Justice whether she plans to introduce legislation similar to Clare's Law.  
(AQW 7827/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** Legislation is not required in order to introduce a Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (also known as Clare's Law) in Northern Ireland.

Earlier this year my Department sought views through a public consultation, on whether PSNI's existing common law powers for disclosing information should be utilised through the establishment of a formal Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme.

Having considered the responses to the consultation, I am now committed to introducing a Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme in Northern Ireland. The Scheme will make provision for both a 'Right to Ask' and 'Right to Know' processes.

A Task and Finish Group representing key stakeholders from the statutory, voluntary and community sector has been established to develop the scheme. The primary focus will be ensuring the safety of all those involved hence the scheme will require clear protocols and guidance for police on the operation of the scheme.

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Justice to outline (i) the full complement of staff for Maghaberry Prison; and (ii) the current complement.  
(AQW 7833/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** It would not be appropriate to discuss the staffing levels in prisons, particularly for a High Security Prison.

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Justice to outline (i) the accommodation currently closed in Maghaberry Prison; and (ii) how this affects the prison population and prison staff.  
(AQW 7834/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** A small number of residential units are currently closed within Maghaberry Prison. These Units are Foyle House, Glen House and Martin House. This has not affected the prison population adversely as all units are maintained within the locally set operational capacity target. There is a positive effect on staff with the closure of these units, as staff can be deployed in a manner which affords the delivery of the maximum regime possible.

**Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment on the progress towards introducing legislation similar to the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme that exists in England.  
(AQW 7845/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** Legislation is not required in order to introduce a Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (also known as Clare's Law) in Northern Ireland.

Earlier this year my Department sought views through a public consultation, on whether PSNI's existing common law powers for disclosing information should be utilised through the establishment of a formal Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme.

Having considered the responses to the consultation, I am now committed to introducing a Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme in Northern Ireland. The Scheme will make provision for both a 'Right to Ask' and 'Right to Know' processes.

A Task and Finish Group representing key stakeholders from the statutory, voluntary and community sector has been established to develop the scheme. The primary focus will be ensuring the safety of all those involved hence the scheme will require clear protocols and guidance for police on the operation of the scheme.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Justice pursuant to AQW 6583/16-21 and AQW 6584/16-21, to detail what these monies have been spent on.  
(AQW 7919/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** The only expenditure from income collected from speeding fines has been on daily running and administration costs. This includes maintenance and calibration of the equipment. Total expenditure is provided in the table below:

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Expenditure allocated against fine income (£,000)	434	468	552	486

**Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister of Justice to outline whether European Arrest Warrants will remain applicable to this jurisdiction, after the possible exit from the EU.  
(AQW 7943/16-21)

**Ms Sugden:** This issue is being considered as part of a detailed assessment of the potential impact for us of a UK withdrawal from the EU and will feed into negotiations.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Justice to detail the amount collected in fees from drivers that have taken a Speed Awareness Course, each year since 2012.

**(AQW 7955/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:**

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Income from Driver Awareness Courses (£,000)	901	876	838	888

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any road safety initiatives funded by monies collected from fees for Speed Awareness Courses.

**(AQW 8003/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** There have been no road safety initiatives funded by monies collected from fees for Speed Awareness Courses.

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Justice to outline how the monies collected from fees for Speed Awareness Courses are accounted for in her Department.

**(AQW 8004/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The PSNI account for this income and associated expenditure in their Annual Report and Accounts.

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Justice when the Prison Management Board will implement the commitment on pay and conditions made to Prison Officers in 2014 as part of the Management Deployment Agreement, and reiterated by the then Director General in June 2016

**(AQO 794/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** Discussions took place in recent months between NIPS and DOJ senior managers and the trade unions on a 2016 pay award for prison grades. These were set in the context of current public sector pay policy that all elements of any awards, including contractual entitlements, should be restricted to a 1% increase in the overall pay bill.

I also met with the Prison Officers Association to discuss the financial climate we are operating in and to listen to their views. I met with and discussed this with the Finance Minister on several occasions to put the case that prison grades pay award should not be restricted to 1%.

Following those discussions, the Finance Minister wrote to me on 10 November outlining the offer he was content to approve. He had listened to the points I had made and agreed that the pay award for Prison Staff could be offered outside the current public sector pay policy.

The overall pay settlement of 2.5% is the best pay deal anywhere the public sector. It represents over £1.2 million in additional funding for prison grades. The award is significantly higher than for others who are paid from the public purse and recognises the unique role prison officer's play.

As well as the pay award, I want to see additional support services for Prison Officers. That is why I have asked senior officials to meet with the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust to roll out new services that reflect the unique challenges prison officers face.

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of progress on paragraph 4.2 of the Fresh Start Agreement.

**(AQO 795/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** We are making good progress on the commitments made in paragraph 4.2 of the Fresh Start Agreement.

My Department has been working to develop the public awareness campaign and I am pleased to advise Members that I am launching it on 5 December. The campaign aims to highlight the harm caused by organised crime and paramilitarism; raise awareness of types of organised crime and its links to paramilitarism; and encourage everyone to take a stand against organised crime and to provide information to the police or Crimestoppers.

I believe the campaign will play an important part in our work to tackle paramilitary activity and I would like to take this opportunity to urge Members to get behind it and take a stand against organised crime, just as the Panel recommended.

We have been developing a number of research projects to support the implementation of the action plan. We have commissioned questions in the Omnibus Survey to monitor attitudes towards organised crime and paramilitary activity and will use this to monitor the impact of the campaign. Funding has been allocated for a scoping study on a restorative justice centre of excellence. We are taking forward scoping studies to inform the development of detailed programmes, e.g. on promoting lawfulness, interventions to support prisoners upon their release and to inform the development of focused interventions.

My Department has also been working with NIO and the PSNI on research into paramilitary style assaults. In addition, the Programme Boards is exploring the options for commissioning an independent evaluation to monitor the impact and outcomes of the programme.

Eradicating paramilitarism, criminality and organised crime requires all sectors of society to be engaged in this process and a co-ordinated joined up approach across the Executive. We are working closely with colleagues in the Executive Office and with other Departments and have developed the action plan on tackling paramilitarism to align with the outcomes-based approach set out in the Programme for Government to ensure we deliver positive outcomes in communities.

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Justice how the average annual cost of keeping an offender in prison in Northern Ireland compares with that in the rest of the United Kingdom.  
**(AQO 796/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** While costs are not directly comparable, the average annual cost of keeping an offender in prison in Northern Ireland in 2015/16 was £57,643. The National Offender Management Service for England and Wales was £35,182 and for the Scottish Prison Service £34,399 for the same year.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service Cost Per Prisoner Place is higher than the rest of the UK as the same range of services must be provided within a relatively small prison population and therefore economies of scale lead to costs in Northern Ireland being higher.

The Cost Per Prisoner Place for Northern Ireland include the costs of Head Quarters overheads, prisoner transport and property costs, some of which are excluded from England and Wales, and Scotland's calculations of average annual costs.

There is also the added issue of separated paramilitary prisoners in Northern Ireland. This means that prisoners must be held on separate areas which increases running costs and reduces the operational flexibility of accommodation.

Another factor which increases the differential is that during the troubles staff received higher salaries due to the increased risks associated with working with paramilitary prisoners.

While the Cost Per Prisoner Place does have some validity in assessing year on year improvements within the organisation, it has less validity when used to make comparisons with others.

The Prison Service cost has reduced by £16,119 from £73,762 in 2010-11 to £57,643 in 2015-16. This has been due to the completion of the delivery of the voluntary early retirement scheme and construction of new accommodation as part of the Estates Strategy.

**Mr McCausland** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the Assets Recovery Community Scheme.  
**(AQO 797/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** Earlier this year I was able to announce the allocation of over £453,000 assets recovery money to 25 projects aimed at tackling crime and the fear of crime. This allocation was for the 2016/17 year and was part of the £4 million distributed since the Assets Recovery Community Scheme began.

I have had the chance to visit some of this year's projects and have seen at first hand the valuable work they are doing in the community. I believe it sends out a strong positive message that money that has been acquired through criminal activity is now being used to tackle crime and the fear of crime within communities.

The Fresh Start Panel on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups in Northern Ireland recommended further consideration regarding the use of assets recovered from criminal activity which have led to a review of the Assets Recovery Community Scheme. This is ongoing and I hope to be in a position soon to make a decision regarding the way forward.

**Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Justice whether her Department will consider increasing the use of technology, including video links, in the court estate.  
**(AQO 798/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service currently operate a range of courtroom technologies and on line services including the use of video links for the remote testimony of vulnerable witnesses, remand hearings and sentencing when the defendant is in custody. Plans are in place to upgrade the conferencing equipment used in courts in 2017.

I am committed to ensure that we continue to seek new opportunities to use technology in the justice environment in order to maximise the efficiency of the court system and improve the experience for court users. I have therefore asked the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service to develop a digital strategy for implementation by 2020. Furthermore, I am pleased to say that I have recently had a positive discussion with the Lord Chief Justice on this matter.

**Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of Justice, in light of recommendation 5.3 Criminal Justice Inspection Report on an unannounced inspection of Ash House Women's Prison 9th - 19th May 2016, whether her Department intends to expedite plans for a separate women's prison.  
**(AQO 799/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** I am committed to the development of a new, separate facility dedicated to women to provide fit for purpose accommodation that will aid their rehabilitation and enhance public protection.

An Outline Business Case (OBC) 1 for a New Facility for Women on the Hydebank Wood site was approved by the Department of Finance (the then Department of Finance and Personnel) in December 2015.

Project Delivery is dependent on the provision of capital funding. This will be considered as part of the process of setting the next budget.

I am unable to confirm when the building of a New Facility for Women will commence until capital funding is secured.

**Mr Robinson** asked the Minister of Justice, following a number of recent suicides in prison, to outline how she will address this issue.

**(AQO 800/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** The recent deaths in custody and reports from the Ombudsman and Criminal Justice Inspectorate brought into sharp focus the issue of mental health in prisons and how we support vulnerable prisoners.

Since becoming Justice Minister I have made mental health provision a priority and have discussed this with the Health Minister on several occasions, including as part of a visit to Hydebank College in September.

This culminated in my announcement to the Assembly on 21 November of a joint review into support for vulnerable people in custody. This demonstrates the importance I place on this and my determination to ensure all that can be done is being done to support vulnerable prisoners.

**Mr M Bradley** asked the Minister of Justice, given that over 270 crimes in the Causeway area were recorded as anti-social behaviour in September 2016, for her assessment of the effectiveness of Anti Social Behaviour Orders.

**(AQO 801/16-21)**

**Ms Sugden:** As Minister of Justice, I am committed to doing all I can to help reduce behaviours which people consider inconsiderate or nuisance. To that end, addressing anti-social behaviour is a commitment in the Community Safety Strategy and a strategic objective for all Policing and Community Safety Partnerships.

Alongside the PSNI and PCSPs, a wide range of statutory agencies, such as the Housing Executive, local councils and others have a role to play in addressing anti-social behaviour and the Department continues to work closely with these partner organisations at regional and local level.

The approach of these agencies is designed to include intervening early to prevent anti-social behaviour from escalating, and effective enforcement where required.

Where enforcement is required, powers such as Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) are available with the aim of protecting the public from behaviour that causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress.

The recent reviews by Criminal Justice Inspectorate of how the criminal justice system deals with anti-social behaviour (of which Anti-Social Behaviour Orders are but a part) noted that a sensible approach has been taken locally and that the overall trend in levels of anti-social behaviour is down.

That said, I acknowledge that within some communities such behaviour continues to be a challenge.

To consider if more can be done I have asked my officials to scope out, in association with relevant stakeholders, how a holistic review of anti-social behaviour can be taken forward.

Any new powers to address anti-social behaviour will be considered on the basis of what is effective, proportionate and appropriate for Northern Ireland.

## Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

**Mr Robinson** asked the Assembly Commission to detail the organisations it consulted to ensure compliance with employment law when it received the Independent Financial Review Panel determination of 2016.

**(AQW 7085/16-21)**

**Mr Attwood (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** The Assembly Commission did not engage in consultation following the receipt of the Determination issued by the Independent Financial Review Panel in March 2016. The Assembly established the Panel to make Determinations as to the salaries, allowances, pensions and gratuities payable to Members of the Assembly. The Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 ("the 2011 Act") provides that the Panel is the authority that can establish the rates of salaries, allowances, etc. for Members. The Panel is also the authority to establish any criteria that must be met by a Member in order to recover certain costs associated with carrying his or her Assembly duties.

The Panel's independence is enshrined by section 3(1) of the 2011 Act, which states that "the Panel shall not, in the exercise of its functions, be subject to the direction or control of the Assembly or the Commission." For the Commission to consult

externally on the contents of the Panel's Determination would be inconsistent with that independence. In addition, as a legal instrument made under an Act of the Assembly there is a presumption that the Determination is lawful and the Commission must proceed on that basis.

**Mr Murphy** asked the Assembly Commission whether it has provided legal protection or insurance cover for Members in the event of any of their support staff taking legal action as a consequence of the Independent Financial Review Panel's 2016 determination.

**(AQO 802/16-21)**

**Mr Wells (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** The Assembly Commission purchases a combined policy for employer's and public liability on behalf of Members. That policy does not include cover for any legal action taken by support staff against Members in relation to employment matters.

Members had the facility to purchase insurance cover in respect of employment disputes under the previous Office Cost Expenditure regime. Members can also purchase insurance of this type under the 2016 Determination.

Following the introduction of the 2016 Determination, the Commission asked officials to contact the insurance broker to seek information on the nature and cost of a policy to cover employment-related disputes involving support staff employed by Members. The Commission considered this issue at its meeting on Tuesday, 15th November and agreed to proceed to seek a full quotation for a policy of this type.

In order to obtain a valid quotation, each Member will be asked to provide relevant

information on employment-related matters. Assembly Secretariat staff will contact all Members shortly to gather this information.

**Mrs Long** asked the Assembly Commission whether it encountered any difficulties in implementing the sections of the Independent Financial Review Panel's 2016 determination relating to Members' staff.

**(AQO 804/16-21)**

**Mr Maskey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** Members will be aware that the March 2016 Determination was published by the Independent Financial Review Panel on 23 March 2016 for implementation on 1 April 2016. However, many of its provisions only became effective from 6 May 2016.

The 2016 Determination introduced radical changes to the financial support framework for Members especially regarding terms and conditions for Members' support staff and the rental of premises for use as a constituency office.

The employment of support staff is a matter for individual Members as the employer of those staff. The Commission's role is an administrative one to process salary payments and to ensure that the provisions of any Determination issued by the Panel are met.

A number of difficulties were experienced due to the short timescale that was available to make the necessary administrative changes. These related to the administration of the new criteria for claiming support staff costs including the restriction on hours that could be worked by staff and the introduction of pay scales. I am aware that many Members experienced difficulties regarding changes to the terms and conditions of employment for their staff but these were not a matter for the Commission as they were precisely set out by the Panel in the Determination.

I am also aware that Members faced difficulties in securing leases that contained the wording set out in the Determination relating to a landlord's responsibility to make repairs to the premises.

It is worth noting that the independence of the Panel is enshrined in the Act of the Assembly which created the Panel. The Panel is not subject to the direction or control of the Commission or the Assembly. The Commission does not have the legal authority to amend, overturn or ignore the specific provisions made by the Panel in a Determination.

**Mr Anderson** asked the Assembly Commission how much has been saved in administration costs following the reduction in the number of statutory committees.

**(AQO 814/16-21)**

**Mr Maskey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** The reduction in the number of Departments from 12 to 9 resulted in an equivalent reduction in the number of Statutory Committees. As a result, the staff numbers for the Parliamentary Services Directorate reduced by 14 Full Time Equivalent members of staff. This was across a number of different business units including Committees, Research and Information Services and the Official Report and across a number of different grades. This has resulted in a direct saving in Secretariat salary costs of approximately 665,000 thousand pounds. This significant saving has helped the Commission to meet the overall saving of 1.035 million pounds that has already been delivered in this financial year.

Further savings in administration expenditure as a result of the reduction in Executive Departments is more difficult to quantify as these budgets are based on individual Committee plans. Budget plans for Committees are not driven by the number of Statutory Committees, but instead by the nature of the work that is undertaken in any session or any year.



# 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.



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# Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 25 November 2016

## Revised Written Answer

### Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

*In Bound Volume 119, page WA 388, replace the answer given for AQW 5153/16-21 with:*

**Mr McMullan** asked the Assembly Commission to list the energy saving schemes in use in Parliament Buildings; and to outline the estimated annual saving of each scheme.

**(AQW 5153/16-21)**

**Mr Wells (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** Over recent years, the Sustainable Development Office has implemented a range of measures to improve the environmental performance of Parliament Buildings, including replacing light bulbs with more energy efficient bulbs, reviewing the heating schedules for the building, installing 'hippos' in toilets to reduce the amount of water used per flush and reviewing the time schedules for external lighting etc.

As part of the recently completed roof project, further initiatives were undertaken to improve the environmental performance of Parliament Buildings. These included:

- Rain water collecting;
- Photo Voltaic (PV) Panels;
- Solar Thermal tubes;
- Replacement of the heating boilers;
- Upgrading and rationalisation of the air-handling units (AHUs), and;
- Upgrading of the Building Energy Management System (BEMS)

Following completion of the project the following benefits have been realised in the past year:

- PV Panels - 34,219 KWH of Solar Electricity has been generated;
- Rain Water Collecting - 57,980 Litres of rainwater has been collected; this has been distributed back into the building's toilet cisterns;
- Solar Thermal tubes – these have contributed to the supply of hot water in the building reducing the energy use.

In addition to this, the replacement boilers are more efficient and redundant AHUs have been replaced by more efficient models, all of which will result in improved performance and associated energy savings.

It can be difficult to measure the contribution made by individual environmental initiatives; the table below gives some indication of improvements that have been made in recent years:

Electricity usage	<b>16.1%</b> reduction since 2008/2009
Gas usage	<b>19.1%</b> reduction since 2008/2009
Recycling rate	<b>74.26%</b> increase since 2008/2009
Paper consumption* measured by boxes used (2,500 sheets per box)	2008-2009 <b>3,936</b>
*These figures do not include constituency offices	2013-2014 <b>1,783</b>
	2014-2015 <b>1,370</b>
	2015-2016 <b>1,175</b>
	<b>(70% reduction since 2008/2009)</b>

I hope this gives you an indication of the improvements that have been made.

# Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 2 December 2016

## Revised Written Answer

### Department for Communities

*In Bound Volume 120, page WA 135, replace the answer given for AQW 6055/16-21 with:*

**Mr Allen** asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) how many social homes have been demolished; (ii) areas where the vacant land has been re-used for new social housing; and (iii) areas where the vacant land was not re-used for social housing, in each of the last seven years, broken down by constituency.

**(AQW 6055/16-21)**

**Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities):** The Housing Executive's records indicate that 1,452 properties have been demolished in the last 7 financial years. This number includes properties demolished in urban regeneration areas and, therefore, includes previously privately-owned properties that were either vested or acquired by the NIHE and brought into its stock pending demolition.

(ii) & (iii) The Housing Executive has provided the table below setting out the demolition sites, and whether they have been or will be re-used for new social housing.

Year	Constituency	Area	Dwellings	Re-used
2010/11	Belfast East	Ballybeen Square, Castlereagh	24	Yes
	Belfast North	Hogarth St, Belfast	5	No
		Skegoneill Avenue, Belfast	1	No
		Stanhope Drive, Belfast	9	Yes
	Belfast South	Village Urban Renewal Area, Belfast	1	Yes
	Belfast West	Hopewell Crescent, Belfast	4	No
	East Londonderry	Oakland Walk, Coleraine	1	No
		Gleanaan Drive, Portrush	1	No
		North Antrim	Staffa Drive, Ballymena	6
	North Antrim	Regents Park, Ballymena	3	No
		Dunclug Gardens, Ballymena	2	No
		North Down	West Green, Holywood	35
	Strangford	Newtownards Road, Comber	1	Yes
	West Tyrone	Lammy Crescent, Omagh	1	Yes
2011/12	Belfast North	Rathcoole Gardens, Newtownabbey	18	Yes
	Belfast South	Village Urban Renewal Area, Belfast	163	Yes
	Belfast West	Ross Street, Belfast	18	Yes
	East Antrim	Gardenmore House, Larne	90	No
	North Antrim	Regents Park, Ballymena	12	No
	Upper Bann	Moyraverty Centre, Craigavon	12	No

Year	Constituency	Area	Dwellings	Re-used
2012/13	Belfast North	Fortwilliam Parade, Belfast	12	Yes
		Queen Victoria Gardens, Belfast	36	Yes
		Parkend Street, Belfast	8	Yes
		Clachattan Street, Belfast	5	Yes
		Limestone Road, Belfast	3	Yes
		Manor Street, Belfast	4	No
		Alloa Street, Belfast	3	No
	Belfast South	Village Urban Renewal Area, Belfast	256	Yes
	Belfast West	Arundel Court/Walk & Excise Walk, Belfast	13	Yes
	East Antrim	Cairngorm Drive, Larne	34	No
		Shanlea Drive, Larne	16	No
		Linn Road, Larne	8	No
		Old Glenarm Road, Larne	2	No
	North Antrim	Sandown Park, Ballymena	9	No
		Wayside Green, Ballymena	4	No
	Strangford	Lysander Park, Newtownards	24	Yes
Upper Bann	Aldervale, Craigavon	38	No	
2013/14	Belfast North	Ballysillan Avenue, Belfast	7	Yes
	Belfast South	Village Urban Renewal Area, Belfast	110	Yes
	Belfast West	Lawnbrook Urban Renewal Area, Belfast	30	Yes
		Lenadoon Avenue, Belfast	11	Yes
	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Drumbawn Close, Enniskillen	1	No
	North Down	West Green/West Link, Holywood	10	Yes
	Upper Bann	Aldervale, Lurgan	47	No
		Legahory Court, Craigavon	1	No
West Tyrone	Parkside Gardens, Sion Mills	1	No	
2014/15	Belfast West	Lawnbrook Urban Renewal Area, Belfast	143	Yes
		Lenadoon Avenue, Belfast	22	Yes
	North Down	Kilclief Gardens, Bangor	24	Yes
	South Antrim	Firmount Drive, Antrim	1	No
2015/16	Belfast North	Old Irish Highway, Newtownabbey	8	Yes
		Fortwilliam Parade, Belfast	16	Yes
		Hallidays Road, Belfast	10	Yes
		Upper New Lodge Development Area	50	Yes
	Belfast West	Hopewell Crescent, Belfast	19	Yes
		Glenveagh Drive, Belfast	11	Yes
2016/17	Belfast North	Upper New Lodge Development Area	43	Yes
	North Antrim	Camberwell Way, Ballymena	5	No



# Journal of Proceedings



# Minutes of Proceedings



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# Northern Ireland Assembly

**Monday 21 November 2016**

*The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.*

## 1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

## 2. Executive Committee Business

### 2.1 Statement: Mental Health in Prisons

The Minister of Justice, Ms Claire Sugden, made a statement regarding Mental Health in Prisons, following which she replied to questions.

*The Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy) took the Chair.*

## 3. Opposition Business

### 3.1 Motion: EU Funding for the Agricultural Sector

#### Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with concern the risks to multiple streams of funding posed by withdrawal from the European Union; further notes that over 70 per cent of all European funding to Northern Ireland falls under the Common Agricultural Policy and other rural funds, which provide approximately £350 million each year to farmers, representing 87 per cent of annual farm income; acknowledges that the agri-food sector accounts for 3.25 per cent of Northern Ireland's Gross Value Added, which equates to £1.1 billion at basic prices and approximately 71,500 local jobs, and that existing strategies in these sectors, such as Going for Growth, make no provision for the withdrawal of European Union funding; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how she intends to uphold the First Minister's commitment that farmers can be provided for as well as, if not better if Northern Ireland leaves the European Union, and to detail how she will develop a strategy to provide for and secure the long-term sustainability of the agricultural and agri-food sectors to ensure no loss of assistance to farmers arising from the withdrawal of existing European Union funding.

*Mr P McGlone  
Mr R McPhillips  
Mr H McKee  
Mr R Swann*

*Debate ensued.*

*The debate was suspended for Question Time.*

*The Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) took the Chair.*

## 4. Question Time

### 4.1 The Executive Office

Questions were put to, and answered by, the deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness. The junior Minister, Ms Megan Fearon, also answered a number of questions.

### 4.2 Economy

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for the Economy, Mr Simon Hamilton.

## 5. Question for Urgent Oral Answer

### 5.1 Social Investment Fund

The deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness, responded to a Question for Urgent Oral Answer tabled by Ms Nichola Mallon.

*The Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy) took the Chair.*

## 6. Assembly Business

### 6.1 Motion: Extension of Sitting on Monday 21 November 2016 under Standing Order 10(3A)

#### Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 21 November 2016 be extended to no later than 8:30pm.

*Mr T Clarke  
Ms C Ní Chuilín  
Mr R Swann  
Mr A Attwood  
Mr S Dickson*

*The Question being put, the Motion was carried without division.*

## 7. Opposition Business (cont'd)

### 7.1 Motion: EU Funding for the Agricultural Sector (cont'd)

*Debate resumed.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** (Division 1).

*The Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone) took the Chair.*

### 7.2 Motion: Impact of Draft Strategic Area Plan on Rural Schools

#### Proposed:

That this Assembly, noting the failure of the attempt at area based planning for schools in the previous mandate, expresses its concern at the proposals contained in Providing Pathways the Draft Strategic Area Plan for School Provision 2017-2020; believes that schools in rural areas will be most at risk from the proposals; calls on the Minister of Education to detail what rural-proofing measures were undertaken during the development of the proposed Area Plan; and further calls on the Minister to introduce legislation for a statutory presumption against the closure of rural schools similar to the protections already in place in England and Scotland.

*Mrs S Overend  
Mr C McGrath  
Mrs R Barton  
Mr D McCrossan*

**7.3 Motion: Amendment 1****Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'Assembly;' and insert:

'notes the publication of the Education Authority's Providing Pathways Draft Strategic Area Plan for School Provision 2017-2020; acknowledges the concerns that there will be over the proposals, particularly in rural areas; believes that every pupil, regardless of whether they live in a rural or an urban area, should have access to quality education in a viable and sustainable school, contributing to achieving the draft Programme for Government outcome to give our children and young people the best start in life; believes that the best way to achieve this is through an effective area planning process involving managing authorities and sectoral support bodies; acknowledges sensitivities around the provision of the schools estate, in both rural and other areas; and calls on the Minister of Education to bring forward a strategic small schools initiative to ensure accessibility to a quality education, particularly for isolated communities.'

*Lord Morrow*  
*Mr P Logan*  
*Ms C Lockhart*

**7.4 Motion: Amendment 2****Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'mandate;' and insert:

'calls on the Minister for Education to ensure that the findings of the Chief Inspector of the Education and Training Inspectorate's report are taken into consideration and applied when looking at the sustainability of rural schools and that a proper, efficient and effective consultation with local rural communities is completed prior to any decision being taken to close or merge smaller rural schools.'

*Ms K Armstrong*  
*Mr C Lyttle*

*Debate ensued.*

*The Speaker took the Chair.*

*The Question being put, Amendment 1 was made (Division 2).*

*The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was carried without division.*

**7.5 Motion: Poverty and Deprivation****Proposed:**

That this Assembly expresses its concern that according to the Department for Communities, around 376,000 or 21 per cent of people in Northern Ireland live in relative income poverty, before housing costs; notes that in June 2015 the High Court found that the Executive had breached a legal duty by failing to adopt an identifiable strategy setting out how it proposed to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need; further notes that the Programme for Government consultation document published in October 2016 refers to a new Social Strategy in relation to these matters; and calls on the Minister for Communities to publish an overarching strategy and long-term plan, including budget allocations, which outlines specific targets and timelines to reduce poverty and deprivation and tackle social exclusion and ensures the application of resources based on neutral criteria that measure deprivation, irrespective of community background or other affiliation.

*Mr A Attwood*  
*Mr A Allen*  
*Ms N Mallon*  
*Mr M Nesbitt*

**7.6 Motion: Amendment****Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'Assembly;' and insert:

'notes the latest edition of the Northern Ireland Poverty Bulletin detailing the levels of poverty across Northern Ireland; further notes that Section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) was the subject of a judicial review in June 2015; and welcomes the Executive's commitment, as outlined in the recent Programme for Government consultation document, to publish a new Social Strategy that aims to improve the lives of those in poverty through a range of specific interventions that will tackle poverty, social exclusion and deprivation on the basis of the objective need.'

*Mr J Bell*

*Mr C Stalford*

*Mr A McQuillan*

*Debate ensued.*

*The Question being put, the Amendment was made (Division 3).*

*The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was carried without division.*

**8. Adjournment****Proposed:**

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

*The Speaker*

*The Assembly adjourned at 7.45pm.*

**Mr Robin Newton**

The Speaker

21 November 2016

# Northern Ireland Assembly

21 November 2016  
Division 1

**Motion: EU Funding for the Agricultural Sector**

**Proposed:**

That this Assembly notes with concern the risks to multiple streams of funding posed by withdrawal from the European Union; further notes that over 70 per cent of all European funding to Northern Ireland falls under the Common Agricultural Policy and other rural funds, which provide approximately £350 million each year to farmers, representing 87 per cent of annual farm income; acknowledges that the agri-food sector accounts for 3.25 per cent of Northern Ireland's Gross Value Added, which equates to £1.1 billion at basic prices and approximately 71,500 local jobs, and that existing strategies in these sectors, such as Going for Growth, make no provision for the withdrawal of European Union funding; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how she intends to uphold the First Minister's commitment that farmers can be provided for as well as, if not better if Northern Ireland leaves the European Union, and to detail how she will develop a strategy to provide for and secure the long-term sustainability of the agricultural and agri-food sectors to ensure no loss of assistance to farmers arising from the withdrawal of existing European Union funding.

*Mr P McGlone  
Mr R McPhillips  
Mr H McKee  
Mr R Swann*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

**Ayes:** 59

**Noes:** 34

**AYES**

*Mr Aiken, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Ms Dillon, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Ms Hanna, Mr Hazzard, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr E McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Mr McKee, Mr McMullan, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Mullan, Mr Murphy, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Smith, Ms Sugden, Mr Swann.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McKee, Mr Swann.*

**NOES**

*Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Ms Bailey, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Middleton, Lord Morrow, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan, Mr Robinson.*

The motion was **carried**.

# Northern Ireland Assembly

21 November 2016  
Division 2

**Motion: Impact of Draft Strategic Area Plan on Rural Schools (Amendment 1)**

**Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'Assembly;' and insert:

'notes the publication of the Education Authority's Providing Pathways Draft Strategic Area Plan for School Provision 2017-2020; acknowledges the concerns that there will be over the proposals, particularly in rural areas; believes that every pupil, regardless of whether they live in a rural or an urban area, should have access to quality education in a viable and sustainable school, contributing to achieving the draft Programme for Government outcome to give our children and young people the best start in life; believes that the best way to achieve this is through an effective area planning process involving managing authorities and sectoral support bodies; acknowledges sensitivities around the provision of the schools estate, in both rural and other areas; and calls on the Minister of Education to bring forward a strategic small schools initiative to ensure accessibility to a quality education, particularly for isolated communities.'

*Lord Morrow*  
*Mr P Logan*  
*Ms C Lockhart*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

**Ayes:** 66

**Noes:** 26

**AYES**

*Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stafford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan, Mr Robinson.*

**NOES**

*Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allister, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Kennedy, Mr E McCann, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr McGrath, Mrs Overend.*

Amendment 1 was **made**.

# Northern Ireland Assembly

21 November 2016  
Division 3

**Motion: Impact of Draft Strategic Area Plan on Rural Schools (Amendment)**

**Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'Assembly;' and insert:

'notes the latest edition of the Northern Ireland Poverty Bulletin detailing the levels of poverty across Northern Ireland; further notes that Section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) was the subject of a judicial review in June 2015; and welcomes the Executive's commitment, as outlined in the recent Programme for Government consultation document, to publish a new Social Strategy that aims to improve the lives of those in poverty through a range of specific interventions that will tackle poverty, social exclusion and deprivation on the basis of the objective need.'

*Mr J Bell*

*Mr C Stalford*

*Mr A McQuillan*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

**Ayes:** 56

**Noes:** 31

**AYES**

*Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan, Mr Robinson.*

**NOES**

*Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Ms Hanna, Mr Kennedy, Mrs Long, Mr Lyttle, Mr E McCann, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Ms Mallon, M Nesbitt.*

The Amendment was **made**.

# Northern Ireland Assembly

## Papers Presented to the Assembly on 16 November 2016 – 21 November 2016

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
  - Records and Information Retention and Disposal Schedules (DoJ).
  - The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DfC).
  - Libraries NI Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DfC).
  - The National Museums of Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2014-15 (DfC).
  - The National Museums of Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DfC).
  - Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman Annual Report 2015-16 (DfC).
5. Assembly Reports
  - Managing Legal Aid (Public Accounts Committee).
6. Statutory Rules
  - SR 2016/400 The Juries Regulations (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).
  - SR 2016/401 The Waste (Fees and Charges) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DAERA).
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
  - Consultation on Incentivising Cleaner Fuel Technologies: Implementing Amendments to the General Circulation Directive and Other Associated Proposals (DfI).
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

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# Northern Ireland Assembly

**Tuesday 22 November 2016**

*The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.*

## 1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

## 2. Public Petition

### 2.1 Public Petition: Campaign for Abortion Law Reform in Northern Ireland

Ms Clare Bailey was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition regarding the Campaign for Abortion Law Reform in Northern Ireland.

## 3. Executive Committee Business

### 3.1 Statement: North South Ministerial Council Plenary Meeting

The deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness, made a statement regarding the twenty-third meeting of the North South Ministerial Council in Plenary format, which was held in Armagh on Friday 18 November 2016, following which he replied to questions.

### 3.2 Statement: Rating Policy

The Minister of Finance, Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, made a statement regarding Rating Policy, following which he replied to questions.

### 3.3 Statement: North South Ministerial Council in Agriculture Sectoral Format

The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Miss Michelle McIlveen, made a statement regarding the meeting of the North South Ministerial Council in Agriculture Sectoral format, which was held in Armagh on Wednesday 26 October 2016, following which she replied to questions.

*The sitting was suspended at 12.52pm.*

*The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy) in the Chair.*

## 4. Question Time

### 4.1 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr Peter Weir.

### 4.2 Finance

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance, Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir.

## 5. Question for Urgent Oral Answer

### 5.1 Proposed Industrial Action by the NASUWT

The Minister of Education, Mr Peter Weir, responded to a Question for Urgent Oral Answer tabled by Mr Chris Lyttle.

*The Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone) took the Chair.*

## 6. Executive Committee Business (cont'd)

### 6.1 Statement: Progression of the Regeneration Bill

The Minister for Communities, Mr Paul Givan, made a statement regarding the Progression of the Regeneration Bill, following which he replied to questions.

### 6.2 Statement: British-Irish Council in Environment Sectoral Format

The junior Minister, Mr Alistair Ross, made a statement regarding the meeting of the British-Irish Council in Environment Sectoral format, which was held in Guernsey on Friday 4 November 2016, following which he replied to questions.

### 6.3 Legislative Consent Motion: Savings (Government Contributions) Bill

#### Proposed:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the Savings (Government Contributions) Bill as introduced in the House of Commons on 6 September 2016, including the provision in clause 5(2) making bonuses under the Bill an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the provision in paragraph 16(8) of Schedule 2 dealing with information sharing.

*Minister for Communities*

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

## 7. Private Members' Business

### 7.1 Motion: Energy Affordability and Security

#### Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with concern that electricity prices for non-domestic large energy users are almost 60 per cent higher than the EU-15 median; further notes the policy vacuum which exists in the Department for the Economy regarding renewable energy following the closure of the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation and the collapse of the Renewable Heat Incentive; calls on the Minister for the Economy to clarify the position on future subsidy arrangements for all forms of energy generation, in the context of decarbonisation and mitigating the effects of rising costs; and further calls for long-term energy security and affordability to be given a much higher priority in the emerging Programme for Government 2016-21.

*Mr S Aiken*

*Mr A Chambers*

*Debate ensued.*

*The Speaker took the Chair.*

*The Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) took the Chair.*

The Question being put, the motion **fell** (Division 1).

### 7.2 Motion: Review of Arm's-Length Bodies

#### Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the reduction in the number of Government departments and the associated efficiencies; and calls on the Executive to review the number and function of its arm's-length bodies with a view to reducing their number, where possible, and maximising the available revenue.

*Mr C Stalford*

*Mr W Irwin*

*Mrs P Cameron*

*Mr P Logan*

### 7.3 Motion: Amendment

**Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'departments' and insert:

'and acknowledges the important contribution of current and past arm's-length bodies across a range of social, cultural, environmental, economic, legal, rights and equality issues; recognises that arm's-length bodies have independence which avoids decisions and funding being politicised, produces best policy outcomes and has access to technical and specialist capacity; and calls for a review of the financing of arm's-length bodies to establish proper resourcing with an objective and sustainable funding process through which arm's-length bodies can deliver effectively their work.'

*Mr R McPhillips*

*Mr A Attwood*

*Ms N Mallon*

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, the amendment **fell**.

The Question being put, the motion was **carried** without division.

*The Speaker took the Chair.*

## 8. Adjournment

**Proposed:**

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

*The Speaker*

Mr Alex Easton spoke to his topic regarding Funding for Road and Footpath Maintenance in North Down.

*The Assembly adjourned at 9.15pm.*

**Mr Robin Newton**

The Speaker

22 November 2016

# Northern Ireland Assembly

22 November 2016

Division 1

**Motion: Energy Affordability and Security**

**Proposed:**

That this Assembly notes with concern that electricity prices for non-domestic large energy users are almost 60 per cent higher than the EU-15 median; further notes the policy vacuum which exists in the Department for the Economy regarding renewable energy following the closure of the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation and the collapse of the Renewable Heat Incentive; calls on the Minister for the Economy to clarify the position on future subsidy arrangements for all forms of energy generation, in the context of decarbonisation and mitigating the effects of rising costs; and further calls for long-term energy security and affordability to be given a much higher priority in the emerging Programme for Government 2016-21.

*Mr S Aiken*

*Mr A Chambers*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

**Ayes:** 35

**Noes:** 53

**AYES**

*Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Hanna, Mr Kennedy, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr E McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Aiken, Mr Chambers.*

**NOES**

*Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan, Mr Robinson.*

The motion **fell**.

# Northern Ireland Assembly

## Papers Presented to the Assembly on 22 November 2016

### 1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

### 2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

### 3. Orders in Council

### 4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Report of an announced visit to Maghaberry Prison to review progress against the nine inspection recommendations made in 2015 (DoJ).

Legislative Consent Memorandum: Health Service Medical Supplies (Costs) Bill (DoH). (Version Laid on 7 November 2016 replaced with this version).

### 5. Assembly Reports

### 6. Statutory Rules

SR 2016/402 The Level Crossing (Ballarena) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/403 The Level Crossing (Castlerock) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/404 The Level Crossing (Coleraine (Bushmills Road)) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

### 7. Written Ministerial Statements

### 8. Consultation Documents

### 9. Departmental Publications

### 10. Agency Publications

### 11. Westminster Publications

### 12. Miscellaneous Publications

# Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

## Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

**First Stage:** Introduction of Bill.

**Second Stage:** General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

**Committee Stage (Comm. Stage):** Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

**Consideration Stage (CS):** Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

**Further Consideration Stage (FCS):** Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

**Final Stage:** Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

**Royal Assent.**

## Proceedings as at 22 November 2016

### 2016-2021 Mandate

#### Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Budget (No.2) Bill 1/16-21	13.06.16	14.06.16	/	/	20.06.16	21.06.16	27.06.16	29.07.16
Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers) Bill 76/11-16	12/01/16	25/01/16	/	/	02.02.16	16.02.16	23.02.16	22.07.16
Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill 2/16-21	19/09/16	27/09/16	23/02/17					

### 2016-2021 Mandate

#### Non-Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent

/ Bills progressing by accelerated passage

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# Northern Ireland Assembly

**Monday 28 November 2016**

*The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.*

## 1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

## 2. Public Petition

### 2.1 **Public Petition: Promotion of the Protection of Unborn Children in Northern Ireland**

Mr Jim Wells was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition regarding the Promotion of the Protection of Unborn Children in Northern Ireland.

## 3. Executive Committee Business

### 3.1 **Legislative Consent Motion: Higher Education and Research Bill**

#### **Proposed:**

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Higher Education and Research Bill relating to joint working and advisory services, the Teaching Excellence Framework and powers to fund research.

*Minister for the Economy*

*Debate ensued.*

*The Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) took the Chair.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** (Division 1).

### 3.2 **Motion: Further Education (Governing Body of Institution of Further Education) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016**

#### **Proposed:**

That the Further Education (Governing Body of Institution of Further Education) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 be affirmed.

*Minister for the Economy*

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

### 3.3 Legislative Consent Motion: Policing and Crime Bill

#### Proposed:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of a number of provisions within the Policing and Crime Bill, by amendment at Lords Committee and Lords Report Stage, insofar as they related to UK maritime enforcement powers; UK cross jurisdictional arrest powers; anonymity for victims of forced marriage and pardons for convictions of certain abolished offences.

*Minister of Justice*

*The debate was suspended for Question Time.*

*The Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy) took the Chair.*

## 4. Question Time

### 4.1 Health

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Health, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

### 4.2 Infrastructure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Infrastructure, Mr Chris Hazzard.

*The Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone) took the Chair.*

## 5. Executive Committee Business (cont'd)

### 5.1 Legislative Consent Motion: Amendment

#### Proposed:

Leave out all after the second 'powers;' and insert:

'and anonymity for victims of forced marriage.'

*Mr J Allister*

*Debate ensued.*

*The Speaker took the Chair.*

The Question being put, there were dissenting voices. Tellers were called for a Division. One Teller presented for the Ayes but none for the Noes. In accordance with Standing Order 27(4), the question was not carried. The Amendment, therefore, **fell**.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

### 5.2 Motion: Draft Civil Legal Services (Scope) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016

#### Proposed:

That the draft Civil Legal Services (Scope) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 be approved.

*Minister of Justice*

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

## 6. Assembly Business

### 6.1 Motion: Extension of Sitting on Monday 28 November 2016 under Standing Order 10(3A)

**Proposed:**

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 28 November 2016 be extended to no later than 8:00pm.

*Mr T Clarke  
Ms C Ní Chuilín  
Mr R Swann  
Mr A Attwood  
Mr S Dickson*

*The Question being put, the Motion was carried without division.*

## 7. Private Members' Business

### 7.1 Motion: House Sales Scheme

**Proposed:**

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Communities to suspend the House Sales Scheme until such time as a full review into the long term impact of this scheme on the provision of social housing stock has been carried out.

*Mr A Maskey  
Mr F McCann*

### 7.2 Motion: Amendment

**Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'Communities' and insert:

'to commission immediately a full review into the long term impact of the House Sales Scheme on the provision of social housing stock.'

*Mrs N Long  
Ms P Bradshaw*

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, the Amendment **fell**.

The Question being put, the Motion **fell** (Division 2).

## 8. Adjournment

**Proposed:**

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

*The Speaker*

*The Assembly adjourned at 7.14pm.*

**Mr Robin Newton**

The Speaker

28 November 2016

# Northern Ireland Assembly

28 November 2016

Division 1

**Legislative Consent Motion: Higher Education and Research Bill**

**Proposed:**

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Higher Education and Research Bill relating to joint working and advisory services, the Teaching Excellence Framework and powers to fund research.

*Minister for the Economy*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

**Ayes:** 58

**Noes:** 28

**AYES**

*Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Robinson, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan, Mr Robinson.*

**NOES**

*Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Hanna, Mr Kennedy, Mr E McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McKee, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Aiken, Ms S Bradley.*

The motion was **carried**.

# Northern Ireland Assembly

28 November 2016  
Division 2

**Motion: House Sales Scheme**

**Proposed:**

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Communities to suspend the House Sales Scheme until such time as a full review into the long term impact of this scheme on the provision of social housing stock has been carried out.

*Mr A Maskey*

*Mr F McCann*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

**Ayes:** 35

**Noes:** 49

**AYES**

*Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms S Bradley, Mr Carroll, Ms Dillon, Mr Durkan, Ms Fearon, Ms Gildernew, Ms Hanna, Mr Hazzard, Mr Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr E McCann, Mr F McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McMullan, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Mullan, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Gildernew, Mr F McCann.*

**NOES**

*Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Ms Armstrong, Mrs Barton, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mr Clarke, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKee, Mr McQuillan, Mr Middleton, Lord Morrow, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Smith, Mr Stalford, Mr Weir.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan, Mr Robinson.*

The motion **fell**.

# Northern Ireland Assembly

## Papers Presented to the Assembly on 23 November 2016 – 28 November 2016

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
  - Social Security Agency Annual Report on Decision Making and Financial Accuracy (DfC).
  - Tourism NI Annual Report and Accounts 2015/2016 (DfE).
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
  - SR 2016/405 The Magistrates' Courts (Licensing) (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).
  - SR 2016/406 The Offshore Installations (Offshore Safety Directive) (Safety Case etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfE).
  - SR 2016/410 The Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) (Independent Guardian) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoH).
  - SR 2016/412 The Building (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoF).
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

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# Northern Ireland Assembly

**Tuesday 29 November 2016**

*The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.*

## 1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

## 2. Executive Committee Business

### 2.1 **Statement: British-Irish Council Summit**

The First Minister, the Rt. Hon Arlene Foster, made a statement regarding the twenty-eighth Summit of the British-Irish Council, which was held in Wales on Friday 25 November 2016, following which she replied to questions.

### 2.2 **Motion: Draft Insolvency (Monetary Limits) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016**

**Proposed:**

That the draft Insolvency (Monetary Limits) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 be approved.

*Minister for the Economy*

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

### 2.3 **Motion: Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016**

**Proposed:**

That the Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 be affirmed.

*Minister for the Economy*

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

### 3. Private Members' Business

#### 3.1 Motion: Medical School in the North West

**Proposed:**

That this Assembly notes the support of the Minister for the Economy and Minister of Health for the establishment of a medical school in the North West; acknowledges the positive impact of a medical school on the delivery of medical and health services in the North West and that it would be one element in the expansion of student numbers and courses at the Ulster University at Magee; calls on the Executive to work with the Ulster University, the General Medical Council, the Government of Ireland and other stakeholders for the establishment of a medical school in the North West; and further calls for a Programme for Government commitment to establish this medical school early in this Assembly mandate.

*Mr M Durkan  
Mr C Eastwood  
Mr G Mullan*

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

#### 3.2 Motion – People Diagnosed with HIV

**Proposed:**

That this Assembly notes the increasing number of people diagnosed with HIV in Northern Ireland year on year; is concerned at the levels of stigma experienced by people living with HIV; acknowledges the need for a new campaign to promote awareness and prevention, specifically tailored to Northern Ireland; commends the work of Positive Life, Northern Ireland's only dedicated charity working to support people diagnosed with HIV; and calls on the Minister of Health to support this organisation in the development of a centre of excellence at its new headquarters.

*Ms P Bradley  
Mr G Middleton  
Mr T Clarke*

#### 3.3 Motion: Amendment 1

**Proposed:**

Leave out all after the second 'HIV;' and insert:

'recognises the disproportionate impact of HIV among gay and bisexual men; acknowledges the need for a new campaign to promote awareness and prevention, specifically tailored to Northern Ireland; commends the work of Positive Life, The Rainbow Project and others working to prevent the spread of HIV and supporting people diagnosed with HIV; and calls on the Minister of Health to work with the statutory, community and voluntary organisations working in this field to develop a centre of excellence.

*Mr E McCann  
Mr G Carroll*

*Amendment 1 was not moved.*

### 3.4 Motion: Amendment 2

#### Proposed:

Leave out all after the third 'HIV;' and insert:

'calls on the Minister of Health to support this prevention work by bringing forward proposals to ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland has access to vital pre-exposure prophylaxis medication on the same basis as the rest of the United Kingdom; and further calls on the Minister to support Positive Life in the development of a centre of excellence at its new headquarters.'

*Ms P Bradshaw*

*Mrs N Long*

*Debate ensued.*

*The sitting was suspended at 12.57pm.*

*The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) in the Chair.*

## 4. Question Time

### 4.1 The Executive Office

Questions were put to, and answered by, the First Minister, the Rt. Hon Arlene Foster. The junior Minister, Mr Alastair Ross, also answered a number of questions.

### 4.2 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Ms Claire Sugden.

### 4.3 Assembly Commission

Questions were put to, and answered by, Members of the Assembly Commission.

*The Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone) took the Chair.*

## 5. Private Members' Business (cont'd)

### 5.1 Motion: People Diagnosed with HIV (cont'd)

The Question being put, Amendment 2 was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

*The Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy) took the Chair.*

## 6. Adjournment

#### Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

*The Speaker*

Mr Colin McGrath spoke to his topic regarding the Proposed Closure of Outdoor Education Centres in South Down.

*The Assembly adjourned at 5.46pm.*

#### Mr Robin Newton

The Speaker

29 November 2016

# Northern Ireland Assembly

## **Papers Presented to the Assembly on 29 November 2016**

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly  
Annual Report on Child Poverty 2015-2016 (DfC).
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules  
SR 2016/415 The Caseins and Caseinates Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoH).

## **For Information Only**

(C. 31) SR 2016/399 The Road Traffic (Amendment) (2016 Act) (Commencement No. 1) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
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# 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 29 November 2016

### 2016-2021 Mandate

#### Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Budget (No.2) Bill 1/16-21	13.06.16	14.06.16	/	/	20.06.16	21.06.16	27.06.16	29.07.16
Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers) Bill 76/11-16	12/01/16	25/01/16	/	/	02.02.16	16.02.16	23.02.16	22.07.16
Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill 2/16-21	19/09/16	27/09/16	23/02/17					

### 2016-2021 Mandate

#### Non-Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent

/ Bills progressing by accelerated passage

